

Art In The Home

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Art in the home is one of the most effective ways to create an environment that reflects the unique personality of the homeowner. Art inspires and uplifts us, while energizing and providing a unique dimension and character to the home. However, to be effective, the selection, placement, and lighting of the art is critical.

Selection of art for the home is deeply personal. Working with clients who are building their first collection, my advice is to buy what you love, what inspires you, what moves you. As my client Edwynn Houk, owner and curator of the Houk Gallery in Manhattan, likes to say “You do not need a 25-word paragraph to explain a good piece of art. It speaks on its own.” His advice to new collectors is to learn about art—read, study, go to museums and galleries—and create relationships with gallery owners.

Whether designing a new residence or renovating an existing one, my firm enjoys working with clients who have existing art collections, hearing their stories about the purchase of each piece and seeing what the collection tells us about the owner and their preferences. The collection often influences both the furnishings and the color and material palettes selected. We have found that effective placement of an art collection can give it a new life and a new look.

There are a variety of approaches to placing art in the home, but for now, let’s talk about two. Traditionally, in residential design, art is carefully placed in each room creating a dynamic balance with the furniture layout. Larger pieces create strong focal points and smaller

pieces are grouped together to create vignettes or carefully placed in discreet areas. Always remember that the home is a three-dimensional environment and that art, when viewed from one room to another, encourages movement in the direction of the art.

In a modern design with a less formal approach, an art rail can be used to display larger pieces leaning against the wall or shelves to display smaller pieces. Artwork can also be placed on the floor, propped against the wall. There is an ease to this approach that allows for a random display of art that can be changed to reflect the changing mood and sensibility of the owner. Whatever approach you take, be sure to display art in every room in the home including the foyer, hallways, kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms. Often neglected, these areas provide unique opportunities for vignettes that create memorable spaces.

Keep in mind, if you are hanging pieces on the wall, a general rule of thumb is to hang paintings or prints so that their centerline is at eye level or between 5’-0” and 5’-6” above the floor. The same applies when grouping pieces together—keep the centerline of the group at eye level. When placing artwork over furniture, hang the bottom of the piece eight to ten inches above a sofa, console, or headboard.

Lighting is critical to the display of any art collection. When we have created a floor plan with fixed locations for the furniture and artwork, recessed ceiling fixtures or surface-mounted light fixtures are a great architectural solution. In a residence where the client may change the display of artwork frequently, track lighting is a solution that allows greater flexibility to adjust the lighting as needed. With both of these approaches, the lamp in the fixture can either provide a wide beam of light that gently washes a wall or a focused beam of light accenting certain pieces on the wall. Both approaches can and are used together. In selecting any lighting system, consider energy efficiency which can be addressed through the use of energy efficient light fixtures and dimmers.

Whatever your approach to collecting and displaying art in your home, it is important to have fun with the process and to love the pieces you are collecting. Along with the furnishings, they create a home that is a uniquely personal environment for you and your family.