

## Graffiti in Residence? It's the Latest Hotel Amenity

By GLORIA DAWSON SEPT. 19, 2016



Chaz Barrisson, right, of the street art duo London Police, in the lobby of the Quin Hotel with a former resident artist, Nick Walker, left, and the hotel's art curator, DK Johnston, center.

*Credit Hilary Swift for The New York Times*

Businesses typically try to keep graffiti off their walls, and remove it when it does sneak on.

Not the Quin Hotel, in Midtown Manhattan. It commissions graffiti.

Chaz Barrisson, half of the street art duo London Police, recently painted two of his signature grinning characters on the wall by the service doors of the hotel. It was part of the hotel's artist-in-residence program, which included a gallery show of the London Police's graphic, black-and-white work, done on canvas and paper.

As hotels work harder to distinguish themselves in the age of Airbnb, many have focused on using local art to give their décor a one-of-a-kind look. But with artist-in-residence programs, some hotels in the United States and abroad are going further, aiming to make the art experience even more immersive for guests.

"The hotel wants to look good," Mr. Barrisson said at the start of his weeklong residency in mid-August. So they bring in "happening" art, he said. "And for me, it doesn't hurt, does it?"

Other hotels with artist-in-residence programs include Quirk Hotel, in Richmond, Va., which recently brought in Carli Holcomb, a sculptor who often works in metal.

One of the longest-running residencies has been the illustrator David Downton at Claridge's in London, where he has been on site since 2011, rendering images of some of the hotel's glamorous guests, including Diane von Furstenberg, Sarah Jessica Parker and Dita Von Teese.



Chaz Barrisson makes finishing touches on an art piece outside the Quin Hotel in Midtown Manhattan. Credit Hilary Swift for The New York Times

Under the programs, artists are often paid to stay and work at the hotels, letting guests interact with them and gain insights into their creations that go far beyond what a visit to museum or gallery can impart.

“It’s a very different approach than what I’ve seen previously in the art hotel genre,” said the Quin’s art curator, DK Johnston, who previously produced cultural events for the Clift Hotel in San Francisco and the W South Beach in Miami Beach.

Mr. Johnston has been welcoming artists to live and work at the hotel in conjunction with a gallery show of their work since the hotel opened on W. 57th Street in 2013. The program has included mostly street artists who, in addition to creating works to hang in the lobby, have drawn and painted on hotel doors, stairwells and other areas.

Convincing the management of the Quin that a program such as this would fit in at the hotel was “a difficult discussion,” Mr. Johnston said. “We’re in a fancy place. We’re in the wrong neighborhood for this kind of art.”

He said he warned the management that “not every artist is going to be corporate-friendly, is going to present themselves in the most consistent manner, is going to be predictable.”

“That’s part of the frisson of art,” Mr. Johnston said. “You never know what’s going to happen.”

The hotel decided it was worth the risk, despite the occasional incident — including when Blek le Rat, a French stencil graffiti specialist who was in residence in 2014, was nearly arrested after police spotted him stenciling on a hotel door.



Some of the London Police's work on display at the Quin Hotel. Credit Hilary Swift for The New York Times

Although the results of the programs are hard to quantify, Mr. Johnston says he considers the Quin's a success. Guests have begun to plan trips around artists' residencies, he said. And while sales are not the primary focus, the art is selling.

Works from the London Police on sale at the Quin ranged from \$800 to \$7,500. Although the Quin does not take a cut of the sales, many hotels with artist-in-residence programs do.

The Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee, which has a large Victorian art collection, started its artist-in-residence effort in 2009 "to create new pieces, interact with guests and help enrich the local art scene," Joseph Khairallah, chief operating officer of Marcus Hotels and Resorts, owners of the Pfister, said in an email. The current artist-in-residence is an abstract painter, Pamela M. Anderson.

Marcus Hotels has expanded the program to two of its other locations, the Skirvin Hilton Hotel in Oklahoma City and the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln, Neb. The local artists do not live in the hotels but spend about 30 hours a week working in studios near the lobbies.

At the Vendue in Charleston, S.C., the current artist is Fred Jamar, a Belgian painter whose recent work has focused on colorful scenes of the harbor city. Most of the time he works in a studio on the ground floor that guests are encouraged to visit. On Thursday evenings, he paints during dinner in the hotel's restaurant, the Drawing Room.

"Travelers today seek culturally immersive experiences," Emily Rigsby, the director of art at the Vendue, said in an email. "Interacting with artists, stepping into to the artist's studio and being present as art is made creates unique experiences for guests."

Residencies are not limited to visual artists. At the Hotel El Ganzo in San José del Cabo, Mexico, the artist-in-residence program has included visual artists and musicians who record in the hotel's 1,700-square-foot studio and perform for guests on the hotel's roof.

The Monteverdi Hotel and Villas, in Castiglioncello del Trinoro, in the Tuscany region of Italy, takes an even more eclectic approach, with an artists and scholars in residence program. Coming residencies include a jazz vocalist, an opera singer and choreographer, a set and costume designer and a neurologist, who will give lectures. "We're in a place, Tuscany, that gave birth to the Renaissance," said Michael L. Cioffi, who owns the hotel and created the program. "So you have this incredible flourishing of art and humanity and science and music all in this little area of the world."

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