

Using art in design

| BY GOY ZHENRU |

Artworks are often an afterthought in interior and spatial design. Their mere “decorative” title often results in their potential to fundamentally shape and craft different spatial experiences being untapped.

But just like materials used to form the structure and finishes of the space, artworks add an integral design layer that enhances the overall spatial experience for users.

The pairing of art pieces with your interior design can be done with simple techniques. There are no hard and fast rules for integration of art pieces into your design and it is often subject to one’s taste and preference. Here is a guide to help jumpstart your thought process.

For this article and in collaboration with Chelsea Zhao of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, we use the interior of a recently completed office space to illustrate the following methods for integrating artwork into your design space.

- **Visual expression of the art piece:** Consider the artwork as part of your overall material palette. Examine the materials, structure and colours used by the artwork and complement it with your interior mood board;
- **Surrounding context:** Consider the existing limitations and functionality of the space where the artwork is placed. Use the artwork to address the existing spatial or aesthetic issues; and
- **Innate content:** Tap into the storytelling of the artwork. Use the artwork as the voice of the space, which sets the overall mood and atmosphere for the users. If integrated well, the art piece may also give a glimpse into the owner’s philosophy and values.

The selection of the artwork need not be done in that order. Depending on your spatial constraints or design intent, certain aspects may present themselves with more weightage than others.

Visual expression

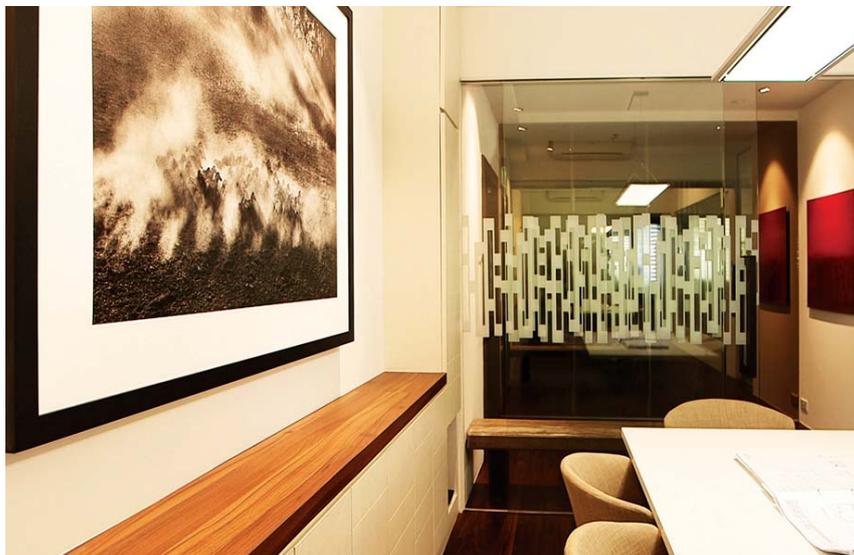
In the reception area, we have selected a piece by Miya Ando entitled *Evanescent Vermillion*. We chose this artwork because it has a strong and inviting colour that serves as an “art-mark” amid the labyrinth of offices in the building. The colour of the artwork provides a distinctive guide for clients that is visible from a distance. Together with the interior material palette of mahogany timber flooring, bronze tinted mirror and the selected upholstery for the workstations, the vermilion colour blends in effortlessly to form a warm colour palette resonating with the cosy theme of the interior design.

Ando handcrafted this ethereal metallic horizon using a palette of muted red, gold and pink pigments applied onto plates of anodised aluminium. The artist then sanded and applied heat, acid and patinas to create this art piece that symbolises strength and impermanence. The vermilion used in the artwork is a perfect eye-catching yet meditative piece for the reception area.

Surrounding context

For the interior of the meeting room, the design intent was to create an expanded experience of the 12 sq m space. Together with interior design strategies such as mounting full-height mirrors, continuous use of floor material into the pantry space and light illumination washing both ceiling and wall surfaces, the use of the right artwork will also create an illusion of spatial expansion in the meeting room.

Considering the existing spatial limitation, we selected a featured artwork that serves like a window to an external environment. This approach of “borrowed view” is also a strategy commonly used in architecture and landscape practices to break the physical boundary of the given land area. As the client requested for a calming and soothing atmosphere, we found Sebastião Salgado’s *Genesis* collection as the perfect fit for the space. Framed in a two-inch-thick black timber frame, the black-and-



Use artworks strategically to shape and craft spatial experience

white Gelatine silver print showcases the grandeur of Botswana zebras galloping uninhibited in their natural surroundings. The detail in the print captures the morning rays through the dust stirred up by the relentless pace of the zebras.

The artwork is “framed” architecturally among clean geometry of cabinetry works as well as a neutral selection of meeting tables and chairs. The effect of this composition allows for a natural focus on the artwork, thus dramatically dissolving the boundaries of the small meeting room.

