



The image shows a room with a light-colored wall. Three abstract paintings are displayed. The top-left painting is rectangular with a vibrant orange and red color palette, featuring swirling, organic forms. The bottom-left painting is rectangular with a green background, showing a red, elongated, fish-like shape with various appendages. The right painting is rectangular with a light beige background, depicting a complex, multi-colored structure resembling a stylized tree or a cluster of figures. Below the paintings is a wall of vertical wood paneling. In front of the paneling is a dark green, tufted sofa. To the left of the sofa is a wooden side table with a silver lamp. To the right is a dark wooden coffee table.

# DOWNTOWN EXPRESSIONS

By lending their walls to local artists and offering fresh exposure, some boutique hotels in San Francisco's Tenderloin district are painting a new way for residents and tourists to connect to the city

By **Laura Kiniry**  
Photography **Mathew Scott**







## A SMALL CROWD GATHERS ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF SAN FRANCISCO'S TILDEN HOTEL,

drawn together by the vibrant pink and black hues of artist Parisa Ghaderi, whose silkscreen prints of a faceless round-bodied form known as *Dumpling Girl* hangs on two walls of the hotel lobby. Across the room, a couple of overnight guests enjoy complimentary wine and bite-size eats, while a solo guitarist strums an instrumental rendition of popular tunes.

Known as Tilden Tuesday, this bi-monthly casual reception that showcases the works of local artists was started in April 2018 by the hotel to engage with the SF creative community. "Many of our artists live within walking distance of the hotel, and their works provide a good lens into what's happening right here and now. These kinds of projects help combat the city's [gentrification]," says general manager Jason Webb.

For many of San Francisco's downtown boutique hotels, establishing such partnerships is a growing way to make a largely touristic area more appealing to SF residents, blurring the lines between us and them in more ways than one.

Tilden is housed in a 1928 Art Deco building along Taylor Street, in the city's gritty Tenderloin neighborhood. Formerly known as the Hotel Mark Twain, the historic property reopened in 2017 with a new name and a modern minimalist aesthetic – one that celebrates art and artists, as seen from the in-room botanical watercolors of Southern painter Jenny Kiker and a hallway mural of 3D hearts (3D glasses are on loan at the front desk) painted by artist Gypsy Joaquin EsSlowly.

Tilden itself was named after SF sculptor Douglas Tilden, best known for his baseball-themed sculpture, *Our National Pastime*, in Golden Gate Park. "This gave us an obvious art tie-in," says Webb, who







had wanted to highlight the "especially good art scene" in Tenderloin, so he set about working with the Wildflowers Institute, an organization that helps communities become self-sustaining through their own resources.

However, what began as a speakers' series focusing on topics like how art survives in a community soon morphed into something completely different. "We realized we weren't shining a spotlight on the artists themselves," the manager says. Thus, Tilden Tuesday was born.

Here's how the program works: A new local artist – usually found by Webb through word of mouth or, in the case of Ghaderi, by talking over cold brews in the hotel's Tilden Café – is given carte blanche to take over two walls of the hotel's lobby for two months. So far, the artworks have ranged from experimental digital portraits to Dada-inspired abstract collages made of ripped and cut paper.

Price-wise, the pieces are affordable and all of the proceeds go directly to the artist. "Our sweet spot is between US\$30

and US\$1,000," Webb says of the pricing, but it can range as low as US\$25 to US\$50 for photograph reprints. The hotel also commits to purchasing at least one piece from the exhibition. One such example is a mosaic-covered mannequin by multimedia artist Chris Cook that now hangs near the entrance to The Douglas Room, a restaurant and bar serving New American fare and inventive cocktails.

Tilden Tuesdays attract SF residents who are looking for something fun to do on a weeknight, while offering hotel guests an authentic perspective of the Tenderloin community beyond its issues of homelessness – a concern for travelers to the neighborhood these days. "These artists present a different way of looking at the Tenderloin," Webb says, "and guests seem to truly appreciate – and want to purchase – local art."

