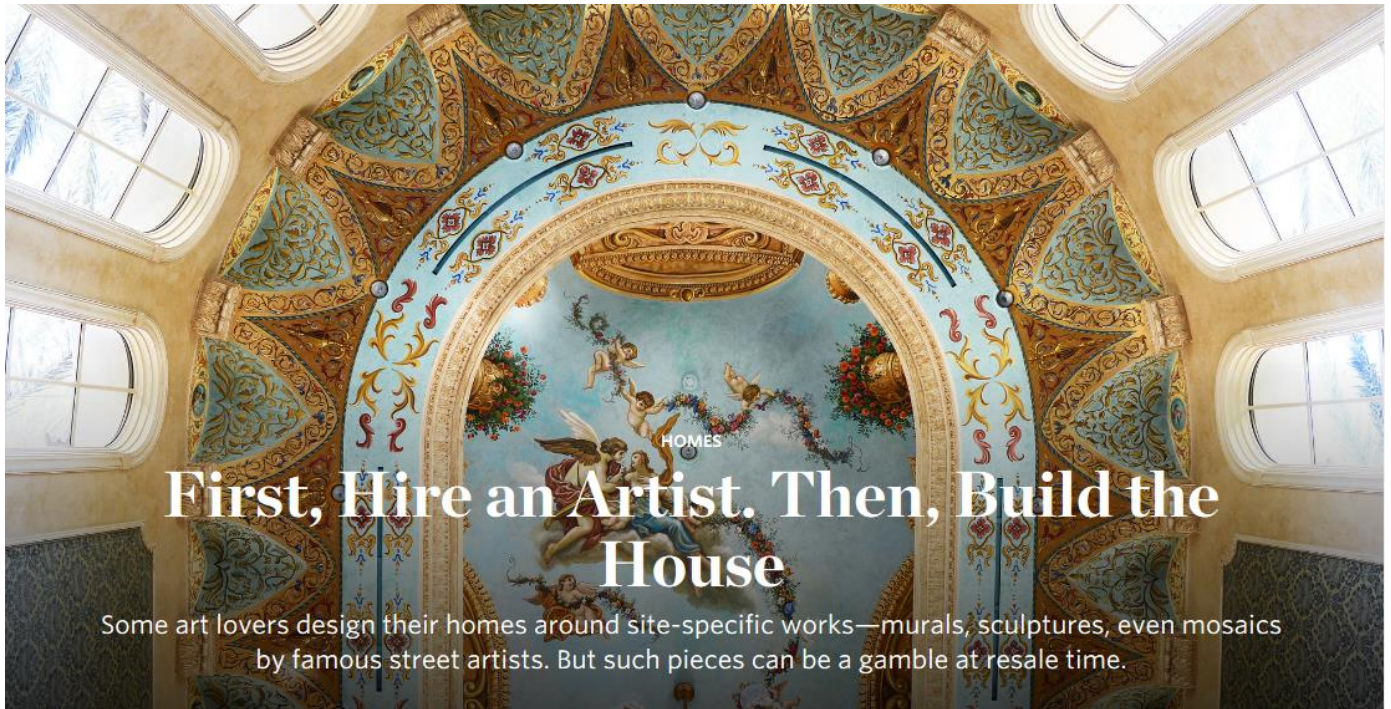


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



First, Hire an Artist. Then, Build the House

Some art lovers design their homes around site-specific works—murals, sculptures, even mosaics by famous street artists. But such pieces can be a gamble at resale time.

By: Leigh Kamping-Carder
Nov. 9, 2017

Some homeowners hang paintings. Todd Piccus had a mural of a cartoon frog replicated on the side of his garage. He also hunted down, and commissioned, a secretive Paris-based street artist to adorn his house.

"I like to have things that no one thought of doing and can't do," said Mr. Piccus, 52-year-old vice president of legal and business affairs at Mattel, the toy company.

A small number of art lovers commission site-specific works that are as inseparable from their homes as the staircase or the kitchen island. Artists will work with architects, interior designers, contractors and lighting specialists from the early stages of a project. Window placement, ceiling height, furniture arrangement—all are subservient to the artwork.



