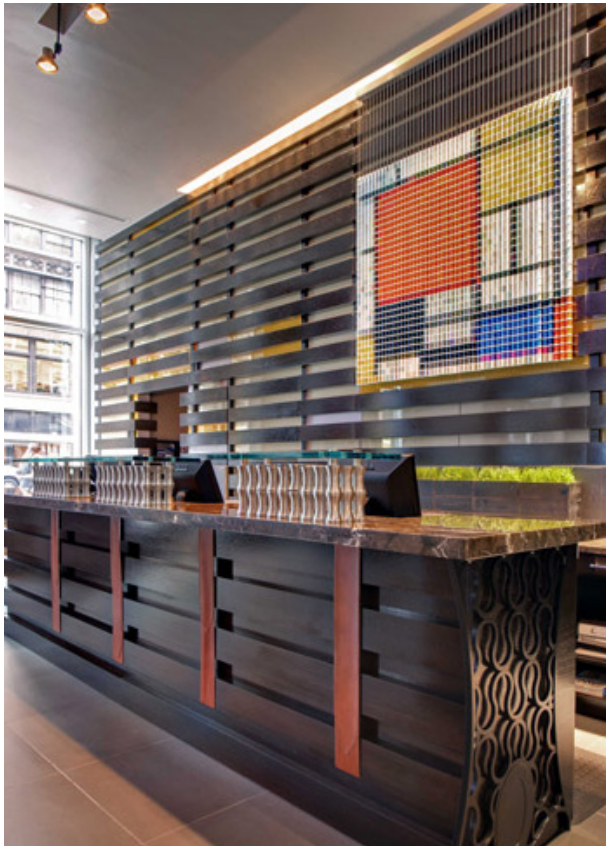


# Incorporating Art into Architecture

Wall Street Journal Photo Editor Rebecca Horne interviews renowned architect Glen Coben.

You may not know **Glen Coben**, but you probably know his work. During his 48 years



Interior shot of the Hilton New York Fashion District © Hilton Fashion District Hotel

as an architect, Mr. Coben has built many familiar spaces. Among Glen & Company's recent projects are 59 restaurants, with 47 of them in New York, such as Mario Batali's **Del Posto**. Before opening **Glen & Company** in 2000, some of Mr. Coben's projects included: The **Four Continents Bridge** and The **Isuzu Space Station** in Japan; domestic and international **NIKETOWNS**;

The **Theater** for the **Academy Awards** and The **Hacienda Football Stadium** in Los Angeles; and The **Coca-Cola Sky Field** in Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Coben takes a collaborative approach to designing interiors, and sees artwork as an essential element.

**RH: When planning spaces, how do you think about integrating artworks?**

**GC:** We begin by understanding the mission of the project...what are the goals, what is the function, what will the guests experience in the spaces/spaces? Once we have the "outline" of the story, we begin to solve the problem spatially. Once we have the flow and spaces defined, we look at focal points and what nuances will assist us in adding layers to the narrative.

**RH: How does this work—can you give an example?**

**GC:** We designed a hotel which originally opened as "**fashion 26** – A Wyndham Hotel" (it is now referred to as Hilton Fashion District). Our focus was to bring the notion of American Garment-making into a narrative. The front desk was designed as an homage to a sewing table....we commissioned an artist to create cast aluminum "bobbins" that are used to create a screen to hide the computer monitors. We also commissioned the artist Devorah Sperber to create a wall hanging piece as a focal element in the Lobby. Devorah works in spools of thread, which were the perfect

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complement to the theme! We also commissioned several photographers to create a series of images for the guest rooms.... these images are of details of garment making....from a close-up of a sewing machine's needle to a pile of buttons and the knot of a tie.

**RH:** Can you elaborate a bit on what you mean by "story"?

**GC:** The "story" of a project is the narrative we use to create a connection between the project and the guest. We always strive to "localize" and customize the guest experience...whether it is a retail store for Nike that tells the guest all about the product and imbues the space with the values of the brand, or a restaurant for a chef such as Dr. Miguel Sanchez **Romera**, where the story told was all about him—where he studied, where he practiced his medicine

and what his passions are. The hard part is creating the narrative, but once it is established, all future design decisions are based on that "story".

**RH:** How does art change the identity of a space? Do you work with images that play off shapes or colors already built into the space?

**"After Mondrian (Fashion 26)",** site specific commission by Devorah Sperber, 2009 1632 spools of thread, stainless steel ball chain and hanging apparatus Dimensions 59.5 x 59.5"

**GC:** Art selected or commissioned carefully adds to the overall narrative of the design. Conversely, art hung on a wall just for the sake of it is like a bad music soundtrack—it is obvious that it just wasn't thought out!

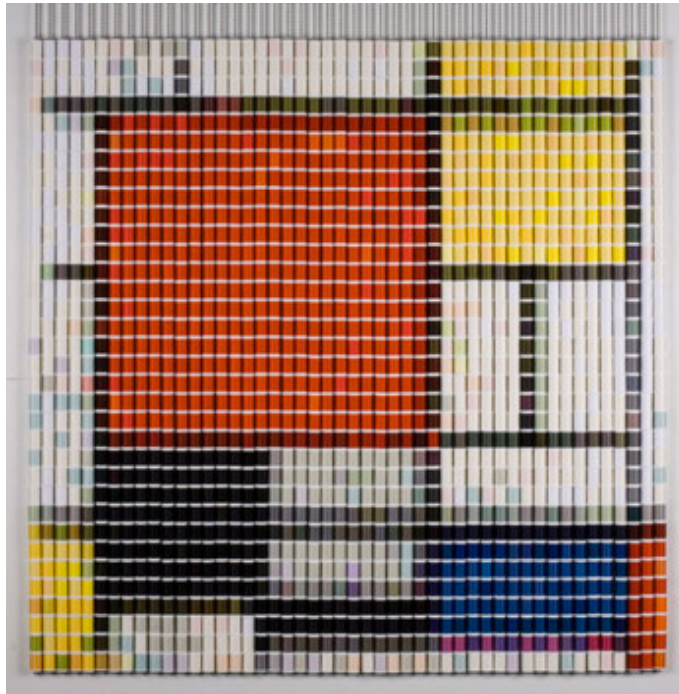
**RH:** Are there guidelines you can use for both kinds of spaces- a home and a hotel room, or are they at odds with each other?

**GC:** No rules. Except the pieces need to "mean" something. Just as our designs are meant to tell stories, each of the parts of the puzzle need to add to that narrative.

**RH:** What is the most important function art can have in a space, in addition to add-

ing to the design narrative?

**GC:** It shouldn't smack the guest in the face—it should be in harmony with the space and surroundings.



"After Mondrian (Fashion 26)", site specific commission by Devorah Sperber, 2009 1632 spools of thread, stainless steel ball chain and hanging apparatus Dimensions 59.5 x 59.5"