

Buying *art* on the learning curve

Take free advice from the experts to up your comfort level

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Bare walls. It's often one of the most intimidating things new homeowners face. Unlike buying a new fridge or a plasma television, you can't purchase art based on an energy efficiency rating or whether it comes with surround sound.

"I think it's an education process, like anything when you're making an investment," says Matthew Hudon of the West End Gallery at 123rd Street and Jasper Avenue. "It's getting people comfortable with making that kind of purchase."

The extra effort put into familiarizing yourself with art and artists, interior designers say, is worth it.

"The art makes the place, really," says Etienne Grossi of Shantam Interior and Decorative Arts.

Artwork, he says, can carry a theme or add a texture or colour to tie things together. "You can pull a colour from a different location of the room to another location of the room through art."

A strong piece can also add personality, says Amanda Schroter. "I believe that art is an essential part of a home," says the interior designer. "It warms up a house. It's more inviting."

While there is no formula, there are a few things you can keep in mind to make shopping for art easier:

► Figure out what you like

If you don't know where to start, just try to see as much art as possible.

"Art, for me, is kind of an instant response, a gut response," says Hudon. "You kinda love it or you don't."

Galleries can help you identify certain styles that you may be drawn to, says Hudon, and many have approval options that allow you to take a piece home and try it in your space, with no obligation to buy.

And don't forget that art doesn't have to necessarily be paintings.

Consider sculpture, glasswork. Then, educate yourself, says Hudon. "Research the gallery; research the artist."

► Consider how you want to use your art

Beyond looks, artwork can also serve a functional purpose. A vertical arrangement of artwork along a narrow wall space, for example,



Art and lighting on this narrow wall succeed in moving the eye upwards, thereby giving the room a taller look.



The relationship between art and other objects in the room is key.

can make a room look taller, says Schroter, while wide, horizontal pieces across an expansive wall will make a room look bigger.

"It helps move your eye around the room," she explains.

"Large paintings look the best on large walls and small paintings look the best on smaller walls," adds Grossi, who is also a painter.

"Using a vertical wall to hang a vertical painting will flatter the artwork and complement the architecture. If you have an oddly shaped wall, try an oddly shaped conglomeration of smaller paintings."

Lay groupings of artwork on the floor to see how they look in different arrangements, he continues, and always think about how your art relates not just to the space it's in, but the objects it shares that space with.

"In design, relationship is everything."

► Think about colours

While your artwork doesn't necessarily have to match everything in the room, colours should complement each other, says Grossi.

Instead of matching red with red, for example, you could try pairing

your stuff," says Schroter.

► Yes, you can buy on a budget

Art is an investment, but it "doesn't have to be an expensive investment," says Hudon. "I think people have a little bit of intimidation going into an art gallery, thinking that you have to win the lottery to be able to afford anything, and that's not the case."

Handblown glass starts at \$80 at the West End Gallery, and paintings start at \$300.

"There are different artists at different stages in their careers," he says. "There are certain artists that I would say ... are excellent painters but not as well-known and do have a very good price point."

Some galleries, like the West End, have layaway options so you can split the cost of your piece over several payments.

"You don't need six figures to buy something," says Hudon. "You can buy something for \$300 and improve the vibe of your home."

For those who prefer really baby steps, Grossi suggests starting with wallet-friendly prints before you invest in a more substantial original.

