

Art is a perk at some South Florida hotels

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CARL JUSTE / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Hotel Urbano is one of the few hotels that is curating its own art collection and establishing itself as an art hotel. Sandra Knuyt's paintings decorate the small business center.

Guests at a handful of Miami-Dade hotels could be forgiven if they confuse their surroundings for an art gallery.

From Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst paintings at the W South Beach to curated exhibitions from emerging artists at Miami's Hotel Urbano, lodgings throughout the region are embracing art as a way to stand out and attract a creative clientele.

Even the newest Hampton Inn in town, near Miami's Brickell Avenue, is getting in on the artsy act.

Bernard Wolfson, who opened the hotel in September, loaned some art from his own collection, including an HD video by Gregory Scott that he bought last year at Art Miami for the "mid-five figures." Several other original works belong to the hotel.

"Now the trend seems to be that hotels are affording their guests a unique experience, including a nice art collection," Wolfson said.

The Sagamore, which includes the words "The Art Hotel" in its title, was a pioneer. The Miami Beach boutique hotel features art from the collection of Cricket Taplin, owner Martin Taplin's wife, including a piece comprised of 85 Garry Winogrand photographs.

Cricket Taplin said the art went up once construction finished in 2001, the year Art Basel Miami Beach was supposed to start. The event was canceled, but the Taplins still wanted to host people who had come to town for the fair in the hotel.

"We didn't even have furniture," Taplin said. "Marty said, 'What are we going to do? We're not wallpaper people.' I said, 'Why don't we put our art up?'"

She said that spontaneity continues a decade later.

"I hang the art the way I install it in my home," she said. "There's nothing that's guarding it."

At the W, which opened in 2009, the art comes from owner Aby Rosen's collection. The lobby includes three pieces by Hirst, a Jean-Michel Basquiat painting and two Warhols. Photographs by fashion and entertainment photographer Danny Clinch are on upper floors.

"I often see guest just stopping and looking at the art — and I'm talking about the guests who come year-round," said general manager George Cozonis. "But of course this time of year there's so many people who know about art, it's interesting to hear them saying, 'Oh, my God, there's a Damien Hirst! Oh, my God, there's an Andy Warhol! Oh, my God, there's a Christopher Wool!'"

Miami hotel consultant Scott Brush said a focus on art is a trend among hotels — though one, he warned, that probably can't grow too much.

"Not every place can support one," he said.

While pointing out differences in the way hotels go about collecting and displaying art, he said the overarching goal is for properties to appeal to a specific community and distinguish themselves.

"Everybody always searches for a point of difference, and the art can be a real point of difference," Brush said. "If you've got stuff like Art Basel going on in the neighborhood, it makes it even that much more prominent."

At the Betsy Hotel in Miami Beach, which opened in April 2009, one of the questions on the comment card is: "What did you think of the art in the hotel?"

General manager Jeff Lehman said the hotel has rotating exhibits, usually arranged directly with artists. Since the summer, work from photographer Robert Zuckerman has been featured. Another exhibit shows photos of rock and roll artists in their youth.

"Whereas a lot of people have art for art's sake — they use the hotel as a place to put the art — we sell our art. We have people who are interested in the hotel because they want to be surrounded by art," Lehman said.

Hotel Urbano opened in early 2010 as Miami's "Art Hotel," forging a partnership with Art Fusion Galleries in the Design District. Gallery director William Braemer curates the collection at the hotel quarterly with work from emerging and mid-career artists that is available to purchase for \$500 to \$15,000.

"Essentially you can purchase art right off the walls from the hotel," said Bridget Dadd, the hotel's director of sales and marketing. "It's not just a typical hotel where it has art that looks like it's from Pottery Barn. It's gallery space."