

*Nancy Sweeney is photographed in her home next to "Tea Pot," a sculpture by Ron Cooper. "Tea Pot" is made of recycled wooden scraps thoughtfully assembled to create a thing of beauty," Sweeney says. "Just as the art of Kentsugi is a metaphor for embracing your flaws or imperfections, the traditional Japanese aesthetic, Wabi-sabi, teaches us nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."*



*"Three Circles," by artist Chul Hyun Ahn. Installed at The Ameswell Hotel in Mountain View, CA.*

**"THEY TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE LOCAL ART COMMUNITY BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE ALL THE HEARTBEATS ARE — SO THAT'S WHERE WE LOOK FIRST."**



Soon Sweeney met Thomas Salamunovich, who was working at the landmark restaurant, Stars, under the tutelage of Jeremiah Tower. A celebrity chef, Tower, along with Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck, has been credited with pioneering the culinary style known as California cuisine.

"We dated for a year, got married and moved to France," relates Sweeney, "where I began working with noted contemporary art dealer Daniel Templon, who represented blue-chip artists including Roy Lichtenstein, Frank Stella and Robert Longo. He needed a native English speaker to translate some of the written materials he received, and I was able to go to the international art fairs with him: FIAC in Paris, ARCO in Madrid, Art Basel in Switzerland.

"I wasn't planning to work," continues Sweeney. "I was going to take the year and learn French. But

Thomas had a hard time finding work, because in French culture, you have to pay to 'stage' in a restaurant. Being able to apprentice in France is like going to trade school; young chefs work in kitchens with two-star, three-star chefs to get an education. Fortunately, the gallery was able to open the doors to some fabulous restaurants for Thomas — doors that we wouldn't have been able to open ourselves."

After a year in Paris, the couple moved back to San Francisco, where the couple's oldest son, Jackson, was born (Leo and Owen came later) and where Sweeney began working with a fine-art publisher who was doing wood block prints. "Our office was where the San Francisco Giants' baseball field is now," she says, with a laugh, "and we joke that my desk was home plate."

Thomas was working at Post Trio, a restaurant owned by noted chefs

Wolfgang Puck and Anne and David Gingrass. "It was the hot restaurant at the time and Thomas was the sous chef, the managing chef there. But it was a hotel restaurant, which meant three meals a day, seven days a week and we had a young child," explains Sweeney. "It just got to be too much. So, Thomas answered an ad which ran in the San Francisco Chronicle for Sweet Basil, which was looking for a chef. My family was in Colorado, so he took the job, and we moved back to be closer to them."

Once in Vail, Sweeney got involved with Vail's Art in Public Places board. As for Salamunovich, after working at Sweet Basil for six years, he opened his own restaurant, Larkspur, at the base of Golden Peak.

As it happened, a family friend, Flip Maritz, co-founder and CEO of Maritz Wolff & Co., a hospitality investment firm, was involved with Rosewood Hotels and Resorts. They

were building a new luxury hotel on Sand Hill Road in Silicon Valley, Rosewood Sandhill, and he asked Sweeney to source art for the project.

"At that point, I had only been working on private collections and hadn't been in the hospitality sector," says Sweeney. "That kind of introduced me to the design community and to other developers that parlayed into this business that is very hospitality-specific. Everything is so relationship-based. A lot of people that I met at that time have either gone on to be principals at other design firms or are brand designers and have introduced us to this whole network that we have been fortunate to be included in."

Essentially, Sweeney and her team choose art which provides a sense of identity to a hotel's entrance. It sets a mood. Sparks conversation. Adds personality. And, many times, a striking piece of art creates a memorable first



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The vibrant Japanese ramen restaurant in the Venetian Macao Ltd. Artist Yuki Ideguchi created the mural with acrylic and spray paint on canvas.



impression as well as a focal point for the lobby. Original pieces or limited-edition prints by well-known artists convey luxury and sophistication in superior hotels. So, there's no doubt that incorporating art into a hotel lobby makes the space more unique and engaging. That's always Sweeney's goal.

