



BARRON'S PENTA

Working With Artists for a One-of-A-kind Home



The Art House in Venice, Calif., which features several commissioned artworks. Credit: ANTHONY BARCELO

By V.L. Hendrickson

March 22, 2023, 11:45 am EDT

Invader arrived in the middle of the night.

The anonymous French street artist had been given a week to install a wraparound ceramic tile mosaic tag featuring pixelated images from videogames *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* on the exterior of the Art House, Todd Piccus' Venice, Calif., home.

No surprise, the artist likes to work undercover. So time had been carved out of the construction schedule for the property, workers sent home and scaffolding was put up specifically so he could reach the chosen spot high on the home's facade. He was allowed to come and go as he pleased.

"During the agreed upon week, of course, I drove by the house like three times a day to see, 'Oh my God, is it there? Is it there?'" says Piccus, a vice president and global head of legal and business affairs at Mattel.

Despite never having laid eyes on the artist, Piccus knows "almost to the hour" when his house was tagged by Invader—Invader's first residential commission. Getting it installed took years of cajoling, Piccus explains, especially given the artist's anonymous status. They communicated through a gallery, and there were points when the project didn't seem like it would go ahead, he says.



A wraparound ceramic tile piece by the anonymous French street artist Invader. Credit: ANTHONY BARCELO

“It was a very stressful, rewarding, and long project. I was desperate to be his first residential commission in the world. To me, to be able to say that is a sexy thing,” Piccus explains, noting that the artist had walked away from another project with a difficult homeowner. “I was kind of walking on eggshells, to be honest, in a way that I don’t welcome. I’m a lawyer, so the notion of doing a commission with an anonymous artist who I will never meet through an art gallery owner in Belgium who I will never meet was crazy. But I felt like I had to jump the chasm.”

The Invader piece is just one of the custom elements Piccus has commissioned for his Art House, which also features an authorized replica of a famous mural of a frog created by the musician Daniel Johnston in Austin, Texas; one-of-a-kind paintings; and several multicolored tile installations created in situ by a local artist.



An authorized replica of a much-loved mural of a frog in Austin, Texas, at the Art House. Credit: CELESTE GODOY PHOTOGRAPHY FOR THE CORCORAN GROUP

"I want to have things that people can't go out and buy. That's what appeals to me about commissions," Piccus explains. "They're things that require investment of time and money and collaboration that most people don't have the patience or the interest in. And I like having something that if somebody says, 'Where did you get that?' I have to explain to them that, 'Well, it doesn't matter, you can't have it.'"

This article appears in the March 2023 issue of Penta magazine.