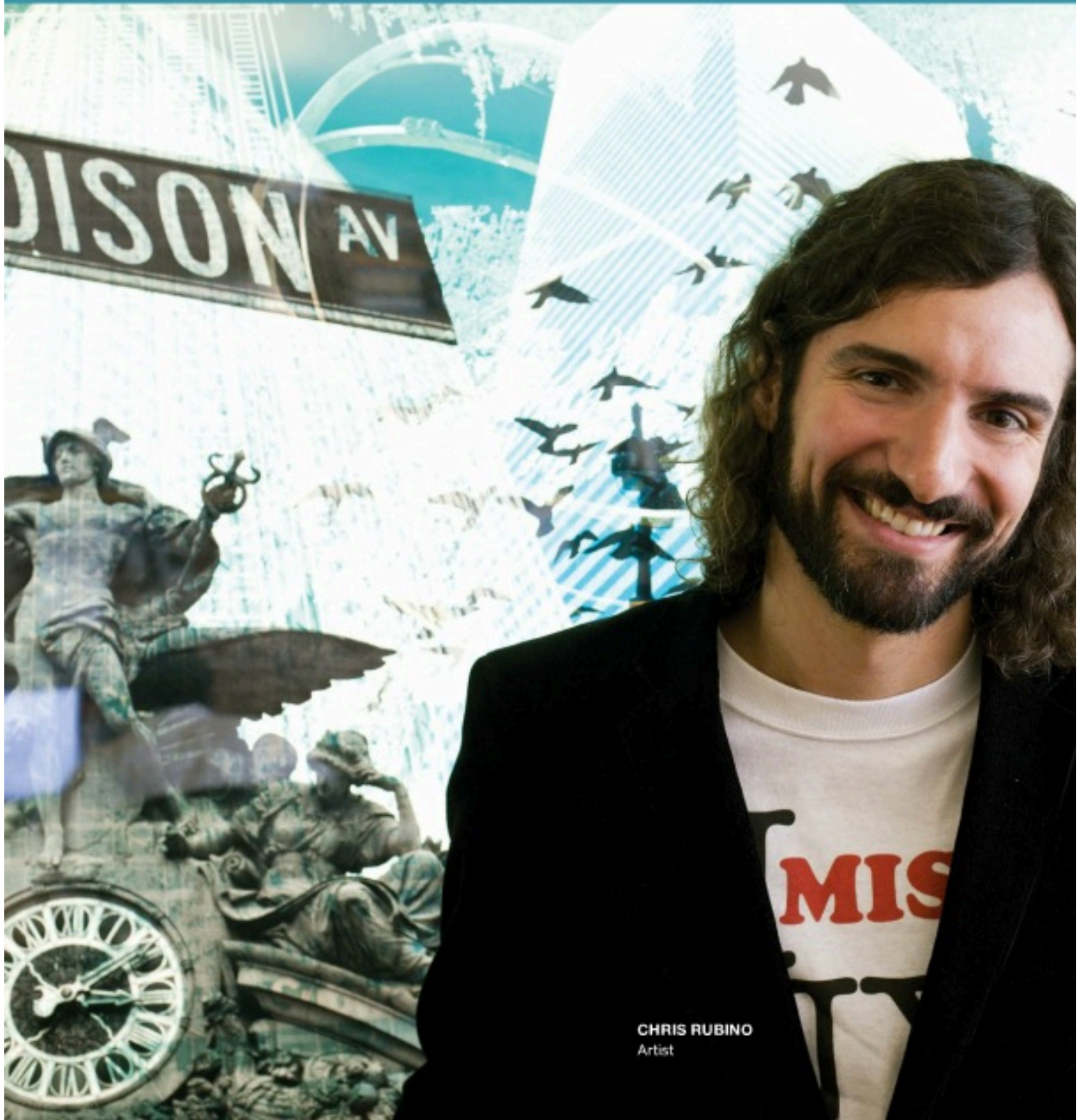


boutiqueTM DESIGN

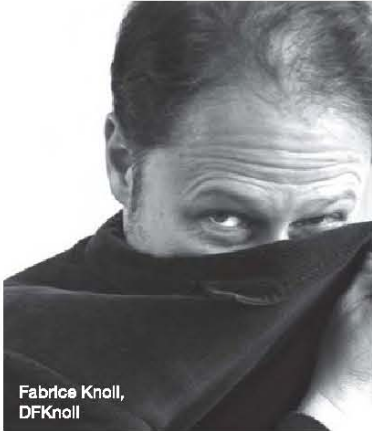
www.boutiquedesign.com

March+April 2011: Arts & Culture

COVER STORY: Distrikt Hotel's City Scenes
Quirky Environment Enlivens Rumor Hotel
Smart Art: A How-To for Designers
Hotel Indigo Docks in Shanghai



CHRIS RUBINO
Artist



Fabrice Knoll,
DFKnoll



Mari Balestrazzi,
Morgans Hotel Group



Stanford Hughes,
BraytonHughes Design Studios

Off the Wall

Designers share their best practices for finding provocative art that doesn't break the bank.

