



# Art-break hotels

Guests are gaining a cultural insight to their destination of choice before they even leave the lobby, writes **Tiana Templeman**.

It is hard not to be impressed by the sculpture of two Red Guards – one holding Mao’s Little Red Book, the other a bright red mobile phone – that dominates the lower foyer of the Langham Place Hotel ([hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com](http://hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com)) in Mong Kok. The child-like guards, with their featureless faces and wide-open mouths, symbolise the blind worship of Maoism during the Cultural Revolution and current trend towards materialism.

The hotel is part of an emerging fad that sees contemporary art employed to enhance guests’ experience. Whereas pictures adorning walls were once little more than nondescript prints and paintings chosen to match an establishment’s decor, properties are increasingly being designed around artwork. Some feature works by local artists or focus on a certain genre; others provide an excuse for art-loving owners to indulge their passion. Many rely on pieces to create a sense of place or provide insight into a city and its people, *Red Guards – Going Forward! Making Money!* by Jiang Shuo being a case in point. As Michael O’Sullivan, of the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia, points out, “In the ever-growing market for cultural tourism, it is a natural

progression that hotels are seeking to offer a more integrated experience.”

These hotels allow guests to develop an understanding of a city before they even step outside the door. As more than 60 per cent of the contemporary art on show at Langham is by Hong Kong-based artists, guests can feel more connected to the city.

Chris Parkin, the proprietor of the Museum Hotel ([www.museumhotel.co.nz](http://www.museumhotel.co.nz)), in Wellington, New Zealand, believes the term “art” is open to interpretation. He has a passion for limited editions ... of Italian racing bikes. A sign beside two gleaming sports bikes in the lobby reads: “It’s art – really it is.”

While this may be debatable, the hotel, which features opulent furnishings and a painting titled *The Attack of the 60ft Vermeer Inspired Woman and the Despondent Chicken*, surprises and delights from the moment you walk in. Located across from New Zealand’s premier museum, Te Papa, the hotel plays host to everything from surrealism to sculpture. Many works have strong links to the city in which they were created. *Bucket Man*, a haunting diptych of local homeless identity Robert Jones, was purchased from artist Duncan Smith.



Left: a striking work at Sydney’s Storrier hotel. Above: *The Attack of the 60ft Vermeer Inspired Woman and Despondent Chicken* is one of many works displayed at the Museum Hotel in Wellington, New Zealand. Below: photographs line the corridors of Hotel Max in Seattle.



Another eclectic collection – in Spain – takes guests from ancient Egypt into the realms of pop art with a side trip to Rome. Jordi Clos, president of Derby Hotels Collection ([www.derbyhotels.com](http://www.derbyhotels.com)), is an archaeologist and Egyptologist who has collected art for more than 25 years. The group’s Claris Hotel, in Barcelona, holds one of the most important private collections of Egyptian art in Spain as well as works by Andy Warhol, Hindu sculptures, ancient Roman mosaics and engravings commissioned by Napoleon. Many pieces are incredibly valuable yet remain uncontained to allow maximum viewing pleasure.

In the United States, Seattle’s Hotel Max ([www.hotelmaxseattle.com](http://www.hotelmaxseattle.com)) has a photographic focus, with each work commissioned for the hotel. Each guest-room door is clad in a black-and-white photo, making the corridors resemble a gallery. On the fifth floor, Charles Peterson provides a high-energy experience with photos of the city’s music scene; on the third floor, Joan Broughton chronicles local street musicians. The works provide an often raw look at the birthplace of grunge.

In Australia, A Hotel Group is establishing a series of art hotels themed around prominent Australian artists. The Storrier ([www.thestorrier.com.au](http://www.thestorrier.com.au)) in Kings Cross, Sydney, features works by Tim Storrier while the much-anticipated Smart will boast the works of Jeffrey Smart when it opens in Melbourne next year. Properties featuring pieces by John Olsen and Brett Whiteley are in the planning stages.