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# ART HOUSE

Hotels are investing in *artist-in-residency programs*, changing the perspective of guests, staff, and artists alike. By Adrienne Gaffney



For an artist used to working within the confines of an urban studio, Costa Rica's Hotel Belmar is a revelation. Working days are broken up by hikes through the misty tropical forest or countryside horseback rides, and views out the window may include a gorgeous inlet of the Pacific. Artists are able to spend weeks living and working at the hotel, which can have a transformative impact on a career, and guests are able to witness them at work. While placing artists' work on a hotel wall is commonplace, and might include a narrative connecting the work to the space, Hotel Belmar and an increasing number of other hotels are running residencies that establish a relationship between an artist and a property, broadening the guest experience.

Hotel Belmar's program began when Pedro Belmar, the owner and then-manager of the eco-hotel located in the mountains of Monteverde, Costa Rica, started thinking of ways to connect the hotel to the art movements that were thriving in the region. Belmar, who had a longtime love of art and had done an internship at MoMA, connected with Martha Palacio, a documentarian who had been working on a project about underground artists. They put together a program that would both nurture artists and bring their work into the hotel.

At Belmar, artists are given a room and a workspace for their stay. They spend the time working and taking inspiration from the local scenery, but also lead talks, workshops, and open studios. Residents have included painters, writers, photographers, and sculptors. "This close encounter with an artist at work can be deeply profound, as it invites guests into a world of transformation, offering insight into the complexities of creation while fostering a deeper connection to the environment and the artists themselves," Palacio says.

Grammy-winning artist Paul Blair, who performs under the name DJ White, oversees the Graduate Sweet Dreams Society, a residency program at Graduate by Hilton hotels. For him, it's about looking at the resources the hotel has and seeing how they could be utilized to help artists create. "It was like, 'Okay, cool, we have



Opposite, from top: Hotel Belmar's exterior; the hotel's residency connects artists and guests. This page, from top: A Hotel Belmar guest room; Monteverde's mountains and forest reserve.

this coatroom that nobody's walked into for the last four years.' There's a lot of extra space that's been underutilized, and what artists don't have is space—or the money to get a space," Blair says.

Blair recalls one artist who had spent the last 40 years painting in solitude in his studio. But the bustle of the hotel convinced him to venture out. He set up his easel in the lobby and began painting, offering guests a unique peek into his process.

The Ace Hotels run residencies in New York City, Kyoto, Sydney, and Palm Springs. Participants have included Stephanie Santana, a mixed-media textile artist; and Lauren Cohen, who paints, sculpts, and creates graphic novels. "Being able to utilize all of the hotel is such a gift," says Tokotah Ashcraft, who manages the program. "The front desk and the folks who work in the lobby or in the restaurants take such pride in the fact that we have an artist in residence, and they're able to see the beautiful work each day and witness the community participation in these programs, too."

Caroline Zimbalist, an artist and fashion designer known for using unusual materials, spent August of 2024 at the Ace Hotel Brooklyn creating a work that would be shown in the lobby for three months. Toward the end of her residency, Zimbalist led a workshop for guests of the hotel and community members, introducing them to bioplastics, a type of plastic made from renewable resources, before she created her own works onstage.

The residencies also introduce guests to the local culture. Participating in the Peninsula Tokyo's Art in Resonance program let Maaya Wakasugi share the art of Japanese calligraphy with guests. "I held live performances in the hotel lobby, and guests were also invited to visit my art studio,

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—MARTHA PALACIO

which was transformed from one of the guest rooms into my atelier during this period," he says. "It was an exciting and happy experience for me and for the guests to witness the creative process. Some mentioned they felt 'healed' through the art of calligraphy, while others said that the time spent creating in the studio 'gave them inspiration.'" He can't wait to be invited back.



MONTEVERDE: ANDRES GARCIA LACHNER; REMAINING IMAGES: COURTESY OF HOTEL BELMAR.