

Artist Features: Lin Baoling (Taiwan, Singapore based)
Source: Prestige, May 2008, page 258 - 261



Magazine cover

PHOTO: GORTZ/MARKUS



ART OF HOSPITALITY

You might expect to find a range of good quality decorative art on the walls of hotels, but some luxury hotels are going a step further and now offer their guests a museum-like experience.
Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop investigates

WHEN THE CAPELLA SINGAPORE OPENS ON SENTOSA island at the end of the year, a series of very large-scale sculptures by a number of renowned British artists will be featured as will several artworks by the late French pop artist, Jean DuBuffet.

Ninety percent of the collection will be custom-designed and site-specific. The works will come from a wide-range of established and emerging international artists and artisans and will include many contemporary art pieces in novel media such as pressed flowers mounted into archival paper and coloured pigment powders on handmade papers.

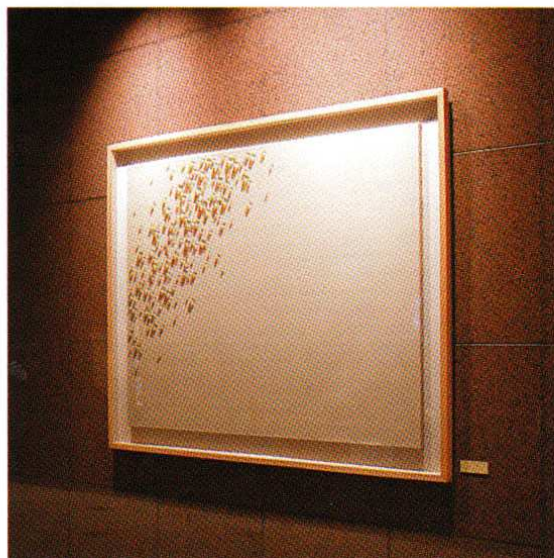
"The Capella is one of the most exciting properties I've ever collaborated on," explains Elizabeth Weiner, the California-based art consultant and curator in charge of the project, who was also behind the display of art works at the Ritz-Carlton Millenia in Singapore as well as the Four Seasons Resort Jackson Hole and the Four Seasons Hotel Silicon Valley in the United States. Describing the Capella Singapore project, Weiner says, "The Norman Foster architecture is a work of art in itself and the neutral colour palette of

the elegant interiors by Jaya & Associates is a perfect backdrop for contemporary artworks."

"This collection is a monumental effort. Our goal is to offer Capella's guests with a full depth of visual experiences, invoking a full range of emotional reactions. This will not be a collection to simply walk by. We want this collection to connect with Capella's guests, taking on the true sense of the word 'art' – to engage and transform the viewer," she adds. "The result will surely be nothing less than spectacular and totally unique, not just for Singapore, but for Southeast Asia and beyond."

Living surrounded by countless pieces of stunning museum-calibre art is something that more and more guests experience when they stay in five-star hotels in Asia.

The St Regis Singapore has original sculptures by Botero and Li Chen as well as paintings by Georgette Chen and Le Pho. The Grand InterContinental Seoul has works by well-known contemporary Korean artists like Bae Joon Sung and Kim Tschang-Yuel, while the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong has a series of interesting sculptures by



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international artists as well as many paintings by Hong Kong artists, Chui Tze Hung and Chung Tai Fu.

"Our objective was to create a contemporary collection of art that would reflect the international standing of the Four Seasons in cosmopolitan Hong Kong. However, there was a focus on sourcing artwork created by Hong Kong and Chinese artists so as to give the hotel a sense of place," explains Sandra Walters, director of Sandra Walters Consultancy, the company that curated the art displayed at the hotel.

The recently opened InterContinental Westlake in Hanoi boasts works by young, emerging Vietnamese artists such as Nguyen Minh Thanh and Le Quoc Viet, while the Peninsula Bangkok displays works by young contemporary Asian artists such as Thai artists Natee Utarit and Niti Wattuya and Vietnamese artists Phan Cam Tuong and Nguyen Thanh Binh; furthermore, a coffee-table book on the hotel's art pieces is available for sale in the hotel's boutique.