Todd Piccus paid \$1.585 million for a property in the Venice section of Los Angeles in 2012. After tearing down two existing houses, he built a 3,000-square-foot home and a separate building housing a garage and office.



The main house has three bedrooms and four bathrooms. The master suite, shown here, measures about 1,000 square feet.



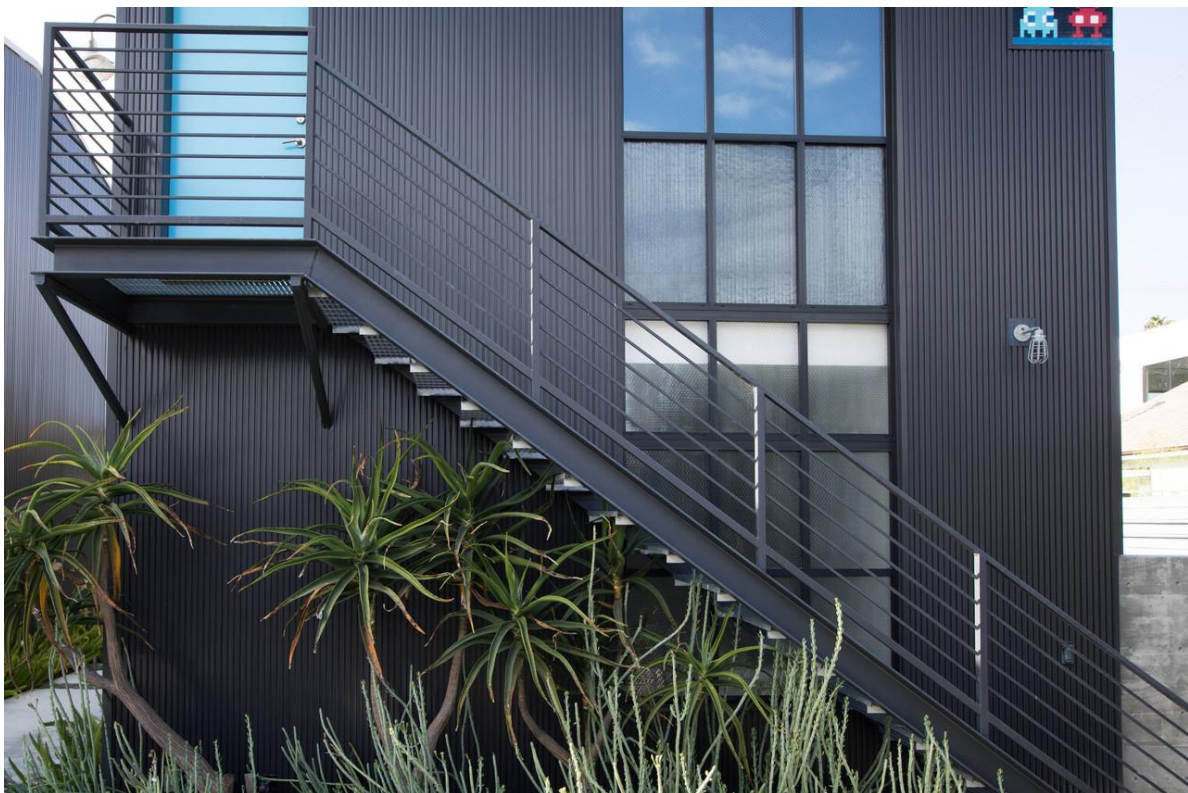
The bathtub in the master suite, which has a view of a mural. It's a reproduction of a Daniel Johnston work that sits across from the University of Texas at Austin.



