

THE OWNERS OF
J. WILLOTT GALLERY
REVEAL THE ARTISTRY IN
CURATING ARTWORKS
FOR AN UPSCALE CLUB
HOME AT MORNINGSIDE
IN RANCHO MIRAGE.



AND THEN THERE WAS ART

MASTER CURATORS

—
BY SHELLY CANNON
Photographs by David Blank





Some people love to visit art galleries; others frequent museums. Then there are those who combine these two experiences in the comfort of their own home. That's essentially what J. Willott Gallery helped the Davies family do. Their residence houses a collection of museum-quality art, made possible by gallery owners Josh Paquette and Josh Otten and their rarefied roster of international artists.

Affectionately dubbed "the two Joshes," Paquette and Otten arguably are two of the local market's most sophisticated gallerists. Celebrating 11 successful years with their new 5,000-square-foot gallery on El Paseo in Palm Desert, they are trusted advisers and master curators. Bringing two discerning pairs of eyes to their client-centric business, they consider clients' taste, lifestyle, and interiors when transforming bare walls into artful environments. "We let the client guide the process from the beginning," says Otten. "The first question always is, 'What aesthetic impact does the art make?'"

"We're not here to tell a client what to like," Paquette emphasizes, because art is subjective. "Art is an extension of someone's personality."

Their recent project at Morningside in Rancho Mirage involved helping one couple select fine artwork for an entire residence. The duo worked room by room to present a cohesive body of work throughout the renovated home. From start to finish, Otten and Paquette collaborated with the homeowners, honoring their preferences and passions.

"It begins at the gallery," Otten explains. "Then the next evolution will be in the home. We look

clockwise from opposite far left: *El Mar* painting by Erik Gonzales; J. Willott Gallery owners Josh Otten and Josh Paquette; geometric painting, *The Inner Court*, by Garo Antreasian and abstract painting, *Days End*, by Krista Harris; a bold painting by L.A.-based artist America Martin.





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at the natural lighting, the finishes, the furnishings, and everything that complements the architecture.”

Homeowner Duncan Davies went to great lengths to pursue the right gallery with which to partner. Once he found Otten and Paquette, he was on board for the process. “They know what they’re talking about,” he says, “and they have the eye for quality. They knew how to define the space for each work of art.”

Davies says he and his wife wanted to work with “people they could relate to” as they brought to life their concept. Their goal with J. Willott was to create a contemporary space in their California home that could house and complement great art.

“We sought to create a gallery in our house by having an open environment where the artwork and furnishings were the focal point,” Davies explained. The home was renovated (taken down to the studs) with the mindset of creating, much like a gallery setting, an interior with large white walls and expansive space: the quintessential environment for enjoying art.

In making selections, the gallery owners aspire to awaken clients’ appetite and appreciation for art. “We

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above: *Origins I* and *Origins II* diptych by Erik Gonzales; the bronze sculpture in red is *Hestia* by Julie Speidel. opposite: The dining room is brought to life with *Kishar*, a red sculpture by Julie Speidel; *Suspended in Dreams*, the glass sculpture on the table, by Richard Jolley; and *Lightly*, a print collage by Eva Isaksen.

want our clients to be as excited to tell people the story of a piece as we are,” Paquette says. “It’s part of the fun of collecting. We also see ourselves as educators.” Otten articulates the importance of clients acquiring art that genuinely moves them, regardless of trends or an artist’s prestige. “Art is magnetic attraction. Usually your first instinct is your best guide.”

Paquette and Otten’s overarching commitment is to develop deep connections with their clients. “We are a relationship gallery,” says Paquette. “We’re here to build lifelong associations.”

Their own appreciation for fine art has a long history, as does their friendship. Raised in Maine, the pair have been close since preschool. Otten grew up around art: His grandfather was well known as an astute collector who purchased pieces by legends like Kandinsky, Renoir, and Chagall. The family donated his valuable collection to the Portland (Maine) Museum of Art.

For his part, Paquette’s love of art also developed over time. He attended art school at the College of Santa Fe in New Mexico, graduating with a BFA in documentary photography. Having worked for a Santa Fe–based gallery,



he relocated to work at the gallery's multiple locations, wherever he was needed most. His position included opening an El Paseo showroom in 2004. By 2007, he and Otten decided to open their own gallery, J. Willott (the name is a blend of Paquette's middle name, Willis, and Otten's last name). The gallery has grown every year since.

J. Willott's list of artists is a representation of art's upper echelon. Take, for example, Michael Schultheis, whose genius took him to Cornell, and later Microsoft, as a mathematician; his expansive whiteboard equations were so beautiful and visually arresting, his professor would photograph them. His *Morning Tides of Pythagoras* graces the Davies' main living area.

Add Knoxville-based glass artist Richard Jolley, whose sculpture *Constellation 7* is mounted above the fireplace. "He's one of the most revered artists in glass," Otten says, "one of only three or four in the world with his level of skill."

Among other selected works are a totemic abstract sculpture, *Kishar*, by Julie Speidel, influenced by the monolithic structures at Stonehenge; a highly detailed collage with leaves and natural elements by artist Eva Isaksen of Norway; and a client favorite, an abstract impressionist

piece, *Camas Prairie Reds*, by artist Theodore Waddell. As the first artist J. Willott represented, Waddell has intriguing work in 40 museums, including the Palm Springs Art Museum. Other standouts are by America Martin (*Women and Roses*); Erik Gonzales (*Origins I* and *Origins II*); and a commissioned piece, *Lucky Motel* by Jason Kowalski, whose hidden imagery is revered by collectors.

As Otten explains, "The art world loves definitions, but it's hard to pin down work [with labels]." Paquette agrees; "People's tastes change; we focus on museum quality to build collections that stand the test of time." Paquette says J. Willott "believes in good art, not genres." Their core focus on talent and technical ability has created a list of respected artists who are both well-educated and advanced in their careers.

Further, the gallery helps artists, Paquette says, "make a living with their passion." It is mutually beneficial. "Without the art, we don't exist; without the gallery, the artist doesn't," he says. "We all work together."

Davies, enthusiastic about his home's art, says he can't recommend the gallerists enough. "They've been absolutely first-class," he says, "a pleasure to work with."