

## Interiors



# The fine art of making your pictures look their best

Nothing stamps our identity on our homes like the paintings, watercolours, family snapshots and children's potato-prints we choose to display on our walls. Jack Rear offers expert advice on choosing, framing, hanging and lighting your own personal art collection

Whether you're an art connoisseur with a splendid collection, or you just want to frame some of your favourite prints and family photos, displaying pictures properly can help you imprint your personality on your home, raise your spirits and tie a room together.

Think about the overall effect you want to achieve from the art you're showing. If you are decorating a plain room, art can create a focal point where one doesn't already exist. On the other hand, if you've got a room with plenty of focal points (a fireplace, large windows, exposed brick and so on), then you might be better off considering pieces that blend into the background and add general interest to the space.

"It's key to draw the eye around the space, and adding a pop of the same colour on a sofa as you have in a picture can help to make the whole room look cohesive," says Julia Kendell, an interiors expert and a presenter of the BBC's *DIYSOS*.

"There's no doubt there should be some commonality in your colour scheme and general mood, but buying art to fit the pre-existing room can look very contrived. It's about finding a good link to the overall styling of a room."

## Where to buy affordable original art

Lucy Wilson is one of the brains behind the new "Art Kiosk" from the homewares marketplace Glassette ([glassette.com](https://www.glassette.com)), which sells original artworks for between £200-£650. She observes that "the traditional route to buying art is to go into a gallery and inquire about the price, which is something that feels exclusive to me." She once enquired about a piece of art only to be told it was worth several thousand pounds. "And I felt awkward about admitting I couldn't afford it. By putting the prices on our artworks, we hope to make art more accessible."

Social media sites such as Instagram are good places to browse for original pieces that won't cost a fortune. Accounts such as [@daily\\_collector](https://www.instagram.com/daily_collector) and [@studioviews](https://www.instagram.com/studioviews) daily collate emerging artists and help new collectors discover what's hot while these artists' works are still affordable. "You only need to get a toehold," says Thom Hetherington,

◀ Picture this: a 'gallery wall' can include all sorts of art styles and frames

founder of Manchester Art Fair and Manchester Contemporary. "You always need an angle on art to decide where and what you want to start buying. I'm an architecture geek, so I've always been instantly drawn to city landscapes. It's really useful, I think, to just consider: what is my thing, what do I like? Is it my location, do I like natural history, do I like birds, do I like Italy? Find something you're passionate about and that'll give you that little hook to narrow the field."

Art fairs and open studios are also a great low-pressure way of exploring art in person, with the Affordable Art Fair in London, the Art Car Boot Fair, and Manchester Art Fair (and its online market, Easel) among fairs that prioritise making art more democratic. If you live near a city with an art school, Hetherington also recommends shopping at degree shows, where "you can pick up some incredible work quite cheaply."

"Instagram is also a great opportunity to meet the artist before buying," adds contemporary artist Paul Weiner. "Most artists love receiving a direct message from someone who loves their art and would consider buying." Many artists sell independently on Instagram, offering better prices than they would through a gallery.

Prints and drawings by a given artist tend to be priced more cheaply than paintings by that artist. Online galleries such as King & McGaw, Wondering People, Partnership Editions and The Violet Hour sell both prints and original pieces.

There's a midway option, too, says Hetherington. "You can have what is known as a giclée, which is a machine-done, high-quality print of a piece of artwork," he explains. "If you just want that piece of art on your wall, giclées can be an affordable way of having it."

"Personally, what I find more interesting are what are called 'artist hand prints', which are done individually by the artist, so there might be slight variations or discrepancies or imperfections in the process that make each of the prints individual. These will be numbered, signed, short-run editions. I find that much more satisfying if I like an artist, as I know that I've bought a piece they've physically created."

You can also trawl the second-hand shops or attend a local auction. "Often, you can get a watercolour at auction for less than you'd pay for a poster," says Kendall. "Markets are also a great place to find good-quality frames; even if you don't like the picture, you can pick up a beautiful frame for £15-£20. Even if it's not the right colour, if it's just a beautiful pattern or texture, it's easy to spray-paint old frames to give them a new look."



◀ Perfect symmetry: make things look considered

simple black frame. On a gallery wall, try keeping frames the same colour, while mixing up the thicknesses and textures of the frames.

"If you have got elements of timber in the room, such as oak furniture, it can be nice to have oak frames to pull your eye around the room," says Kendall. "It's worth bearing in mind what colour wall they're going to be on, and if you want there to be a contrast. If you have dark walls, having a lighter frame is going to be more obvious."

## How to light your art

"A general principle when you think about lighting is to light from above," says Harry Triggs, co-founder of TM Lighting, a London-based design company that specialises in lighting artwork, both in galleries and residential spaces. "A lot of what we try to replicate in artificial lighting is what we see outside. Think about the light from the sun, that's the perfect light and it comes from above."

Exceptions to that rule come in the form of very ornate frames, where a light above the frame would be distracting, or when an artwork depicts a light source, such as a fire, in which case you're best to light from the direction of that. Bulbs are also a consideration. A higher-quality bulb will be able to shine a wider spectrum of colours on your artwork, so you'll see more of the colour in your art, making it more vibrant.