Of course, working with local artists is a "must." This allows Sweeney and her team to curate unique pieces of art that highlight the local lifestyle. The pieces celebrate the respective culture and artfully represent the surroundings.

"We have a great team which is extremely skilled at researching and sourcing. They take a deep dive into the local art community because that's where all the heartbeats are — so that's where we look first," relates Sweeney. "It's where you're going to find the viewpoint that's most authentic to a region.

"What we strive for is the success of capturing what feels right, what works in

the space," she continues. "Does it clash? Does it integrate properly? We're never trying to match a color scheme. But we also don't want to go in with something like a hard-edge, geometric abstraction when it should be a softer landscape. So, it's more about picking things that really exhibit what we're trying to say. We're storytellers at the end of the day. We're trying to tell the story of the locals. Tell the story of the property. Tell what's unique about the property. That makes it a little less specific as to whether we like a piece or not. Knowing if it works within the context of the bigger story is what's most important.

"We also realize that art is very personal and subjective. There have

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been times when we've referred a piece and might say, 'This is perfect for a space,' and the client says, 'It doesn't matter. I don't like it.' Fortunately, that is a rare occurrence."

Then again, when art is commissioned for a specific area many pieces come into play. And there's always the possibility of a mishap. So it was when a small crack was noticed during the installation of a large, dimensional wall sculpture for a hotel in Abu Dhabi. "It had been inspected and we couldn't figure out what had happened," says Sweeney. "So, the artist scrambles and makes a new piece and we install it. And years later, I was working with an installation crew and a guy says,

'Remember when that piece fell off the truck and cracked?' I looked up and asked was that the — and I named the delivery firm — and he says, 'Yeah.' And I'm thinking that was my piece and it was fortunate that I had insurance! It was a \$60,000 claim."

Over the years, naturally, the art scene and what and how a visual artist creates has broken new ground. An example is ephemeral art which is defined as "art lasting for a very short time."

"We don't get too involved with ephemeral art. Our focus is place makers and things that are tangible and have some sort of graphic or physical impact," explains Sweeney. "It's about a drive to make things and not wondering if it's going to live in perpetuity forever and ever. Even things like a Banksy come and they're irreverent and they disappear. Yet, they create a conversation and that's the lasting effect. It's a conversation that