► Buy what you love

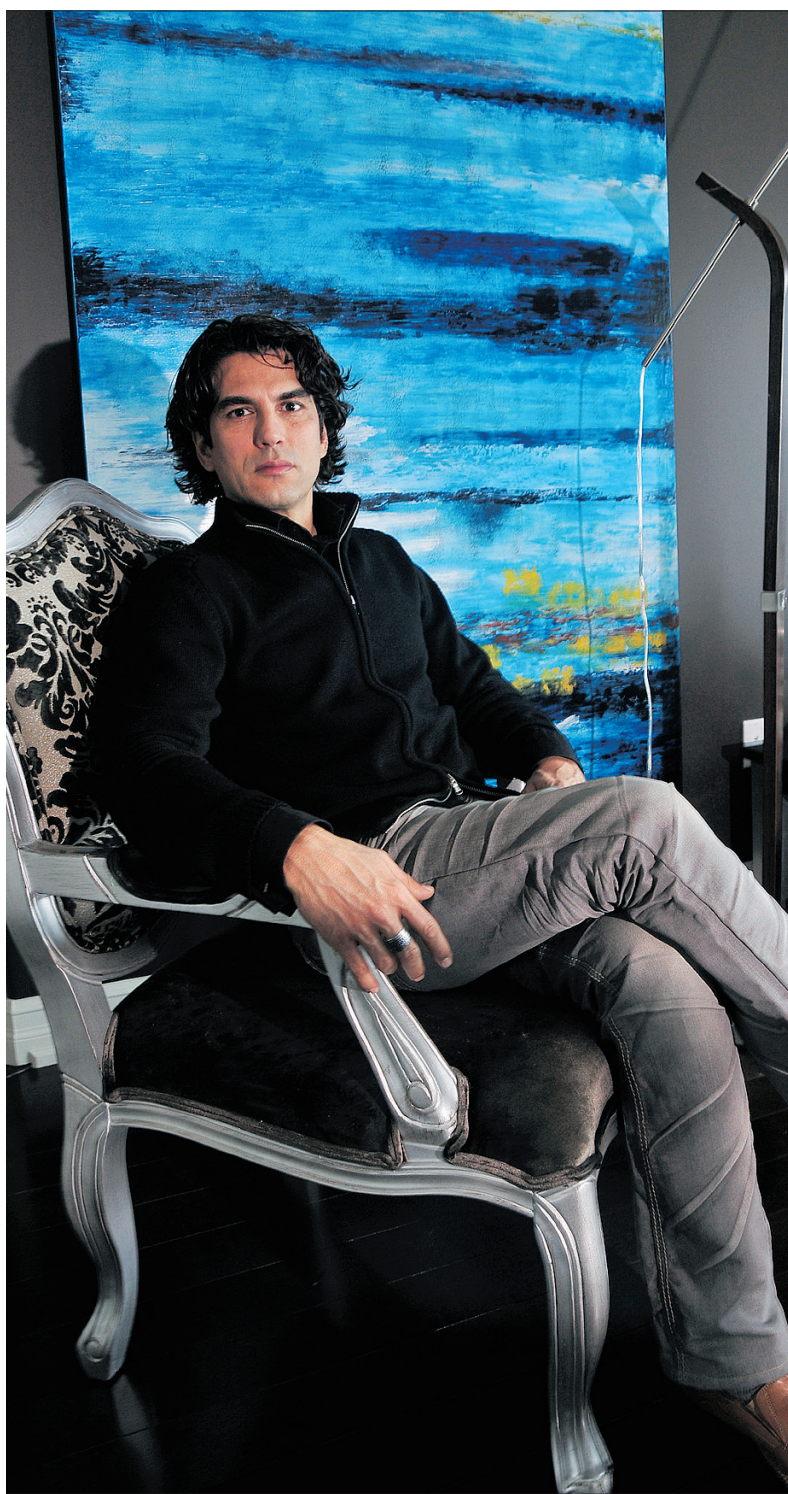
"Choose art that you love. Don't buy it because someone else likes it," says Hudon. "What I personally like, you may not. It really has to be a choice by yourself or your husband or wife or your family, to put in your home."

Don't forget that art doesn't have to come last in your design approach. "Art sometimes comes first because you may have a piece of art that you love," says Grossi. "Then you take your colours from that. Or it can come last to kind of tie the whole place together."

So don't worry too much about the paint on your walls or the upholstery on your sofas. "Your art's going to stay the same, generally," says Hudon.

"You can change your couch and your wall colours every couple years. So you want to choose (art) that you truly love because you'll have it forever."

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Local interior designer Etienne Grossi poses for a photo with some of his artwork behind him in Meridian Plaza downtown.



Grossi designed this show suite at Meridian Plaza condos.



The dominant blues in the artwork at left pull the other pieces of glass and pottery in the room together.

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