In the case of the artists, these partnerships can open doors to further collaborations. Ghaderi recalls a hotel guest from Santa Barbara, a sociology professor, who approached her in the



**THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

Tilden Hotel's retro-inspired signage; the hotel's café, where artist talks are held; general manager Jason Webb; *Fisherman* by Leonardo Niño



**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP**  
*Rigoletto* by John F. Martin at The Marker Hotel; the newly renovated hotel is located in a 1920s building

lobby while she was hanging her pieces. "She ended up purchasing two of my smaller pieces right there, and a third one a couple months later," the artist says.

They are still in contact, and have even discussed working on an art show focusing on femininity in LA. "I've never thought of my work as especially feminine, but her interest brought out a part of it and myself that I didn't know existed," shares Ghaderi.



#### JUST OVER A BLOCK NORTH OF THE

Tilden is The Marker, another 1920s boutique hotel that recently underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation. It reopened in late 2018 with a new color-bursting palette to match its Theater District digs and a cozy common area where curated artworks on loan from the city's SFMOMA Artists Gallery are displayed. The Marker also organizes pop-up events for the creative community, such as one last May that featured 24 makers who sell handmade and vintage items on Etsy, the Brooklyn-founded e-commerce website. The hotel provided light snacks and beverages from



### ART ESTATE

Stay at these hotels supporting SF artists in the city

#### Hotel G

The newly remodeled Hotel G has been a partner of the city-based Creativity Explored, an organization that supports local artists with developmental disabilities, since 2014. [hotelgsanfrancisco.com](http://hotelgsanfrancisco.com)

#### Hotel Des Arts

The aptly named Hotel Des Arts is home to a series of artist-designed guestrooms, including one featuring the Asian-inspired art of SF's own Sam Flores, and another highlighting Jeremy Fish's angelic skull artwork. [sfhoteldesarts.com](http://sfhoteldesarts.com)

#### Hotel Del Sol

Each spring, the colorful, reimagined Hotel Del Sol motor lodge hosts Startup Art Fair, transforming its rooms into modern exhibit spaces for over 70 independent artists. [instagram.com/hoteldelsol](https://www.instagram.com/hoteldelsol)







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The grand staircase of The Marker Hotel; handcrafted accessories by Frolick Jewelry; the jewelry brand's founder and lead designer Adrienne Wiley



its restaurant, Tratto, as well as a deejay to keep things lively. In the hotel's ballroom, artists were selling screen-printed T-shirts, illustrated prints and handmade dolls for kids, while in the lobby there was a tarot card reader and a vendor selling chains and pendants.

"We absolutely loved working with The Marker," recalls Rebecca Saylor from the volunteer-run SF Etsy Collective. "It gave all of the artists involved greater exposure to their works and opened us up to a whole new clientele who weren't necessarily looking to shop, but found themselves pleasantly surprised [by the crafts on display]."

Adrienne Wiley, who showcased her Frolick Jewelry at the event, is glad she participated. "As a designer, I'm always trying to reach a broader audience. The Marker Hotel was a venue that attracted both visitors and locals – I saw a noticeable bump in my online traffic

beyond SF months after," she says.

Such partnerships help hotels become a part of the SF community by breaking down the barriers between visitors and city residents, as well as challenge the perception that lodgings are simply places to spend the night, says Pearl Tam, The Marker's marketing and brand partnership manager.

She even attended a recent Tilden Tuesday to see if it'd be something that The Marker could implement, "but there are obvious logistics to consider", Tam says, alluding to the fact that The Marker and its nearby sister property, Hotel Spero, are run by the larger Access Hotels and Resorts (while Tilden is part of Point Hospitality Group), so such decisions would need approval. "People think it's only possible for local businesses to get involved within their communities," she says, "which isn't true. It just requires some forethought."



## CREATIVE BUZZ

**Here are some other ways to experience art in the Fog City**

### Madrone Art Bar

Along with a bevy of specialty cocktails and musicians ranging from blues accordionists to rockin' pianists, this corner establishment is home to a series of constantly changing art installations.

