



Art That Engages



May 12 By: Abby Elyssar

Communicating locale through design is top of mind for many hospitality professionals—creating a sense of place connects travelers to the local culture and art. But, design that takes this a step further is design that ignites recognition in oneself, that binds two cultures and creates a feeling of familiarity.

For David Knowles, founder/creative director of Artelier, weaving context into design is the focus, specifically through art. Artelier, an art consultancy spanning hospitality and residential, provides art market research and commissions services for designers, developers and private clients. Knowles shared his insight with us, taking us through his creative process and thirst for connection. For Knowles, his inspiration begins with the artists themselves:

What trends are you seeing in hospitality design and art?

In terms of art in a hospitality context, rarely has there been a time when art has been accessible to so many. With the rise of online galleries, search engines and platforms like Pinterest, I often see art in hospitality projects that feels very familiar, appearing to be drawn from a fairly generic online pool of images and styles. What stands out to me are projects where designers and art consultants have delved deeper into their research to discover a more original aesthetic connected to the project's context. And for me, the works that truly resonate are where the artists are working with sustainable practices, using fairly ordinary natural materials and creating something timeless and extraordinarily beautiful.



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Can you talk about some current hotel projects you have going on? How are you incorporating these trends?

We are working on two five-star hotel projects in Ethiopia and Bahrain. The focus for these projects is to engage with the contexts of these remarkable countries through art, carrying out a depth of research that goes beyond desktop searches by visiting these countries and experiencing the culture and landscape firsthand. We search for subtleties and nuances that offer the beginning of artistic themes and narratives, which can then be intelligently woven throughout the hotel's art in order to create a rich and holistic tapestry unique to project.

An important consideration for many hotels is to also promote local artists, and so become a patron for the country's artistic communities. A key element to our on-the-ground research is therefore to engage with these communities, establishing strong relationships that enable us to have dynamic collaborations with local artists. We seek to nurture native talent and intuitively evolve the hotel's art collection around them, rather than importing a ready-made international aesthetic.



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How do you seek inspiration?

I like to embed myself in artist communities, by visiting open studios, college shows, gallery exhibitions and museums. I particularly enjoy taking the time to get to know artists on a deeper level and gain a true insight into what drives their creativity, their intuitive fascination with their chosen medium, and, of course, their often quirky and unique life journey. I am particularly inspired by artists working sustainably with natural materials and who have pursued a path of learning and developing ancient craft techniques, following in the footsteps of their ancestors to keep the medium alive and relevant to a contemporary context. I also like to take the opportunity to switch off from art and seek experiences in nature that reinvigorate a sense of our innate connection to this fragile planet.



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What about originality? We're seeing a lot of crossover between residential and hospitality design, exposure on digital channels, etc. How do designers stand out today?

As a company originally established as an art consultancy for private residential and superyacht projects, a large proportion of our projects continue to involve working directly with these discerning private clients. Having delivered 18 superyacht projects to date, as well as a select number of privately owned aircraft, Artelier has valuable crossover experience and a rare insight into this elusive world. Often these types of projects are wrapped up with NDAs and don't tend to surface online, and so having worked for these clients on their private residences and yachts certainly informs our curatorial approach to hospitality projects.

We have learned that, for these clients, originality is of paramount importance—they want art that no one else has, that has been crafted exclusively for them. I would advise designers and art consultants to not rely on the typical 'luxury aesthetic' so easily encountered online, and instead evolve a project style that is inherently connected to the project and its unique context. While this is a more natural extension for residential design, as residences often develop around personal tastes, going beyond online luxury trends also hugely benefits hospitality design. Developing a project style that deeply engages with the hotel's context gives the space personality, adding that sense of originality that sophisticated clients appreciate.



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How is COVID-19 impacting current and future projects? What plans do you have for these?

While we find ourselves in a challenging time, Artelier remains ‘business as usual.’ Our artists are able to work from their home studios and continue to create work for ongoing commissions. In many ways, artists are resilient in these circumstances as they often work from their home studios in relative isolation, and this sense of solitude can often be a space in which creativity can flourish.

However, we have seen some projects put on hold. When the projects come back it will be our role to offer the owners the most economic artwork options in achieving their return on investment. Art is often a very powerful and relatively low-cost way to create a striking statement and stand out from the competition.

How do you advise hotel designers to seek inspiration during this time?

I would suggest that now is a good time to engage with artists and their processes. Rather than being an afterthought, art can often inspire wider design concepts—creative interpretations of themes, subtle color combinations and innovative use of materials can all feed in to interior design.

While the possibility of seeing art in the flesh is limited at the moment, there are a wealth of resources available online; it is an ideal opportunity to do more in-depth research about a particular artist’s inspirations. I often find that reading artists’ interviews provides a valuable understanding of their creative journey and their inventive use of materials and artistic processes.