

PROJECT SHEET: BIG PICTURE THINKING

For this residence of epic proportions to be filled with art, careful consideration, industry know-how, and a healthy dose of imagination were required. Megan Dicks and Hannah Abbott, art consultants and co-directors of OTOMYS Gallery, Melbourne, rose to the challenge. Charlotte Middleton writes.



If there was ever a project that put the big picture in big picture thinking, it's this extraordinary feat of curation – aptly named the Curatorial House – in Torarā, Victoria. The client, a mature couple, tasked Taylor Piesch Architects with creating the enormous five-level home, masterfully styled by Tyler Aspen Edmonds. Recognising the scale and culture of the build, Aspen Edmonds then recommended that the client bring on industry specialists to handle the mammoth task of procuring art.

To this end, co-directors of OTOMYS Gallery, Melbourne, Megan Dicks and Hannah Abbott were engaged as art consultants at the end of 2020, with the job carrying all the way through the following year.

Though they had previously curated hotels of a similar size, acquiring the number of works with such variation and point of difference was a new ballgame. Brutalist in character, the home offered an abundance of stone and marble to both contrast and complement through art, with not a single white painted wall to be found anywhere.

"We did know that we wanted to bring an air of femininity, for balance, and we wanted to bring in some movement," says Dicks. "We were always very conscious of the emotional journey, and we really wanted it to be varied." Originally provided with a budget to acquire 20 works for the main areas, the pair pulled from their extensive network of connections through OTOMYS Gallery to assemble a world-class array of artwork, starting with the lobby.

With its enormous front door, soaring triple-level void, and symphony of pendant lights, there was no question that the art had to match the drama of this first space in the home. On one side, a sprawling abstract work by Mark Roper stretches close to four metres across the wall and two metres high, with natural light filtering through the void to illuminate a pair of wall-mounted sculptures best described as folded over white circles by Anna Dudek on the other side. "The void allowed light to travel through the home at angles that you wouldn't normally achieve, because there'd be a ceiling there," commented Abbott. "Those two artists sitting together in the space was just phenomenal."

As more spaces were injected with art, the basement took on a moody ambience. Subdued tones and textural works by Brazilian artist Eduardo Santos made for an aluring first floor-lounge, and the skyline views of the top level were celebrated with a sculpture by Greg Pess inviting festivities – all with the client's enthusiastic support.

For someone who professed to know very little about art, Dicks and Abbott soon found that the principal client's "unbelievable sense of fashion" translated into an understanding of colour, line, form, texture, and balance. "There is not a lot to know, apart from what exists between you and the art when you're looking at it," is a key tenet of the philosophy at OTOMYS, seeking to break down the perception of art's inaccessibility.

Even still, the curation demanded a huge amount of trust – the client's trust of Dicks' and Abbott's judgement, the trust that they themselves placed in artists who had never before worked on the scale they were proposing, and trust of their own instincts before artworks were flown (and in two instances, crane-lifted) in from all corners of the globe. "Having seen the pencil drawings come to fruition, and then this monolithically flying through the sky was quite an emotional moment!" Dicks said of the installation of a three-metre-high Ben Sheers sculpture that now presides over a living room.

By the time of its completion, more than 60 artworks from 27 different artists and galleries across 15 cities had been acquired in total, with approximately three-quarters of the works specially commissioned. Dicks and Abbott also spent a lot of time with the client discussing framing options, bronze frames, bespoke hand-painted grey frames, and coloured Perspex frames were among those created to accommodate various works.

Most gratifyingly for the art consultants, it became clear that acquiring the home's collection was not merely a visual or decorative exercise for the client, but that she had become invested in the narratives that the different works told. By thinking big, Dicks and Abbott succeeded in curating a sophisticated journey through art that will enthrall client and visitors alike for generations to come.

Featured image: In the living area of Ben Sheers' Stacked Sculpture and a small glass blue sculpture, Caeruleus #3801 by Heike Brachtow. Photo: Sharyn carme. Courtesy: Otomy's, Melbourne.



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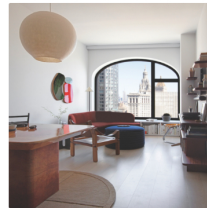
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