BY MARY SCOVIAK



Andrea Hofer DeRosa,
Avenue Los Angeles



Ken Kulas,
Cleo Design

Boutique hotel design used to focus on the art of living. Now, it's just as much about the art. Guests expect a gallery atmosphere that's going to keep them engaged and entertained from the minute they check in to the hours they spend in their guest rooms. The challenge for designers is how to dazzle with expressive arts and crafts that stretch the imagination, not the bottom line.

The upside is that many owners understand the need to earmark money for an art program. "Generally, the art budget hasn't been as hard hit as other areas of the hotel design budget," says Ken Kulas, principal, Cleo Design (Las Vegas). "The problem is that it's such a small piece, maybe a half percent to 1 percent of the total project cost." Making the most of the dollars available has led to creative new strategies for sourcing interesting work and broadening the definition of what art is.

Smarter Commissioning

Original art commissioned just for a particular project is still number one on most designer's wish lists. But it often carries a hefty price tag—too heavy for some recession-era budgets. "In years past, half of our projects involved commissioned art. Today, it's closer to 10 percent," says Kulas.

But some boutique hotel operators, such as Morgans Hotel Group (New York),

compelling pieces within a wide range of budgets," says Mari Balestrazzi, senior vice president, design.

Fabrice Knoll, co-founder of DFKnoll (Paris), literally takes the search for made-to-order art to the street. "Living in Paris, it is quite easy to go to certain areas where artists have their ateliers," says Knoll. "We go into their studios, talk, have a coffee with them, explain the project and our

Making the most of the dollars available has led to creative new strategies for sourcing interesting work and broadening the definition of what art is.

are bucking that trend. "For us, it's most important to tie artists' work into the larger context of the hotel concept. We rarely include pieces not created specifically for us. Our commitment to partnering with artists allows us to create unique and

vision. We see who is in line with the architectural intent and what the artist wants to bring to the environment."

Knoll cautions designers to be specific both in discussions and in the contract, while being careful not to impinge on

ART-INSTALLATION TRENDS



Lobby of the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe at night, designed by Brayton-Hughes Design Studios.

creative freedom. "From the first conversation, you have to be as concise as possible so that he or she will be inspired by the place and will understand how the work will be integrated into it. In the contract, you have to spell out the kind of work, the weight [for structural reasons], the size and so forth," he says. Balestrazzi agrees that respecting the artist is key. Like Knoll, she details exactly what's expected and makes sure the artist is given a reasonable fee and reasonable deadline. "I've never had a problem with delivery," she says.

Stanford Hughes, principal, Brayton-Hughes Design Studios (San Francisco),



Morgane Hotel Group's design for the Ames Hotel, Boston.

relies on art consultants for most projects. "Art consultants' connections give us access to new artists that we might not be aware of," he says. For the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, for example, the project's art consultant (Mary Hannah, owner of San Francisco's Kay + Hannah Associates) tapped into the local pool of artists to create a regionally connected, eco-friendly atmosphere

aimed at the hotel's target demographic. Works include off-the-radar pieces such as tin cans carefully hand cut and fashioned into brilliant blue butterflies that seem to alight on the walls.

Andrea Hofer DeRosa, principal designer at Avenue Los Angeles, says that while she occasionally works directly with artists, she prefers consultants for any volume purchases because of their ability to work with budgeting issues. Frequently, these advisers present a turnkey package that includes responsibility for on-time, on-budget delivery and installation.

Sometimes, though, finding artists comes down to gut feelings. "We have discovered some of our personal favorites on our own, either through magazines such as *Love Magazine* or online at lifestyle and/or design web sites like *Luxury Culture* and *The Cool Hunter*, respectively," says DeRosa.

Off the Rack

Commissioned pieces may provide an aesthetic punch, but fitting them into tight financial strictures can be impossible for some projects. That's when designers have to get more creative, looking for solutions that don't smack of mass production or the pastels hyped on infomercials. DeRosa found that out while working on



Dining area at Regina Hotel Baglioni, Rome.

Chris Coyart (Ritz-Carlton); Michele Mundy (Ames); Darice Eschbren (Regina)

