

ALWAYS IN *Style*

By Jenifer Mangione Vogt

Fine art — a good portion of it by Florida-based artists — enhances the shopping experience at many of the county's finest retail spaces.

The Gardens Mall ▶





Neiman Marcus

Stanley Marcus knew fine art enhanced not only the quality of people's lives, but also their shopping experience. He was on to something in 1951 when he commissioned the first art work for the Neiman Marcus stores founded by his father. The corporate art collection he started now includes more than 2,500 works. Since Neiman Marcus first paired art and shopping, the concept has been embraced by many high-end retailers, particularly here in Palm Beach County where shoppers encounter art that is evocative, colorful, contemplative and sometimes simply fun.

Neiman Marcus sets the bar high, which is evident in its Boca Raton and Palm Beach stores that showcase blue chip art to complement luxury wares like Fendi purses and Diane von Furstenberg wrap dresses. The company's merchandising style, with its impeccable orderliness and minimalistic displays set against gleaming marble floors and cream-colored walls, really makes the art on the walls pop out. The collection includes non-figurative paintings, works on paper, limited edition prints and sculpture. The art is even labeled, just like in a museum or gallery.

A great deal of thought is given to placement at Neiman Marcus, the only luxury retailer with a full-time corporate art curator. Julie Kronick, who currently holds the positions, says, "We place art strategically to enhance cultural awareness and perhaps offer something stimulating or thought-provoking or simply unique and beautiful for everyone to appreciate."

Neiman's Palm Beach County stores feature works by South Florida-based artists such as Purvis Young, Richard Medlock and Bruce Tolman. "Much of our art is created by artists residing in the region where the store is located," Kronick notes. "Its presence engages the community in recognizing our support of local artists."

Nordstrom also incorporates art within its stores in Wellington, Palm Beach Gardens and Boca Raton. The collection includes original paintings, mixed media, works on paper and sculptures. While Nordstrom doesn't have an in-house curator, the company does rely on a professional art advisor. "Our art buyer and in-house visual teams find the right spot to enhance the overall shopping experience," says Brooke White, vice president of corporate affairs. "We feel that there's a natural marriage between art and fashion and art helps create more of a residential feeling."

Art does make a space feel cozier. On Worth Avenue in Palm Beach the public art inspires personal pleasure. Smiles light up the faces of shoppers as they duck into the charming bougainvillea-filled Via Amore and find bronze statues of children in various states of play created by artist Monyo Mihailescu-Nasturel Herescu, a Romanian prince. "People love them," says Sherry Frankel, vice president of the Worth Avenue Association. "I can't tell you how frequently they are photographed."

There's also a two-tiered cherub fountain in the courtyard. "Not only do shoppers notice it," Frankel says. "They stop to throw coins in it!" She sees how legendary architect Addison Mizner's taste has shaped the avenue. "It's like being in Europe – like a fantasyland," she explains. That also holds true in nearby Via Flora where visitors feel like Alice in Wonderland next to the gigantic bronze tulip sculpture *Grande Prima Flora* by Robert St. Croix.

The European-like penchant for outdoor art continues in Palm Beach Gardens, where all of the major shopping venues accentuate their spaces with original sculptures thanks to the city's Art in Public Places program. "Most European cities don't have nearly as much greenery as Palm Beach Gardens, but high-quality design and inclusion of art are historically European characteristics," says PGA Commons developer Joel Channing.



Nordstrom



Legacy Place



CityPlace

At the Commons, shoppers encounter the whimsical work *Moods for Wind and Water*, created by West Palm Beach artist Mark Fuller. The work evokes images of children's cartoons and adds a sense of playfulness to the surroundings.

Fuller has also been commissioned to create many of the sculptures found in the other retail environments in Palm Beach

Gardens, including those at Legacy Place, which pay tribute to community planner Hank Skokowski, who died tragically before the mall space was finished. Fuller's massive sculpture *Stack 45* attests to Skokowski's love of the music from the era of 45 RPM records and smaller sculptures found near benches, such as a pair of bronze cowboy boots, give the impression that Skokowski will soon return.

Artist Terry Thommes' enormous *Reliance* at Mainstreet at Midtown is another commissioned work and resulted from collaboration between the Borland Center for Community Enrichment and Ram Realty Services, the site developer. The 15-foot sculpture is constructed of concrete, glass and steel. "Two monumental arches reach out for each other, depicting how we rely on family, friends and neighbors to create homes and communities of value," says Shari Meltzer, director of marketing for Mainstreet. "This creates a visual and physical connection between the development and the community."

At The Gardens Mall, the posh interior feels even more luxurious and upscale because of the art it contains. Marshall Fredericks' *Leaping Gazelle*, a striking bronze sculpture with a green patina finish, bursts forth with energy and natural beauty. Albert Wein's *Diana*, inspired by the Greek goddess, displays exquisite detail. Shoppers rest their weary feet on benches near these works. Sidney Forbes of The Forbes Company, which



The Gardens Mall



Mainstreet at Midtown

owns and manages the property, says, "I'm proud that we can give our local communities art that can be enjoyed freely and at any time."

Mizner Park and Royal Palm Place, both in Boca Raton, also have a European feel. Most of the outdoor sculptures found there were created by Yaacov Heller, who owns Gallery 22 with his wife Sue. Outside the gallery, located in Royal Palm Place, Heller has created a sculpture park that includes bronze statues such as *The Temptation* and *Fiddler on the Roof*.

In terms of fountain art, there's nothing quite as spectacular as the \$3.5-million, eco-friendly dancing fountain that serves as the focal point of the Italian piazza-like courtyard at CityPlace in West Palm Beach. Visitors are entertained every half hour as the choreographed fountain spurts water in time to musical accompaniment; in the evening, the fountain dances against a backdrop of multicolored lights.

Whether shoppers prefer magnificent fountain light shows like this or quieter courtyard sculpture gardens, one thing that is clear is that in Palm Beach County the enchantment with – and commitment to – fine art isn't confined to museums and galleries. Art is everywhere, even next to the Gucci loafers you've been eyeing. And why not? Art takes an environment up a notch and makes a place feel special. As Forbes points out, "Art is incredibly important to enhance one's quality of life." 

Fabulous Finds

It isn't just the visual arts that add to the pleasures of shopping in Palm Beach County. The performing arts also make a fashionable statement.

CityPlace in West Palm Beach hosts free outdoor concerts in front of the fountain. Past performances have featured popular artists such as Julianne Hough, Clay Walker and Colbie Caillat. Check www.CityPlace.com regularly for new concert listings.

Mainstreet at Midtown in Palm Beach Gardens hosts a Music on the Plaza concert series that features an eclectic lineup of pop, oldies, rock, blues and jazz. Visit their website at www.midtownpga.com.

Nearly all of the county's major shopping centers also host art fairs, including the popular juried Art Festival at Mizner Park and an outdoor fair at CityPlace.

For more information and ideas, visit www.palmbeachculture.com.



Worth Avenue