

# The Fine Art of Acquiring Art

By Valarie Schwartz

Furnishings may complement each other and beautifully fill a room, but without art on the walls, the heart of a home is ... missing.

But selecting art is an art, according to many local experts. "A collector never, ever, ever, ever makes a decision based on what looks good over the sofa," says Bill Hester of Bill Hester Fine Art in University Square. "Anyone who is collecting art will make a determination on what art they want. The challenge they'll give the decora-

tor is 'how do I fit this piece in my home?'"

"I've seen slightly impoverished young professionals who would rather have a painting on the wall than furniture," says Joe Rowand, owner of Somerhill Gallery in Eastgate. Rowand has been helping people find art since opening his gallery in 1972. "Certain people want balance and may start out thinking they have to match the curtains or rugs. But for a true collector, it doesn't make any dif-

ference."

Texture and feel are the major reasons that someone buys art, according to Hester. The texture — created by the application of paint or wax in a painting, or the material of a sculpture — attracts or repels individuals.

Bottom line, though, when a collector loves a piece of art they buy it.

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— Bill Hester,  
Bill Hester Fine Art

"They've collected a feeling. They try to recapture and retain that feeling that they had," says Hester.

"A quickening of the heart," Rowand calls it. "I have trained myself, and say to my staff, 'We do a good job when we teach clients to trust their instincts.' They have an opinion and they trust it."

But what comes first — the art, around which a room is designed, or the room, for which art must be acquired? The truth is that people approach it either way and can find professional help in either case.

Anahid Vrana, who started Art & Placement in 2001, after 29 years as a research scientist in medical cell biol-



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ogy, has seen people pull art out from under their beds and out of attics.

"Usually they inherit things they don't like," she says. They may have five paintings their grandmother collected and like two; or they've grown tired of or have a bad memory association with certain pieces.

She helps them decide what to sell and how to get the best price.

But frequently people have art in their homes that can be updated by reframing or rearranging it.

"I like them to pick out a frame like a piece of furniture," says Noel Plesha, who specializes in home redesign.

"The frame will need to complement the other furniture in the room."

When people start with a room and need to find art for a certain space, Plesha starts by giving them a little guidance and a measurement.

"First we identify the colors, shapes and size of the artwork," she says. "I tell the client that we need it to fill two-thirds of the space above the furniture or of a large wall."

Designers may recommend Web sites for clients to look at, but most will send them out to local museums and galleries.

"This area is so chock-full of artists on every level," says Vrana, who considers her ideal client to be 25 years old with a 10,000-square-foot home full of huge bare walls.

What if the client insists they want only French painters?

"Then I'm right there," Vrana says. If the client can voice what they're looking for, she knows where to find it.

The area art museums provide another major influence for collectors. The Ackland Art Museum at UNC,

the Nasher Museum at Duke and the N.C. Museum of Art in Raleigh tantalize artistic taste buds.

"Those three venues have changed the climate of what's being offered to local collectors," Vrana says. "The area is just booming in the last five years."

And people are looking. "There are so many people that walk in the door on a daily basis to browse," says Annette Girman, owner of Studio 91 in Meadowmont. Like all of the local galleries, she offers an eclectic mix of artists — several who are exclusive to her — in a casual, unpretentious setting.

"As gallery owners we try to hone in on what seems to be of interest to them," Girman says. "I really think that the majority of the time people like to come in and make their own selections of art. Art is such an investment, with the cost factors and appreciation value,



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I feel that if somebody is going to hang onto a piece of art they want to be the ones to make their own selections.”

“It’s got to be something they’re really going to love,” Plesha says, but disagreed with the investment issue. “It’s an important budget item, but it really isn’t an investment any more. There’s too much art out there.”

For some couples it’s just fun.

“Collecting art is a lifelong thing,” Rowand says. “I’ve got clients who’ve been married 50 years and art has held them together. They go together and spend their discretionary income . . . whatever’s left is the money that’s fun to spend.” **CHM**

*The author is a freelance writer who lives in and writes about Chapel Hill.*

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