

Maven of suburban art festivals collects, too

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Tips for buying and displaying art from Amy Amdur, owner of Amdur Productions

- Most people hang their wall art too high. The middle of the art should be at eye level if you stand in that room. If it's somewhere you sit such as an office or dining room, hang the works lower.
 - Let's say you are hanging three pictures side by side on a wall. Do not line up the tops or the bottoms. Draw an imaginary line horizontally through the middle of each picture, and hang them with those points lining up.
 - You need to move your art around. "I just set these little green bowls next to the pears. It made me notice the green of the pears," she says. "A feature table in the front hall is a great thing, but it shouldn't stay the same for 20 years or even six months. After a while you don't see them any more."
 - Prop pictures on the mantel and even in the corners of the bathroom countertop.
- "Then it's really easy to change," says Amdur. "And you don't have to deal with holes in the walls."
- To save money on art, buy matted rather than framed pictures or a painting with a "gallery wrap," which means instead of framing it the artist paints the sides of the canvas. It's OK to hang this without a frame, she said.
 - If you see art you like, the artist will probably make you a custom piece in the colors or subject matter you desire without additional charge.

The tall, reedy neon sculpture "Embrace" glows in orange and pink with accents of blue, purple and green, while orange glass flowers and green bowls accompany two large, luscious resin pears on a round entry table.

It's the first sign that Amy Amdur practices what she preaches.

Her home is heavily decorated with artwork - very appropriate for the woman who stages summer art festivals throughout the suburbs. In fact, even some of the furniture in her Highland Park home is art, such as a dreamy glass buffet table reverse painted in red, orange and gold by Eric Lee of Gurnee in the dining room and a metal foyer bench.

"It's all about people," said Amdur, mentioning artists like Al Blankschien of Milwaukee, who created the neon. "It's not just the art, it's how you look at the art and being able to play with it and put it up in fun ways."

Amdur started the annual Port Clinton Art Festival 26 years ago to help her late father, Steven Amdur, attract crowds to the Highland Park shopping center he developed.

Today, Amdur organizes art festivals in nine towns and two city neighborhoods including Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Lincolnshire and Wheaton.

At home, Amdur's walls, tables and cabinets all attest to her love of art.

Yet practicality comes into play as well. In the foyer, a 4-foot-tall, narrow oval mirror framed with mosaic stained glass - mostly blue - was chosen because Amdur needed a mirror in the area and she realized it would fit the narrow space beside the light switch.

"Sometimes a space can guide you to something unique," she said.

• Is art a good investment? For your happiness and quality of life, yes, says Amdur. You'd need to spend millions - not thousands - of dollars on pieces by known artists to call it an investment.

Businesses and professional people might attract or keep clients because their art improves the mood of their offices.

Nearby hangs a picture of bright yellow flowers on a rich blue background. The mirror also references the silver frame on that picture.

In the hallway are three stunning photos of Asia by Bill Kwok Tchui, who was a Vietnamese boat person and now lives in California.

• In other words, "Buy art you love."

studied photography at the Art Institute of Chicago.

"When you see three of them you start to get a sense of who he is and his simple, quiet style," said Amdur, who

Over the fireplace in the family room hangs a collage commissioned for Amdur Productions' 25th anniversary. It's a hat created from the glossy art annual that Amdur publishes about the festivals. The hat was the idea of artist Keith Grace of Rockford, who calls it "Hats off to Art."

The big sticks leaning by the fireplace were painted by 4-year-old Sammy, a demonstration of the family's penchant to create art.

The plates on the dining room table were stamped with hearts, leaves and other designs by his 11-year-old sister, Hannah, when she was about his age.

Most of the dining room art deals with food, especially Amdur's collection of paintings and sculptures of pears.

But New York artist David Gordon's large picture of yellow flowers on stems, looking almost like balloons on strings, has a place of honor.

"In this economy this yellow - a bright, strong yellow - is a great color to help you feel better," said Amdur.

In a houseful of art, Amdur admits to a few favorite works. One is the word "Art" spelled out in pieces from old wooden yardsticks.

"It's to the point," she said.