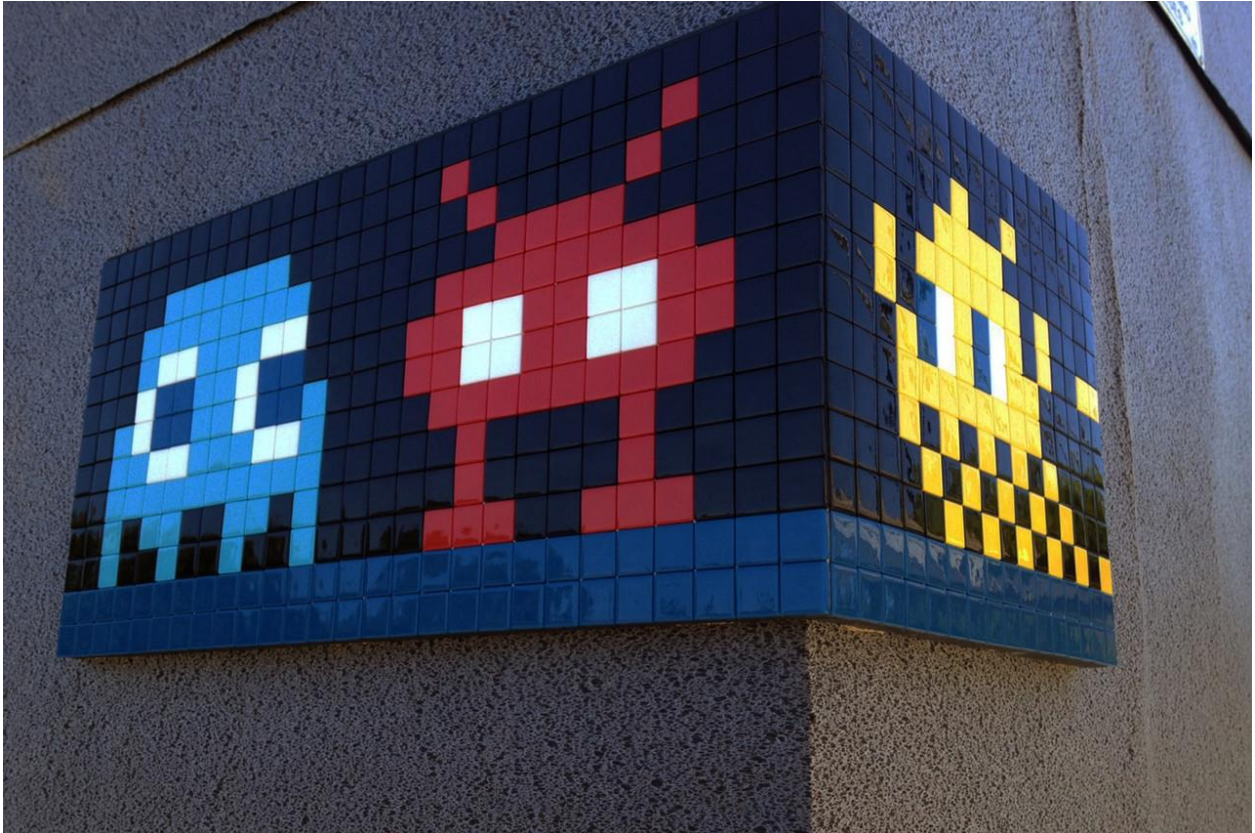
A guest bedroom. The artwork on the wall, a gift from Mr. Piccus's nephew, came from a movie theater lobby, and was used to promote 'The Simpsons Movie,' Mr. Piccus said.



One of the most eye-catching elements of the home is the mural, which includes trompe l'oeuil newspaper boxes.



Mr. Piccus also commissioned a mosaic-tile work by Invader, an anonymous Paris-based street artist. The piece, which wraps around the corner of the home's exterior, would be destroyed if removed.



A photograph of the work when it was first completed. Invader installed it one night in 2014 while the home was still under construction.



Mr. Piccus, 52, is the vice president of legal and business affairs at Mattel, the toy company. His dog's name is Scooter.



Mr. Piccus says he spent about 18 months and \$2.1 million completing the home. Negotiations for the mural and the mosaic took place over the course of several years, starting when Mr. Piccus was living at his previous home.



In designing his home, he was inspired by urban neighborhoods in Austin and Los Angeles. The outdoor staircases echo city fire escapes.

