



ART BY DESIGN

An interior designer finds the right moment to exercise her gifts as an artist

PATRICIA GRAY HAS MADE A NAME for herself as an interior designer in Vancouver, building a career and reputation over a 40-year span. Casting an artist's eye on kitchens, family rooms and entire homes, she has created living spaces that are works of style and function.

And with the tools of her craft – colours, fabrics and furniture – she has used three-dimensional spaces as her canvasses.

But serendipity happened in 2009 that added something special to her career. The financial slump that year brought with it a dramatic dip in the number of design projects, which gave the designer time to paint. Gray found herself with the excuse – or rather, the lack of an excuse – that finally enabled her to stop putting off what she had long thought of: tackling the challenges of a new canvas. ☞



"Running a business, I never seemed to be able to create art," she says. But when the recession hit: "I was sitting around in the eerie silence. I couldn't do anything in interior design because of the economy. I didn't have an excuse. Now, I had all the time in the world."

She had dabbled with painting over the years as a way to relax. But in 2009, she ramped it up. She took several courses at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design, and eventually converted the garage of her downtown Vancouver townhouse into a studio.



"Now, I am pretty much able to paint full-time," Gray says. She describes her work as "contemporary abstract impressionism."

She sells her work internationally, as well as through her website (www.patriciagray-art.com), to her interior design clients, and through other interior designers and architects. It's an avenue that, as a designer, she had long identified as a niche that had demand.

"One of the hardest parts was finding the right art for my clients," Gray says, explaining the challenges she experienced while searching for the perfect pieces for the walls of rooms she had designed. "I could never find the right sizes. And if I found the right sizes, they weren't the right subject matter. I needed big, bold statement pieces." ❧



Today, some of Gray's design clients have collected seven or eight pieces of her artwork in their homes.

But getting to this point, she explains, has been a journey of discovery and learning. "I wanted to be versed in all the mediums of paint," she says.

As a designer, she was adept at using fabric, furniture and lighting. As an artist, she had to become versatile with brushes, surfaces, acrylics, watercolours, pastels, and encaustics, which are a mixture of pigments and hot beeswax. And recently, she has added oil paints to her repertoire.

"I wanted to learn thoroughly all the materials to express myself all the better," she says.



"Sometimes, people see totally different things than what I had intended."

Gray has studied with other artists, including American Richard McKinley, a member of the Pastel Society of America's Hall of Fame at the National Arts Club in New York City. Her learning and experimenting is an on-going process.

She acquires much of the inspiration for her pieces from her travels. A trip to Desolation Sound along the north coast of British Columbia, for instance, provoked and influenced some of her work. She attempted to capture the feelings that were stirred by the depth and luminosity of the water in this remote and pristine location.





When a client saw one painting that resulted from that trip, Gray explains, it conjured up memories of the person's childhood, reminding her of where she had grown up in Nova Scotia. Gray was fascinated by how a piece of art inspired by a scene of the Pacific Ocean resonated and invoked memories of the Atlantic Ocean for someone else. "Sometimes, people see totally different things than what I had intended," she says. "They fill in their own blanks. They can finish it off with their memories. I love that. I never correct them."



Gray recently sold a work composed of layers of gold leaf with a resin finish to U.S. billionaire businessman, conference speaker and author Jay Abraham for his office in Los Angeles. "I am quite honoured it will hang in a beautiful office space," she says. "It's quite exciting."

Owning original artwork is something everyone should experience, Gray says. "It's an investment in your life and your lifestyle. It enriches your surroundings. Original art can be looked at over and over and over again. You get so much more energy and vibration from it. It's an acquired taste, something everyone should experience." >>