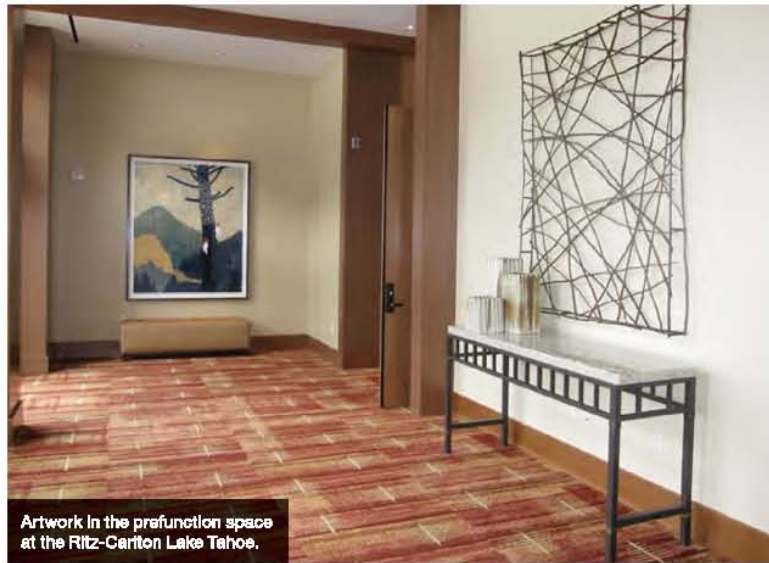
ART-INSTALLATION TRENDS

The Redbury SBE in Los Angeles. "The design concept for the property lent itself to a vintage feel, so we sourced our art and accessories package almost exclusively from local flea markets. We filled the spaces with unique collectibles and objects. So both the public areas and guest rooms felt authentic," she says.

Collections offer another route to resolving the less-is-more approach to art budgets. More and more, designers and consultants are shopping for series of etchings, prints, photographs and graphics that provide an unexpected visual showcase. In a few cases, like the Hotel Eclat Taipei, it's the client who supplies the art. LRF Designers (Hong Kong) had the once-in-a-career opportunity to draw from hotel owner George Wong's art collection—one that included some of the best of current Chinese art as well as a pair of Salvador Dalí sculptures.

Art House

Another approach that's gaining momentum is enhancing a core art program with exhibitions mounted in the lobby or restaurants. Working directly with artists or local galleries, hotels can change up their art programs with each show. Guests get



Artwork in the prefunction space at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe.

the thrill of something new each time they visit; the hotel gets added marketing support from their creative partners and the artists get major exposure to a new pool of prospective buyers.

"We had a very limited art budget for one project, so we reached out to the local art community. We arranged for our client to contract with a local art gallery to install works by local artists on consignment," says DeRosa.

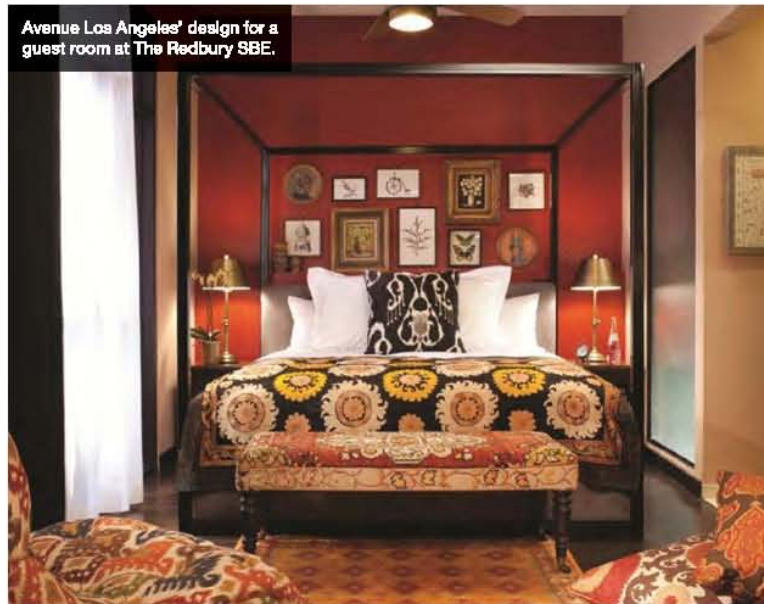
Beyond the financial reasoning, some hotels seek out art installations to up the

cultural ante of the space. For example, Marco Milocco, general manager of the Regina Hotel Baglioni in Rome, treats his property as a dynamic exhibit space to add another dimension to the cultural and artistic side of the city. He typically finds artists among his own social connections and friends.

Milocco contracts directly with the artist. His secret to keeping this arrangement on track? "Basically, the artist supplies the art—all we do is provide the space and the marketing," he says, adding that the hotel does not take a commission on anything sold. It's not a cheap way of using art (a two-week exhibition can cost \$5,000), but it transforms the hotel into a destination, he says.

Not all designers embrace dynamic displays, however. "I am always worried about 'art turnover' when galleries want to use the hotel premises as a supplemental exhibiting window for themselves; I'd rather encourage a gallery to suggest to meet some artists than to propose ready-made art," Knoll says.

No matter whether a hotel's art is commissioned, inventoried or consigned, such installations offer an opportunity for a locale to make a big impact for a relatively small chunk of its overall budget. That means designers and hoteliers need to draw on all their collective knowledge and expertise to deliver on guests' expectations of an artful experience. **BD**



Avenue Los Angeles' design for a guest room at The Redbury SBE.

Mary Hannah (Ritz-Carlton); Matthew Reardon (Redbury)