



Putting art in its place | Karen Lorena Parker will create a painting perfectly suited for the place you want to hang it.

"I try to create the perfect painting for a space. You can go to a gallery and love something but it might be the wrong size or colour. I help to design and fine-tune paintings for clients," she says. "I want my art to live in the space, to be perfect for that space. I want my art to be in the home for people to enjoy."

"Artists frame their work so it can be better appreciated and looks better on the wall," she says. "I think it's part of our culture to want to coordinate colour and design. We're design savvy. If a painting clashes with the surroundings, it would be hard to live with. I've had gallery owners tell me people should buy art because it speaks to you, that you should renovate your house around art work. I say adding a green highlight to a painting doesn't change it."

Put people on a lie-detector and many would say they want a painting that looks good in their home and admit to wanting it to match their decor, and possibly, their sofa.

The fact is, some clients don't know what they want or like and don't have the confidence to move ahead. Some are stymied. "I'll sit in their space with them and work through it with them. Having been a graphic designer, I'm used to working with clients, discussing their likes and dislikes." Do they want tranquil and soothing? Do they want a conversation piece? Do they want a certain mood? Do they want something with personal meaning? Might a painting be better off in another room? She'll move paintings around in a client's home to show how different lighting or decor changes paintings.

It's an art in itself to create a painting with the homeowners -- for some artists, it's an impossibility. They have their own style, their vision of what must be and that's that. They joke about art to match the walls or couches, but Parker understands how homeowners want a painting to work in a space.

The art in Parker's home, which she shares with a toddling son, husband and two dogs, show her range. She's currently working on a painting of a deeply evocative night sky, very loose and moody; others on the wall are bouncing with sunshine; there are florals, abstracts, cityscapes and nudes and even pop-art dancing rave girls. The latter is popular with tweens and nightclubbing twentysomethings but one went to an older man, who loved the way it brightened his day. Another man wanted a painting of a rave deeJay for his loft but wanted a few touches of green added so it would work with his couch.

She recently worked on an insect mural for a child's room with an interior designer, as the room was being worked on. "I started on the computer and sent the proofs. I added more bugs as needed and got the style and colours and then I painted it on the walls." Her graphic art skills come in handy.

"Some artists do commission work but don't deal directly with clients in their homes," says Parker. "For me, a latte in their home is a mandatory part of it. I really like to be in that space, get a sense of the person. So many things are intangible so I like to sit with them."

"I like to have the time with them so they'll develop feelings about the painting, understand a bit more and see it in different ways. Picasso would teach people to really look at paintings. He'd unveil a painting of Gertrude Stein and he would teach them to see the spirit of the woman in it."

Parker trusts her paints to guide her painting. "I like the medium to express itself. I let it decide where the painting's going. Every painting is a little bit different."

A graphic artist and painter for 16 years, she's done about 10 commissions since she recently started customizing her work for clients. Her large paintings (about four by six feet) sell for \$2,000 to \$6,000. She works in oil, acrylic, watercolour and pastel as well as multi-media. Some see her work and want a similar style in a different size, a different colour, or with minor changes. One saw a tulip painting and wanted lilies.

One of her clients is downsizing and must give away her beloved china, which has been the heart and soul of family gatherings for decades. "I suggested doing a painting of a table setting with her china," says Parker. "It holds so many memories. She can have this piece which will mean so much to her."

Another, a female pilot, saw her dramatic painting of a Focke-Wulf 190 (FW190) war plane Parker had done for her husband and wanted one of a WW2 Lancaster fighter plane for her father, as he'd flown one during the War. Planes are becoming something of a theme, partly because she lives and works in Burkeville, near the airport, and partly because her husband Gernot Bremermann, is an airplane buff, and partly because when people see her FW190 painting, they want one.

Another likes the idea of oranges. Parker is in discussion with someone in Kelowna who would like her to do a still life of oranges for her board room. It means she'll travel there to get the feel of the room, take dimensions, Photoshop a sketch (create it on computer) and arrange it on a digitalized boardroom wall for the client to see. "I can digitally superimpose paintings in a space so clients can see what it will look like. Even the frames are digital. It's great to have the technology to see what it will look like without going into the home."

From working with clients, she understands and respects differences in taste. She had done some small paintings of some African women from the Ndebele tribe, where women stretch their necks to swan-like lengths with layers of necklaces. One client loved it and wanted a large painting of it. Others didn't like it at all. "There were extremes in reaction," she says.

She does reserve the right to say no to a painting. She won't, for example, copy an original of someone else's art. And so far, no one has made outrageous demands on her creativity. And besides, she can make changes on the computer to show the results, without destroying the original. You can see more of Parker's work online at www.BremerPark.com.