**[madroneartbar.com](http://madroneartbar.com)**

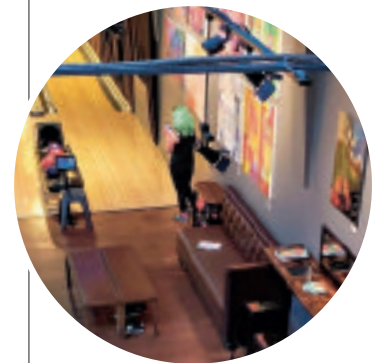
### Revolution Cafe

At this European-style café with walls of locally produced artwork and live music all week, you can grab a latte or a Lagunitas IPA and savor the vibe of Mission District.

**[revolutioncafesf.com](http://revolutioncafesf.com)**

### Mission Bowling Club

Bowl a game or two, chow down on hot tamales and purchase an original artwork. This boutique bowling alley is one of Artspan's Art-in-Neighborhoods venues. **[missionbowlingclub.com](http://missionbowlingclub.com)**





**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP**  
An artwork at the lobby of The Mosser Hotel; the boutique hotel's signage; Joen Madonna, who organizes annual art event SF Open Studios



#### WALK THIS WAY

**Join the Tenderloin art walk every first Thursday of the month and visit the area's creative spaces**

Encompassing about 50 blocks in downtown San Francisco, the

Tenderloin has a reputation for its high rate of homelessness and drug dealings. But

it's one of the last affordable places to live in the city and home to a vibrant artistic community that

has developed a tradition of its own: a self-guided art walk held every first

Thursday evening of the month. Participants

include nearly two dozen creative spaces and artist co-ops, including Look Gallery and Public Barber Salon. [fb.com/firstthursdayartwalk](https://fb.com/firstthursdayartwalk)

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#### "BOUTIQUE HOTELS ARE AN IDEAL

venue for local art," agrees Joen Madonna, executive director of Artspan, a non-profit best known for hosting SF Open Studios, the city's annual autumn art event that showcases new and established SF artists in their workspaces. It runs from October 12 to November 3 this year.

"While larger luxury hotels may have big budgets that they can use to commission artists or display museum pieces, boutique hotels have empty spaces perfect for displaying original art made by people who don't live so far away," Madonna says.

When she's not organizing SF Open Studios, she's working with The Mosser Hotel – another boutique property that meshes classic SF architecture with modern decor; in this case, a marble-floored lobby with sleek couches and dramatic mood lighting – on a quarterly rotating exhibit. The collaboration is part of Artspan's Art-in-Neighborhoods, a program launched in 2015 to activate dormant storefronts and properties with excess space – including hotel lobbies – by featuring locally made artworks.

"SF Open Studios has been great," Madonna says, "but that one time a year just isn't enough to support an artist financially. Venues like The Mosser give them exposure to a wider audience than they would have otherwise."

This evening a crowd of black-clad locals and inquisitive hotel guests gather in the lobby for an art reception showcasing multiple Bay Area artists, including Russia-born Irena Kononova with her ethereal landscape paintings, and contemporary painter Nora van den Berg. "The owners of the family-owned Mosser wanted to give back to the SF community and support its artists," says





**THIS PAGE, FROM RIGHT**  
Artist Parisa Ghaderi;  
*Dumpling Girl*, a recurring  
character who appears in  
Ghaderi's works



Yvonne Ongpin, the hotel's sales and marketing head who works directly with the Art-in-Neighborhood program. "We sponsor a quarterly art reception, complete with bite-size American comfort food from our on-site restaurant, The Keystone, and the artists supply the rest."

Madonna says the program for the Mosser, with exhibits that change four times a year, came with a bit of a learning curve.

Some artists were wary of leaving works at the space and therefore out of their inventory for months at a time, she explains. "But in this economy, local

artists are definitely having to reimagine what a venue is for their art, because museums don't see them as being financially feasible, and galleries are focusing on established big names."

For creatives trying to get the word out about their work, such collaborations are becoming a no-brainer. Ghaderi notes that exhibiting in hotels may have been a new concept to her, but "as an artist, if you find a space that speaks to you and it feels like it can hold your work – ask. Just because there's no artwork displayed there now, it doesn't mean there shouldn't be."



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