

REINVENTING LEADERSHIP

# BOSS

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## BELLE EPOQUE

Boutique hotels are turning to works of the masters to provide travellers with a unique cultural experience. **Kendall Hill** reports

THE RULES governing luxury hotels have changed, according to a recent edition of US *Condé Nast Traveler*. Conspicuous consumption is out, smart spending is in, it declares. Authenticity trumps artifice, and customisation is the new conformity. Hence the new guard of inns offering unique experiences, rather than “five-star” sameness.

One of the strongest trends among them is art. Whether high, low, modern or ancient, operators wanting to set themselves apart are taking a serious look at the visual world and incorporating human creativity into the hotel experience.

Melbourne, Australia’s self-styled creative capital, is at the forefront of the movement. Long home to the Tolarno ([hoteltolarno.com.au](http://hoteltolarno.com.au)), the St Kilda pensione adorned with whimsical paintings by Mirka Mora, the arrival of the Art Series Hotel Group ([artserieshotels.com.au](http://artserieshotels.com.au)) in the southern capital last year brought the art-house trend towards critical mass.

The group’s debut was the Cullen, in Prahran, a designer bolt-hole featuring works by Archibald

Prize-winner Adam Cullen, including painted fibreglass cows in the foyer and an anarchic Ned Kelly romping through the guest rooms.

The 15-storey Olsen in South Yarra, named after national treasure John Olsen, features a swimming pool cantilevered over Chapel Street, open-air bars and self-contained studio apartments for longer-staying guests. Olsen’s influence extends from room artworks and carpets to a six-metre tribute to Melbourne – *The Yellow Sun and The Yarra* – in the foyer.

Meanwhile, the 209-room Blackman Hotel ([theblackman.com.au](http://theblackman.com.au)) opened in St Kilda Road late last year, infusing corporate accommodation with Charles Blackman’s figurative paintings (lobby pictured above).

Each of the three properties offers tours by the in-house curator and a TV channel showcasing the featured artist’s work.

In the CBD, Crown Casino’s latest, the Metropol ([crownmetropol.com.au](http://crownmetropol.com.au)), is another noteworthy addition to the art hotel collection, cased in a

sinuous tower designed by Federation Square architect Bates Smart. Inside, curved walls of Nordic-looking white ash and striking artworks – the hundreds-strong collection is valued at more than \$1 million – are typical of the Metropol’s non-traditional approach to hostelry. Each of the 658 rooms features original art and design plus expansive views from Mt Dandenong to Mt Macedon and Port Phillip Bay. The penthouse-floor lounge and bar, called 28, is a living gallery of eye-catching pieces. If you want ordinary, go elsewhere.

Across Bass Strait, Tasmanian hotels are equally fond of showcasing their artistic leanings. The Henry Jones Art Hotel ([thehenryjones.com](http://thehenryjones.com)) is a row of Georgian warehouses transformed into an eclectic luxury hotel, whose convict-built sandstone walls and antique beams are complemented by a rotating display of more than 300 works, many from the adjoining Tasmanian School of Art.

Up the road, the gracious 12-room Islington Hotel ([islingtonhotel.com](http://islingtonhotel.com)) features paintings by Whiteley and Hockney and entire suites dedicated to the interior art of Chesterfield and the Biedermeier style. But the golden easel goes to Moorilla Estate, a winery, brewery and hotel beside the Derwent River where the eight spectacular suites stocked with breathtaking modern and ancient art are merely a foretaste of the treasures in store at the just-opened MONA, the Museum of Old and New Art ([mona.net.au](http://mona.net.au)). Owner David Walsh describes this important new gallery – Australia’s largest private museum – as “a subversive adult Disneyland”, where the collection will veer between Egyptian mummies and the controversial modern works of the Young British Artists, whose *Sensation* exhibition was banned in Australia.

The art hotel trend is not unique to our shores. In Europe, it can sometimes seem as if art is as integral to the hotel experience as room service and pillow menus. In Bilbao in northern Spain, the Silken Gran Hotel Domine ([hoteles-silken.com](http://hoteles-silken.com)) is a homage to the pop art of Javier Mariscal. Rome’s Hotel Art by the Spanish Steps ([hotelartrome.com](http://hotelartrome.com)) blends Renaissance-style ceiling frescoes with in-room oils in the style of the masters.

In the United States, the fashion is for artists-in-residence to run classes and lectures and create works to adorn public spaces at properties like Milwaukee’s Pfister Hotel ([thepfisterhotel.com](http://thepfisterhotel.com)) and Dallas’s Fairmont ([fairmont.com/dallas](http://fairmont.com/dallas)), where guests can interact with artist George Fowler. In New York’s Harlem, La Maison D’Art ([laimaisiondarty.com](http://laimaisiondarty.com)) welcomes guests with provocative sculpture and paintings.