Until the 19th century, most art was conceived for a specific place, such as a fresco or an altar painting, said Rory O'Dea, an assistant professor at Parsons School of Design, the New School University. The term "site-specific art" emerged in the 1960s, as artists rebelled against the notion of art as a luxury commodity and sought to bring art back into everyday life.

Today, site-specific artwork continues to be "taken very seriously in academic and critical circles," Mr. O'Dea said. After all, a piece that can never be duplicated is inherently worth more. An artwork that can't be removed, however, can hurt the value of the property if the artist isn't well-known.

Mr. Piccus appears immune to such concerns. "This is my forever house," he said, explaining that he doesn't disclose the price he pays for art. "The resale value is not my problem, it's my heirs' problem."

Mr. Piccus bought his property in the Venice section of Los Angeles for \$1.585 million in June 2012. He said he knocked down two existing houses and spent 18 months and about \$2.1 million building a 3,000-square-foot main house and a garage-and-office building.

Inspired by urban neighborhoods in Austin and Los Angeles, Mr. Piccus added outdoor staircases that resemble fire escapes, and modeled a patio after a loading dock. His rarest items, however, are two of his outdoor artworks, both of which involved years of false starts, compromises and negotiations.

Mr. Piccus tracked down the brother and manager of Daniel Johnston, an artist known for painting a popular mural across from the University of Texas at Austin, where Mr. Piccus attended law and business school. It depicts a simple cartoon frog with the caption, "Hi, How Are You."

After much back and forth, Mr. Piccus secured permission to reproduce the work. Then he hired Art Mortimer, an artist who had painted a nearby mural. Mr. Mortimer added his own touches, and Mr. Piccus asked him to include trompe-l'œil newspaper boxes to honor the ones that stood in front of the original. He also almost doubled the size of the painting to 20 by 25 feet, to optimize views from the master bedroom and kitchen. Mr. Piccus determined the spacing between the garage and the home, in part to accommodate the mural.

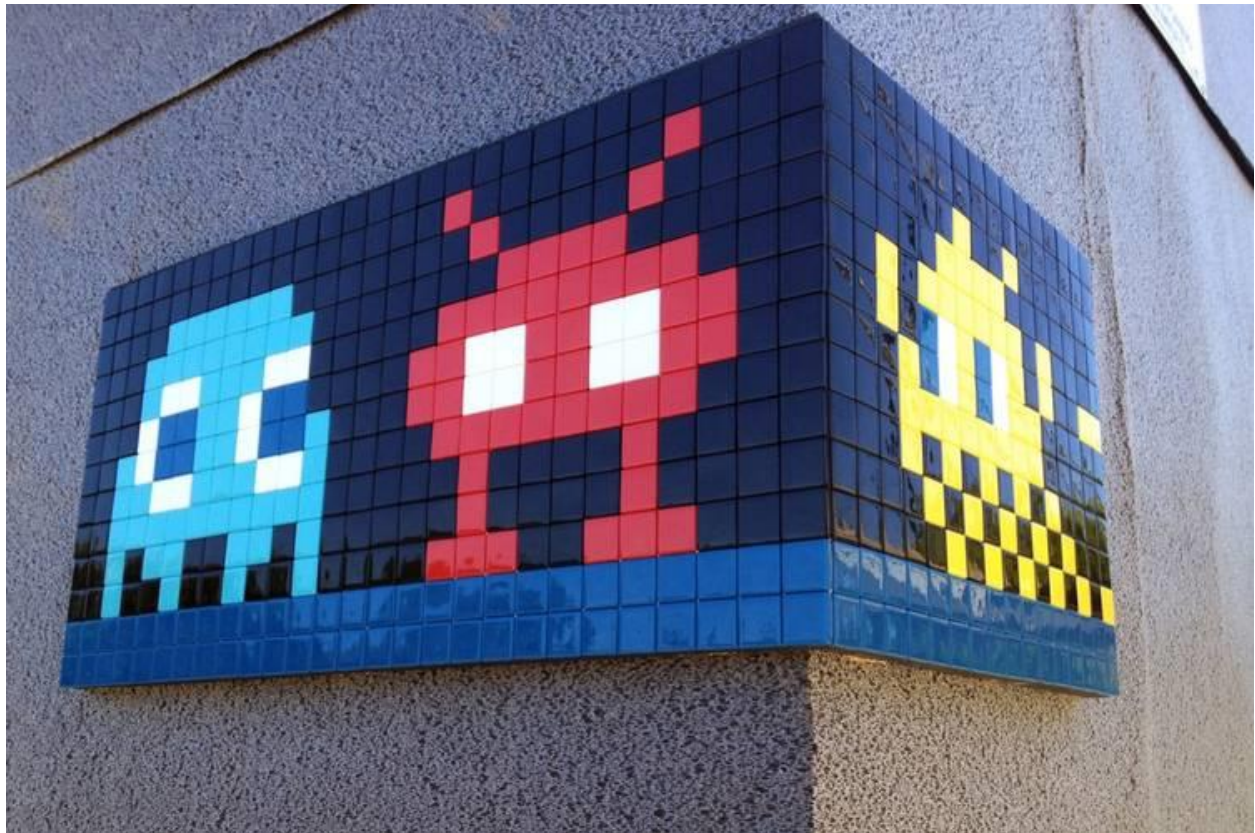
A longtime fan of street art, a catchall for graffiti, sculptures and other works created in public locations, usually without permission, Mr. Piccus had also reached out to the artist Invader. Invader is known for covertly installing brightly colored mosaics from Space Invaders, the 1980s-era videogame, on public surfaces. He sells a replica of each street-based piece, which he calls an alias, for anywhere between €20,000, or about \$23,000, to €200,000, or about \$231,000.

