



St. Regis art collection feels like home

June 28, 4:37 PM · Buckhead Examiner · Lisa Frank



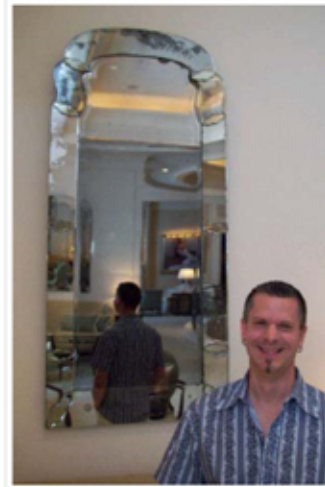
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Art consultant Matthew Whitaker collected hundreds of works of art for Buckhead's St. Regis hotel.
 Lisa Frank

"If it evokes a response, we've been successful at our job," Matthew Whitaker says about the vast art collection he amassed for Buckhead's **St. Regis hotel**.

His \$1 million budget seems luxurious, yet is evidently typical for a five-star property, he's built art collections for several around the world.

Moving to Atlanta from Manhattan 21 years ago, he's had a long career in the hospitality industry managing hotels, restaurants and golf resorts, most recently East Lake Golf Club. After earning a BFA in interior design at Georgia State, he "found his calling," which blends his flair for art with his understanding of the luxury hotel industry. From an internship at **Hirsch Bedner**, the Atlanta firm that designed the St. Regis interiors, he joined their staff now directing an affiliate, **International Art Collaborative**.

With several hundred pieces, the Atlanta collection emanates from a directive Whitaker received from the president of the firm **Howard Pharr**, "Think crisp white linen." That simple concept became the spring board for the elegant feel and tone of every piece. He's also complementing the

French Art Deco theme of the furnishings while establishing a sense of place by incorporating plenty of Atlanta imagery.

Guests are welcomed by a bold, moody canvas of **Piedmont Park** hanging over the reception desk. Two murals in the restaurant are inspired by early morning mist rising from the park's **Lake Clara Meer**. An antique wooden case of framed photographs features famous Georgians as if they were family including **Bobby Jones**, **Coretta**, **Martin**, **Margaret Mitchell** and **Hank Aaron**.

It's all part of the plan to make you feel like you're in a grand private home savoring a connoisseur's personal collection. And the public is encouraged to explore the art as another free gallery experience in Buckhead. "That's the whole point," says **Dawn Truemper**, the hotel's Director of Sales. Her staff is well trained on how to speak about the art.

An effort to involve local artists and galleries was also intentional working closely with Buckhead galleries **Lagerquist**, **Huff Harrington** and **Ann Irwin** among others. While one artist is Nigerian, another Cuban, both live here now. "That level of detail is what makes a collection compelling," the designer explains. "Guests sense there's something special going on. When they ask about a piece and learn that the artist lives in Atlanta, that validates their intuition."

Most of the hotel's spaces feel light and airy, keying off two accent colors of champagne silver and mineral green. The dark wood-paneled bar is a dynamic contrast with a distinctly masculine feel. Whitaker wanted the work "to be more edgy in the bar with the intention of starting conversations."

"I was looking for something unexpected," he says referring to a creative arrangement of actual cigar boxes, each beautifully framed. He thought about framing the lids to reinforce the retro feel, yet credits **Heather Stewart** of fine art frames **Soho Myriad** for suggesting they frame the entire box, bringing an added depth and authenticity. It works.

Details: The **St. Regis Atlanta** is located at 88 West Paces Ferry Road.

Learn more by clicking through the slide show for some of our favorite pieces.

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St. Regis Atlanta has an extensive art collection open to the public



Here are a few of our favorites with an emphasis on the Buckhead connections.

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