"Art is an integral aspect of our hotels — our aim is to create fine hotels not only with the most advanced facilities and personalised services for our guests, but also to invest them with soul through original contemporary art collections, comprising works by both established and emerging artists," says Peter Borer, chief operating officer, The Peninsula Hotels.

Audrey Phng of Asian Art Options believes that coupling art with a hotel is "a marriage that people don't expect but one that works well".

Phng was involved in what could perhaps be described as the ultimate site-specific art installation project: The Majestic Hotel, Singapore, where nine local artists were asked to paint directly on the wall of the hotel rooms. "Art is often left to a much later stage of the hotel design and it's usually driven by

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the choices of an interior designer or the architect who sets the tone for the hotel," explains Phng, "but for this project, we were pulled in right from day one and art was considered as part of the entire design theme. It has become the identity of the hotel."

Weiner points out that curating art for a hotel has "very little to do with matching the colour of the sofa".

"A collection needs to tell stories and there should be surprises coming at you. It's not just a question of resources, or how many dollars you put in, but also of sources. The work has to be cohesive yet diversified too," she explains.

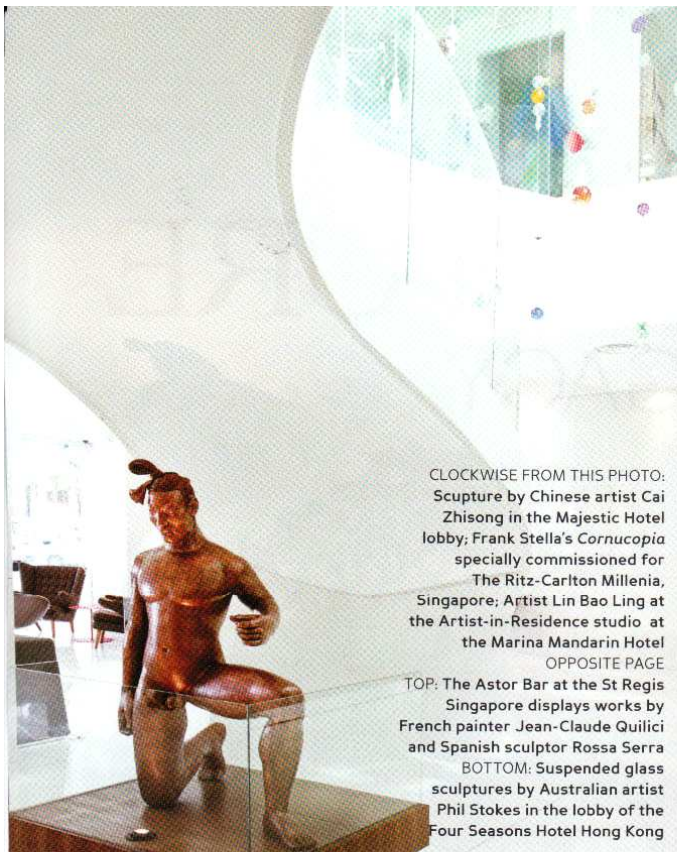
Weiner has worked as a curator for the hospitality industry for 25 years, having started with the Regent in Hong Kong back in the 1980s. "I find curating for a hotel, much more interesting than for a museum. It has such a large, diverse audience that can view the works over the years," she says.



While few hotel owners will give curators a blank cheque to build a truly amazing collection, Weiner says building a real art collection is not just a matter of dollars and cents.