After three months hashing out a contract, Invader agreed to create the residential commission. "I remember having done some sketches before we [agreed] and then it went fast," Invader said in an email via his assistant. Mr. Piccus said he halted construction for a week. In July 2014, under the cover of darkness to maintain his anonymity, Invader installed the piece.

The result is a mosaic piece of three pixelated, alien-like creatures, which cannot be removed without being destroyed. Mr. Piccus has the alias.

Mark Lucovsky hired New York-based sculptor Darcy Miro to create a sculpture for his Santa Barbara, Calif., home knowing it would stay put. The barnacled, amoeba-shaped white bronze, which cost about \$50,000, curls around a cylindrical hearth. Mr. Lucovsky, 56, compares the work to built-in furniture. He and his wife, Cindy, bought the 1,200-square-foot beach house for \$5.75 million in 2008.

The salty air that enters through windows or doors has oxidized part of the piece. Ms. Miro chooses metals and sealants—or lack thereof—based on how the client wants the piece to age.



The Los Angeles home of Mattel executive Todd Piccus includes an installation by Invader, a secretive street artist.

Dan Colussy bought two, 2-acre lots in Jupiter, Fla., in 2003 for \$2.075 million. He and his wife spent about five years building the 17,279-square-foot house. Nearly every one of the ceilings has a mural, which he had painted by a number of artists from around the world. In the library, three domes are painted with scenes that reflect Mr. Colussy's career as an aviation and aerospace executive. In the entryway, a floor done in pietre dure—a Florentine technique of stone inlay—depicts a scene from an Italian church.

Mr. Colussy, 86, whose heritage is Italian, estimates the work added a year to the project, which was completed in 2009. The couple planned to live there for years, but Mr. Colussy's wife died about 4½ years ago; he now wants to start fresh. He has listed the home for \$12.995 million.

Mr. Colussy declined to disclose the cost of the project, but said it was several million more than the home's listing price. "We pretty much understood that you're not going to get your investment back on that type of thing," he said.