Innate content

The last artwork in discussion is an untitled piece in Golnaz Fathi’s *Every Breaking Wave* 2014 collection piece. In the director’s private office, we wanted the voice of the artwork to resonate with the company’s spirit. We found the works of Fathi befitting for the office’s quantity surveyors, who comprise nine women.

Traditionally trained in classical



Miya Ando’s *Evanescent Vermillion* serves as an ‘art-mark’ in the reception area

Persian calligraphy, Fathi is one of the few women to achieve the highest accolade within this discipline. Her painting showcases a fine balance of raw energy and immaculate discipline at work. Similarly, this work attitude is essential in the demanding and fast-paced building industry. Fathi experimented with abstract forms of representation, using modern media to aid her explo-

rations while basing her work fundamentally on calligraphic practices and techniques. Visually, the piece’s bold black strokes juxtaposed against the linear construction of the open file racks add a visual interest to the composed space.

In the above examples, we have shown that artwork forms a critical material element to complete the design intent of the space, and demonstrated its ability to resolve spatial issues while giving a “voice” that sets the atmosphere of the space, enhancing the overall spatial experience of the built environment. **E**

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Sundaram Tagore Gallery was established in New York in 2000. The gallery is the first to focus exclusively on the rise of globalisation in contemporary art and is devoted to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. It has galleries in New York, Hong Kong and Singapore. Sundaram Tagore Gallery Singapore is located at 5 Lock Road in Gillman Barracks and can be reached at singapore@sundaramtagore.com or www.sundaramtagore.com.



Golnaz Fathi’s untitled piece gives a voice and punctuation to the director’s office



Sebastião Salgado’s *Plains zebra* is used as a portal to the external environment



Layering of ages

| BY GOY ZHENRU |

There is a natural sense of history when working with antiques. Each piece of furniture is a talking point in itself with regard to its use of materials, historical functionality and workmanship.

When designing with antiques or their reproduction in a contemporary setting, the idea is not to replicate the time period of the past but to layer its essence into our modern environment. A right balance between modern and traditional needs to be established, otherwise the design may risk being kitsch.

Using the BASF Learning Campus at Rochester Park (designed by Forum Architects) as an example, we look at four design tips that can be used to integrate the past into the present with relevance.

Tip 1: Visualising moods (ambience)

Decide on the mood and the theme of design before embarking on the selection of furniture. Adjectives such as “warm, calming, confident” will assist you in determining the character of the space. Upon selection of the adjectives, choose a colour palette that is reminiscent of the mood. From there, you can base your furniture, room material and colour palette on that “key concept”, which will help blend the different interior elements together.

Art gallery visits are great sources of inspiration. Look at a painting or sculpture that resonates with you. Then make a mental note of the colour or material selection and the emotions evoked from this experience.

Tip 2: Creating zones (space)

Colours are useful in consolidating sets of furniture. When inserting an

odd/unique piece of furniture, simply change its colour either by painting or lacquering its frame. This can unify the furniture. Note, however, that too much of the same kind of furniture can be boring to the eye in a larger space setting. It is advisable to separate the furniture into different zones. The sets of furniture can then display their differentiated, yet choreographed, colours. A key point is to have a common denominator of colour or material so that the different groups can gel together.

Tip 3: New uses (object)

Objects and architectural elements such as vases and antique doors can be fitted for new use as lamps or floor partitions respectively. For screens that are fitted against a wall or flight of stairs, reflective mirrors can be used to maintain the visual porosity of the screen. A long cabinet chest can be used on end walls to create a focal point in the living space. It can be paired with a contemporary art work to complete the look.

Tip 4: Abstraction (detail)