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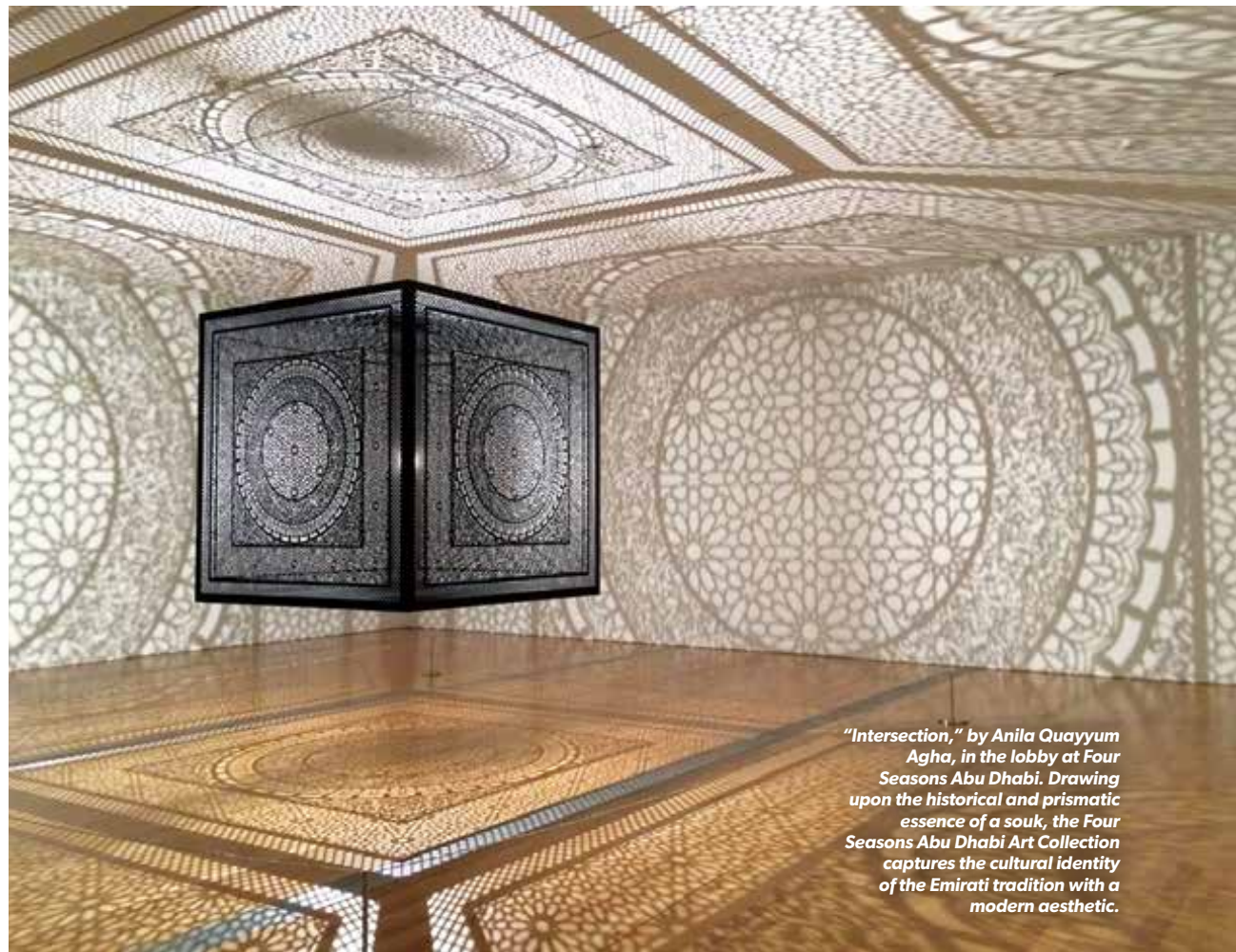
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they create and that goes all the way back to Dadaism. It's the same kind of approach to art that's more about exploration than it is about product."

Sweeney's work is a combination of working with her team to research, define and create a story for each of her projects. It's almost like putting ideas in a container and pulling each one out and deciding whether it will work in a specific project — until everything seamlessly falls into place.

"I love what we do. I love the teamwork because I feel like we get fabulous projects by dialoging, by researching. At the end of the day, it's very creative," says Sweeney. "We're always creating very different brands and that's what keeps it exciting. We're not always doing the same thing. That's what keeps us energized. We do a project and learn something and then you start a new project and it's a whole new set of challenges. And you can approach it with all the information and history that you've learned in the past, but new things are going to come up. So, each day is exciting.



*"Intersection," by Anila Quayyum Agha, in the lobby at Four Seasons Abu Dhabi. Drawing upon the historical and prismatic essence of a souk, the Four Seasons Abu Dhabi Art Collection captures the cultural identity of the Emirati tradition with a modern aesthetic.*



**"IT'S THE SAME KIND OF APPROACH TO ART THAT'S MORE ABOUT EXPLORATION THAN IT IS ABOUT PRODUCT."**

"We also love that we're always working with the source: We either use an artist's existing work, or we commission a piece. We always have that interaction of medium and creation and we leave that information with the project. In the end we create a compendium documenting how the piece was made, as well as the artist's names and how to contact them. We also supply bios about the artists — it humanizes them. It kind of brings the artist into the room and allows the viewer a more personal viewing experience."

When a new project unfolds, Sweeney always begins exploring, hoping to find an artist that is a little jewel. "Many times, I'll discover a local artist and buy a little something — because it speaks to me."

And Sweeney's office is filled with a lot of "little somethings" that speak to her and bring back a plethora of memories to which many more "little somethings," and many more memories will be added. **vvm**