"To create a warm, homely feeling, a lot of people like to use floor lamps or table lamps, but they can flatten the room - you have a ball of light that evenly lights everything around it," says Triggs. "That works as a nice base level, but then you need to add a secondary layer to pinpoint individual features in the room, such as a beautiful artwork."

Nowadays, most picture lighting is done with LED bulbs, but not all LEDs are made equal. Most commercially available LEDs only show 80-85 per cent of the colour spectrum, so for the best effect, look for bulbs that show 95 CRI and upwards on the box, which will provide a much wider array of the spectrum and make the colours of your art look brighter.

Colour temperature is also important. Just like your Christmas fairy lights, different LEDs provide warmer and cooler versions of white. "We recommend 2,700 Kelvin for the home," says Triggs. "Technically, 3,000K is slightly better to render colours, but it feels a bit clinical."



where, rather than being bought specifically to hold court in certain spaces, which can soften it."

## How to frame your art

Choosing the right frame for your artwork can really help it make an impact on the wall. Online services such as EasyFrame allow you to upload an image of your artwork and see how it looks with various different frames, then order one made to measure.

On a gallery wall, matching frames provide continuity when you have a lot of different mediums or styles. Alternatively, if you prefer a more rustic look, a variety of different frames might look good, though the same rules apply as with the art itself - spread them out so you don't have all the same frames together.

"If I have big pieces of art, I tend to have them floated [where the artwork sits on top of the mount, rather than behind it], because I feel it makes the art stand out a bit more," Dawson explains.

If in doubt, it is fine to go with a



◀ True hues: art that hints at colour from furniture adds cohesion to a room

▲ Off the wall: don't feel you have to hang pictures up

## How to display your art

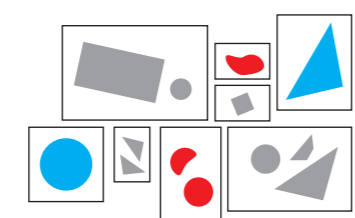
When it comes to displaying art, there are two basic trends: the "gallery wall" (a cluster of small and medium-sized pieces) or larger pieces hanging on their own. The question is, has the gallery wall now had its day?

Displaying one large piece is more straightforward than planning a gallery wall (though it might be more expensive). "You want the middle of the artwork to be at your eyeline," advises Chris Trotman, of art consultancy Run for the Hills. "Obviously, it depends on the wall and what's going next to it: if you have a high bench or a shelf against the wall, then it needs to hang neatly above that. We try to centre things; symmetry is an easy way to make things look considered. We sometimes put art on shelves, rather than hanging it. That's a good way of displaying prints or pictures, and it makes it easy to move them around."

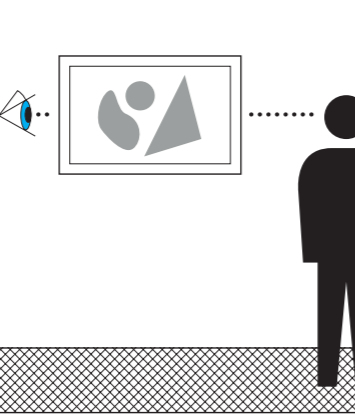
A gallery wall is more complex: it pays to think carefully about which pieces should go where. "To make a gallery wall look impactful, mix all the mediums up," says Wil Law, a home-design stylist at John Lewis. "Instead of just having a wall of screen prints, it's nice to mix in photography, drawings and maybe your kids' paintings if you want a collected look."

"The key is balancing colour. If you have a really bright blue in the bottom left corner of your gallery wall, try to

Balance colours, mix mediums, and spread artwork out evenly



Middle of artwork should be at eye level



balance it with the same colour in the top right corner. Think of it like a see-saw. If you have black and white prints mixed in with coloured ones, make sure they're all spread out evenly. That applies to media, too: don't put all your photographs in one corner and all your paintings in another. Spreading them out makes it look eclectic and striking."

"The absolute key is spacing," says Lisa Dawson, an interiors blogger and author of *Resourceful Living*. "Make sure you space your artworks out regularly. You can mix up the frames, you can mix up the media, just make sure the spacing is right."

You can even lay your art on the floor before you start putting it on the walls to see what goes with what.

But don't feel you have to make everything completely straight and perfect, says interiors expert Flora Soames. "It doesn't have to be all immaculate," she explains. "Framing personal things is just deeply enjoyable when you're in that room." While Soames often creates squares with her artworks, she adds that it isn't a "hard and fast rule. Adding to a gallery wall over time, as you frame new pieces, and that sense of a collage being achieved on your wall, is very satisfactory. I love a pinboard on a wall. I love a bit of a mess."

Of course, you don't have to put your art on the walls. "Hanging pictures on bookcases - I love that," says Soames. "Very often I don't hang pictures, but I'll prop them up on the mantelpiece or on the bedside table - it gives that sense of something just ending up some-

◀ Head-turner: high-quality lighting will make a work of art seem more vibrant



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