

HOW TO BEST DECORATE YOUR HOME WITH ORIGINAL ART—ON A BUDGET

C. Moon Reed Thu. Nov. 5, 2020 (2:00am)



Sure, you could hit the nearest big-box store and fill your walls with cheap reproductions. But why do that when a collection of original art is within reach? And it is within reach, no matter your budget.

“There’s nothing more exciting than living with a work of art in your home,” says Las Vegas-based art adviser Heather Harmon. “That can bring you a lot of joy. It can be very stimulating; it can give you something to talk about.”

More than just decoration, Harmon says, your art collection acts as an autobiographical narrative of your taste. “What you choose to collect is ... an extension of your life story. The works of art that you gravitate to speak to your personal ideology.”



Holly Lay's custom hand-tufted rugs (hollylay.com)

If don't possess a degree in art history, that might sound intimidating. But at its core, collecting art is about simply following your heart.

"If you see something you like, buy it," says Las Vegas artist and art handler JW Caldwell. "There's no wrong reason to buy a piece of art. If you think it will match your couch nicely, that's a valid reason to buy a piece of art. If your friend needs money to get out of jail, that's a valid reason to buy a piece."

Where to Start

Harmon began collecting art by purchasing work from local college students. She advises attending student shows at UNLV, CSN and Nevada State College. "I still think it's one of the best ways to start collecting," Harmon says. "It's a great way to support local artists and see what artists are making in Las Vegas."

The advantage of looking at university-level art is that it's "accessible and open to all. ... You can go into the studios; you can see the exhibitions," Harmon says. "The amazing thing about it is that it's generally at a price point that's affordable. You're not going into a gallery; you don't have to break the bank. And you're also helping an artist in a time when they need it most."

The triangle

Harmon suggests following these three rules to build your "triangle of art collecting." She says the first rule is most important.

1. Buy something you love and that you'll love to live with.
2. Find something that's a great representation of an artist's work.
3. Try to make a good financial decision; find works that will hold their value.

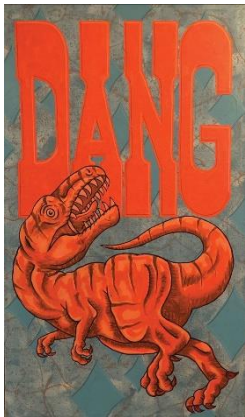


Photo: MCQ Fine Art LLC
Sush Machida's "J&B" (2019) acrylic on wood panels

Five tips

1. Establish your goals. Art consultant and gallerist Michele C. Quinn of MCQ Fine Art advises first thinking about what you want to collect and why. She says that it could just be one piece or a whole collection.
2. Get in the spirit. “The most exciting time to work with a collector is [when] someone is really excited about the process and really wants to learn,” Quinn says. With so many resources available, you can start learning now.
3. Discover your personal style. Even if you have the money to work with a professional art adviser, you’ll still need to develop your own taste. Quinn, for example, takes into consideration collectors’ backgrounds and affinities to help them find what they’re looking for at their own price points. Develop your style by looking at art.
4. Follow the feeling. Ultimately, Quinn says, there’s no formula for good art, but you’ll know it when you see it because it’ll “kick you in the gut” and you’ll think, “God, that’s good.”
5. But don’t be ruled by emotion. While a gut feeling is important, Quinn says clients can sometimes get overly emotional about a piece of work and then make poor financial decisions. Take a moment to step back and really think about whether a piece of art fits your goals—and your budget.

New sources



"Dang" by JW Caldwell

Caldwell says one of the best new places to find (and even buy) art by emerging artists is on social media. “Jump on Instagram, find an artist that you like and then find the people that they like,” Caldwell says. “I’ve found so many artists [whose work] I really love, and I purchase work from them directly through Instagram [or their websites].”

Caldwell has experienced the social media art scene from both sides. During the pandemic lockdown, he’d draw at home, then post the finished products on Instagram (@ThisIsRidiculous13). “I started selling them real cheap, because I had nothing better to do,” Caldwell says. With regular business on hold, he ended up paying rent by selling postcard-size drawings for \$25 a pop.

Caldwell also suggests looking to local tattoo artists for original work. In addition to tattooing, many such artists make other work on the side.

Your wallet versus your heart

While art appreciation is inherently subjective, there are two general schools of thought when it comes to collecting: finance and passion. Ideally, you'll satisfy both impulses. For beginners, most experts suggest following your heart.

"I've installed artwork in mansions that I have deinstalled four days later so that they could go to auction. As soon as the market value went up, they immediately turned it around," Caldwell says. "But you should always buy things that you like. Nobody wants to get stuck with a painting they think is ugly just because it's worth a lot of money."

Look, look, look

Artists and art advisers will tell you, the only way to develop your eye is to look at lots of art, ideally in person. "My biggest piece of advice for a collector starting to collect is looking," Harmon says. "The more you look, and the more you read, the more you get to define what it is that you like."

More hints

- Collect as a family or a friend group. Have conversations.
- When you travel, visit a museum. Nothing compares to seeing art in person.
- Stay up-to-date on the art scene by attending local shows and following art news.
- The most economical way to get into art collecting is to buy numbered prints, limited editions or duplicates by an artist. This is not to be confused by that Monet poster you can find at the local big-box store.
- If you can't afford to buy a lot of art at once, it's OK to save up and buy one really worthy piece a year.
- Remember, if you buy original art by local, working artists, you're not just beautifying your home, you're also supporting your community. You're helping fund more art.



Photo: Test Site Projects

*Justin Favela's
"Aluminio/Hoja III" (2020)
color screen print on
aluminum foil mounted to
Rives BFK*