

Art-full Spaces

One of the most ambitious marriages of fine art and hospitality in Canada is found at the 130-room Listel Vancouver, an independently owned property affiliated with Sterling Hotels and Resorts. Two guest floors are described as “Gallery Floors,” and feature artist-themed rooms displaying works by more than 30 regional and internationally recognized artists. The hotel’s public areas also showcase installations from a rotating collection of large-scale sculptures and glassworks. In all, the Listel displays \$1 million worth of art on its premises, while owning just a small percentage of it.

The idea for the art gallery in a guest room was developed midway through the property’s renovation in 1997. “I called everybody into my office and said ‘It’s not enough,’” says general manager John Nicholson. “It was still too close to traditional hotel chain styling, and we wanted to be unique.” To meet its goals, Nicholson’s team developed a co-operative business model to attract interest from local galleries. “Barrie Mowatt, owner of the Buschlen Mowatt Gallery, latched on to the idea immediately as a good way to showcase their artists,” says Nicholson. “We threw out the rule book. Using our design and drawings, the gallery’s installers hung the art according to their approach, so it’s not where you’d expect to find it in a typical room.”

Aside from covering the costs of framing and installation, the Listel’s entire art investment is based on marketing. “All our promotional material and marketing efforts

include a mention of the Buschlen Mowatt Gallery, helping to promote their sales in a subtle, unobtrusive manner,” says Nicholson. Most of the hotel’s accommodation packages also include private gallery tours and discount tickets to other public and private galleries.

As the Listel and Buschlen Mowatt Gallery begin the second year of their three-year initiative, both parties are encouraged with the results this bold idea has created, and both hope to expand the concept in the future. “The Listel has successfully positioned itself in this market, creating the impact of quality and distinctiveness that only art can bring to an environment,” says Mowatt.

But is it Art?

For most hotel operators, choosing fine art for their properties can be a complex and time-consuming process. Beyond determining a basic art budget, hoteliers are faced with a number of other decisions. They will have to consider, for example, whether pieces should reflect the city, region or other concept, as well as its compatibility with the overall hotel design strategy. Sourcing works of varying price and quality from the hundreds of galleries, art dealers and studios across the continent is another challenge hoteliers will have to face. For most, the easiest solution is to turn to the experts, such as independent art consultants.

“There is an enormous amount to know about art,” says Fela Grunwald, Toronto-based art consultant and president