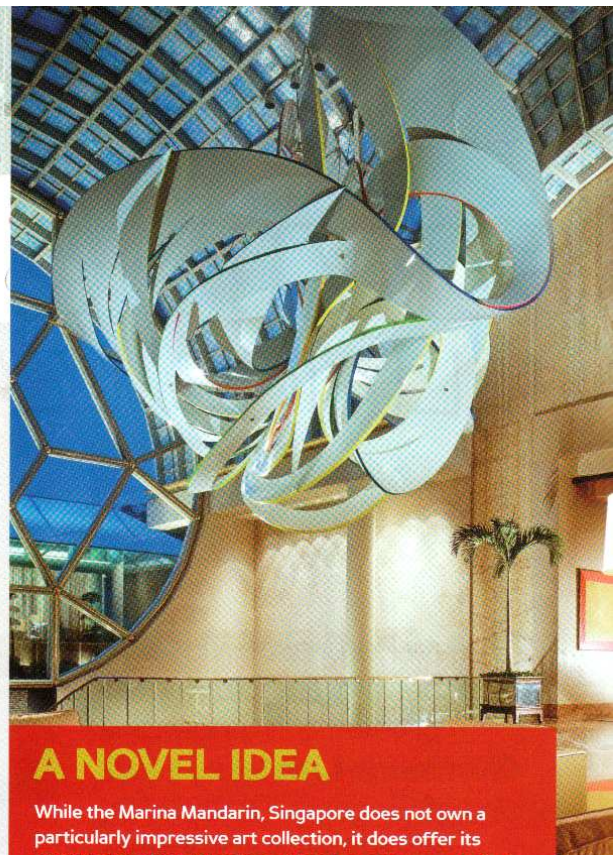
"Pieces need to relate to each other. Sometimes a great piece of artwork, if it's not in the right location surrounded by other art works that are positive, negative to it, then it's there, it's pretty and nice, but you walk by it without really noticing it. It's the juxtaposition of the works that is important."

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CLOCKWISE FROM THIS PHOTO:
Sculpture by Chinese artist Cai Zhisong in the Majestic Hotel lobby; Frank Stella's *Cornucopia* specially commissioned for The Ritz-Carlton Millenia, Singapore; Artist Lin Bao Ling at the Artist-in-Residence studio at the Marina Mandarin Hotel

OPPOSITE PAGE
TOP: The Astor Bar at the St Regis Singapore displays works by French painter Jean-Claude Quilici and Spanish sculptor Rossa Serra
BOTTOM: Suspended glass sculptures by Australian artist Phil Stokes in the lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong



A NOVEL IDEA

While the Marina Mandarin, Singapore does not own a particularly impressive art collection, it does offer its guests a novel art experience, the chance to see an artist at work in their 'studio'. Through an Artist-In-Residence programme, which was established in 2006, an artist is given a small public space within the hotel to work in and showcase his or her art. This open studio concept allows hotel patrons and art aficionados a unique peek at the creative process, giving them an opportunity to interact with the artist. "The art helps us to position the hotel as a patron of the arts. It's a form of corporate philanthropy," says Rae Tang, marketing communications manager, adding: "While there is a loss of revenue for the hotel from the shop space that has been allocated to the artist, the amount of support that the programme has got more than outweighs the loss of revenues on a shop."

Tang explains the idea was really to give the space to young up-and-coming artists and help make "his or her dream come true". "Often young artists do not have enough space to work properly. We felt it was more constructive to give the space to a lesser known artist rather than an established one that doesn't really need the space or the exposure," she says. Audrey Phng of Asian Art Options, who is helping with the selection of artists, says that while many artists have shown interest in the residency, not all

are suited to the format. "The artist has to be willing to interact with the public and be comfortable working while being watched. Some are too shy and don't want to talk to the guests about their works."

For the Ritz-Carlton Millenia, Weiner used predominantly Pop Art or Colour Field pieces, two American art styles that date from the 1960s, thus creating a cohesive collection that includes about 50 major "museum quality" pieces by Frank Stella, Dale Chihuly and David Hockney. Valued at approximately S\$5 million, the displays are often site-specific such as Stella's *Cornucopia* in the lofty entrance area and the two echoing *Anemone Walls* of Chihuly in the Chihuly Lounge and the Greenhouse restaurant.

Hotel owners are increasingly opening up to the idea of displaying more edgy, contemporary artworks rather than antiques that add a feel of opulence but hark back to bygone times.

Walters, who has been involved with numerous hotels in the region, notes "There has been a definite movement toward the acceptance of contemporary art in hotel projects. Although most are still not prepared to select 'cutting edge' artwork, they are certainly requesting more contemporary work and considering 'healthier' budgets for better quality."

Some hotels, recognising the marketing potential of their collection, are now offering an artwork podcast tour. At the Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco, which has an impressive collection of contemporary art, the artists voice the audio guide themselves. Guests can therefore hear celebrated painter Deborah Oropallo describe the way everyday occurrences come together in her large-scale compositions or Darren Waterston explain how his abstract paintings are influenced by traditional Chinese ceramics. □

