

DESIGNER'S TOP TEN

Smart Art

Paintings, prints, photographs, and sculpture can transform a room. Designer Ernest de la Torre offers expert guidance

1 Art can create the entire mood for a room, or serve as an exclamation point in a neutral setting. A monochromatic room can come to life with a vivid abstract expressionist painting, or remain an oasis of calm with the help of a white line painting.



2 Play with size. For dramatic effect, try hanging a large piece of art in a small space, like a powder room or vestibule.



3 Don't try to conform to anyone else's taste. Your art should be a reflection of your personal style and interests.

4 If you are interested in collecting as an investment, do your homework and only buy from reputable galleries. Provenance can be more important for some pieces than others, and in the case of prints, condition is all-important. Keep tabs on auction results and current prices with internet sites like www.artnet.com.

5 Placing art on top of other objects changes the way you see each piece, and can be an artistic process in itself. A portrait hung on a large pier mirror in the French tradition creates a great deal of interest from the reflections alone. Try layering works of art on a table or shelf: a great photograph leaning up in front of an oil painting, with a small sculpture in front of it, can tell a whole story.

6 Sculpture is a great addition to any room. It adds height and a touch of the unexpected. Don't be afraid to juxtapose two artworks from different periods, provided they have a common element. A 1st-century Roman bust will look great with an Isamu Noguchi piece if they are both in white marble.

7 Try using gallery-hanging rods. They allow you to rotate your collection effortlessly without ruining the walls.

8 Choose frames carefully. The wrong one can overwhelm a piece of art or fail to set it off. Mix frames that differ both stylistically and in color; this gives your collection a sense of having been assembled over time. But stick to one frame style for a single series of works by one artist.

9 Create a collage by grouping many small artworks together, linking them through visual forms, theme, or color. The pieces will play off one another to create a single graphic effect.

10 Keep track of the artists you are interested in, and learn about their work. Look for works by emerging artists, and mix them in with better-established ones. A great collection evolves as you do.

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