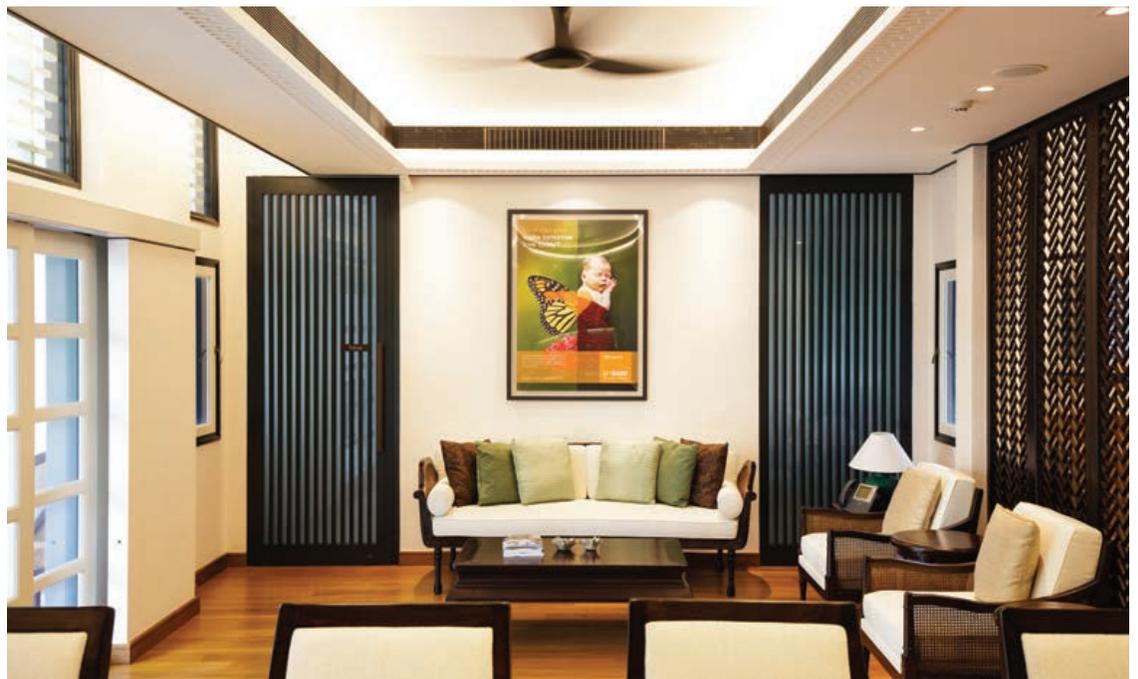
Where customisation is possible, identify the unique element of that era, whether it is the legs, the crown of the chair or simply the materials used during that period. To make them slightly more contemporary, simplify the ornamentation of the design by highlighting only one or two elements you want to showcase on the furniture.

Goy Zhenru previously worked for Forum Architects to complete BASF Learning Campus in 2014. She currently runs her own design studio GOY. She can be reached at goyzenru@gmail.com.

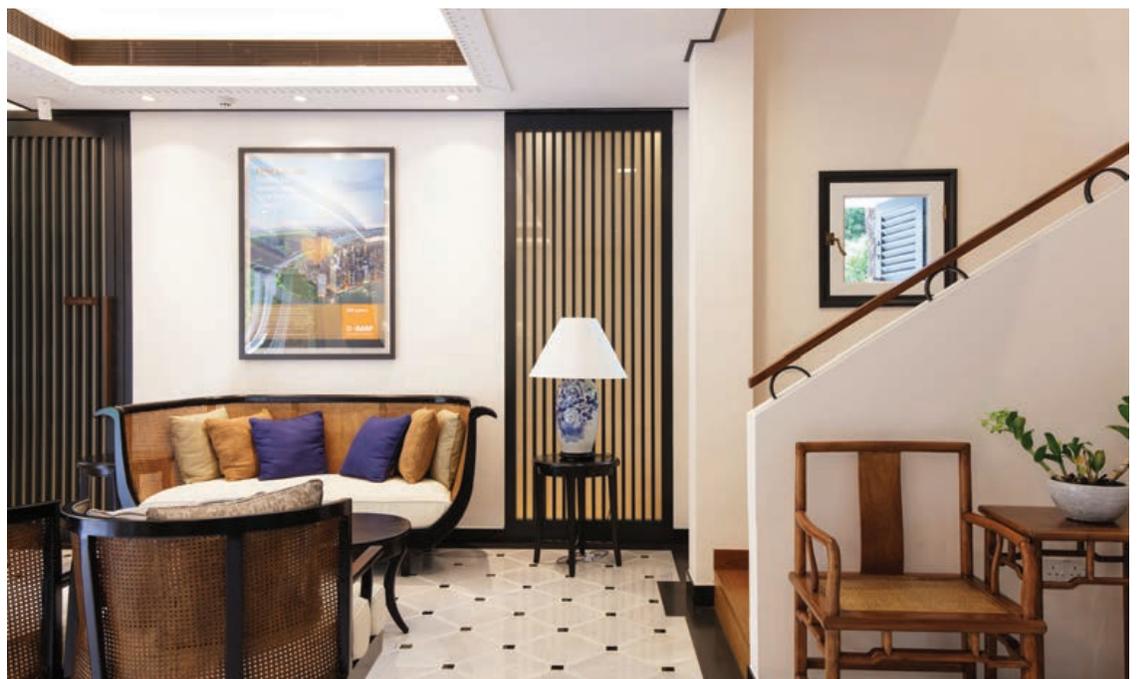
Furniture by Just Anthony



Customise antique furniture by retaining one or two elements of that era, such as the legs or materials used



Warm reception: Using green, brown and cream



Calming reflection: Using blue, white and golden brown



An antique-inspired screen forms part of the staircase construction



Carve out furniture zones for variation and interest



Customisation of antique inspired pieces at Just Anthony



Change the colour of antique furniture to fit into the overall design