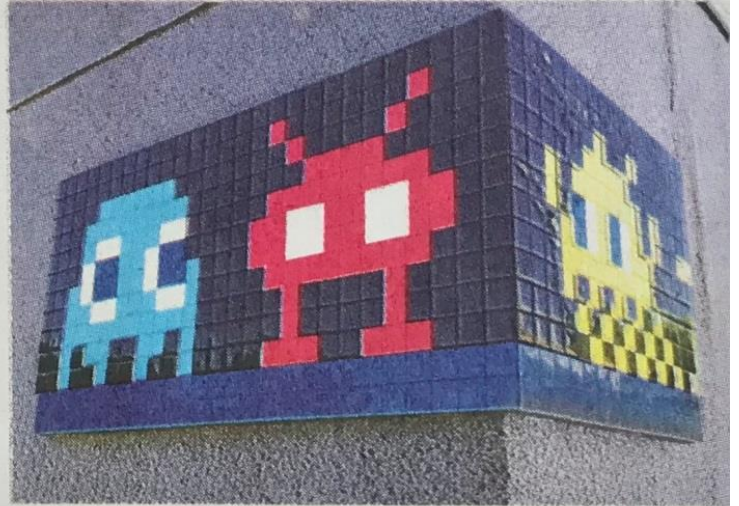
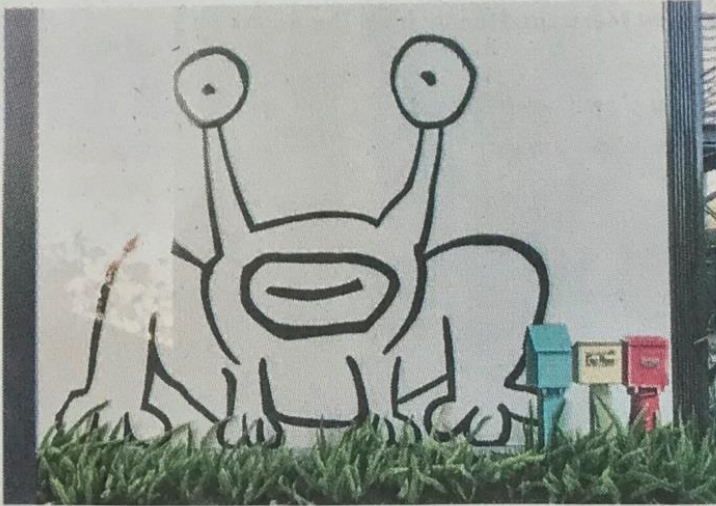
Site-specific artworks could boost a sale price if done by a famous artist, or if the piece can easily be removed and sold, said Ben F. Tunnell III of Los Angeles-based BTI Appraisal. Otherwise, they only sometimes add value, and can lower the price if they are personalized or if a buyer has to pay to remove them, he said.

Sometimes the best sales strategy is simply to embrace a home's artistic attributes. Artist and photographer Raphael Mazzucco and his wife, Lisa, spent more than a decade transforming a typical Montauk, N.Y., beach house into a gallery-cum-nightclub of a home. The couple paid \$920,000 for the 3,500-square-foot home in 2003. Over the years, they spent about \$1.5 million on renovations, he said.

"We sort of based the whole house around the art," said Mr. Mazzucco, 52. The double-height living room became a studio, with floors covered in spider webs of paint. The walls of an infrared sauna are made of Mr. Mazzucco's resin artworks. An oversize square door hiding a "secret" wing is made of one of Mr. Mazzucco's early pieces: a 350-pound framed photograph of model Gisele Bündchen.

The couple said they recently purchased a home in Lebanon, Conn., and listed the Montauk four-bedroom for \$4.35 million. Their listing agent and longtime friend, Dylan Eckardt of Nest Seekers International, played up the individuality of the home, calling it an "asylum for creativeness."

Mr. Eckardt acknowledged that a buyer could tear down the home or purchase it without the art. But the couple never considered repainting the walls or staging the furniture. "If you did that," said Ms. Mazzucco, a photographer, "you'd kill this place."



PERSONAL PLAYGROUND The Los Angeles home of Mattel executive Todd Piccus includes a reproduction of a mural near the University of Texas at Austin, above left, and an installation by Invader, a secretive street artist, above right.