

by Diane Capuano, executive editor

Achieving Perfection In Any Setting

San Francisco
Artist Lynne
Rutter strives
to create the
perfect
artwork
for every
room



San Francisco-based artist Lynne Rutter

In the perfect decorative arts project, there is a symbiotic relationship between the art and the room. The art comes alive when rendered in the room, and the room achieves its full visual potential thanks to the presence of the art. Lynne Rutter understands this and seeks to bring the room and her art together into a harmonious, aesthetically pleasing oneness.

“The artwork and the room need each other,” the San Francisco-based artist says. “A perfect example of this is the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican (which features some of the world’s most impressive fresco paintings set majestically into a 400-foot long barrel-vaulted ceiling). It’s one of my favorite rooms.”

Lynne’s desire to create the perfect finish for every room is what drives her as a mural artist and decorative painter. “I get my inspiration from the room I am designing,” she says. “My work is very-site specific.”

As the owner of her own boutique atelier, Lynne specializes in custom fine-art murals as well as hand-



Lynne Rutter created a hand-painted ceiling design for a 900-square-foot project at the Paris Casino Resort in Las Vegas, Nev. Photo by Marcia Stuermer

detailed architectural ornamentation. Her work encompasses a full range of murals, trompe l’oeil effects, chinoiserie, cloudscares, gilding, historic ornament as well as faux and decorative finishes. In recent years, she has added the roles of colorist

and interior designer to the services that she provides a client.

In her illustrious and varied career, Lynne has had the opportunity to paint in a variety of spaces, ranging from a major restoration project at the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Sacra-

mento, Calif., to a hand-painted ceiling design for the Paris Casino Resort in Las Vegas, Nev. She has designed and painted ornamental borders for a variety of clients and has created murals based on her interpretations of classic paintings from Vermeer, Tiepolo, Chardin and others. She uses a wide range of materials to accomplish this work—everything from house paints and theatrical acrylics to casein paints, Japan enamels and fine art oils.

While Lynne does a lot of contemporary interiors, her specialty is period design. She enjoys the prospect of working in modern interiors but giving them a period look, whether it's a Renaissance-style ceiling or an his-

toric ornament. "I love to conjure up another time or place," she says. "Most historic ornament is borrowed from somewhere else, but I redesign it for each space to make it work. Applying a historic technique to even the most minimal or modern space can yield beautiful and *au courant* results."

Lynne also enjoys doing restoration projects. "There's a great sense of fulfillment in recreating something that was lost," she says.

In addition, Lynne has done projects for a number of historic buildings, using her knowledge of period design to



Detail of the restored ceiling of St Francis of Assisi Church, Sacramento, Calif.

create the perfect complement to the setting. She's comfortable in virtually any style of design and architecture. "Victorian, Edwardian, Arts & Crafts, Beaux Arts—these are the dominant architectural styles in the Bay Area, and I've done work in them all," she reports. "I've always been a fan of grand interior design."

It was this interest that prompted Lynne to consider a career in architecture from a fairly early age. "As a kid, I was drawn to math and physics and geeky stuff like that, but I also had an interest in art," she recalls. "Since high school, I did murals and scenic art for theater. I thought architecture would combine these things."

So, Lynne applied and was accepted as a student at the prestigious Col-



Part of the 9,000-square-foot ceiling of the St Francis of Assisi Church, Sacramento, Calif. Restored by Tom Ciesla and Associates, with Lynne Rutter as manager and painter. Photo by David Papas

lege of Environmental Design at the University of California-Berkeley. Eventually, however, her love of art won out, and she graduated with a degree in fine arts.

After graduation, she roamed around Europe for a while, living on very little money and staying in inexpensive hotels, but having the invaluable experience of seeing great artwork as she traveled from place to place. “It was the ‘80s,” she says. “One could more easily do that sort of thing. I traveled all around until I eventually ran out of money and had to come home.”

Upon returning, she got a job as a set painter for the San Francisco Opera. “I was happily painting sets without even realizing that there was such as a profession in the U.S. as the decorative arts,” she reports.

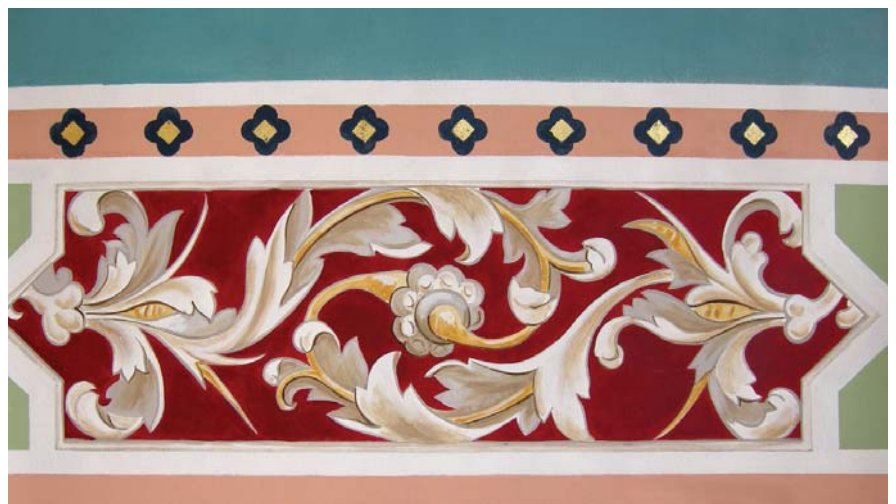
After leaving that job, she had the opportunity to apprentice with some very innovative and groundbreaking artists. She also spent four years as an artisan and studio manager for Evans and Brown Co. Inc., where she coordinated the production of large-scale commercial mural work.

Among the artists she worked with were Roberta Ahrens, one of Northern California’s most renowned decorative painters, and also Larry Boyce, who gained notoriety as a bicycle-traveling artist who brought his artistic vision to restoration projects in California and other Western states. “I worked with Larry for a couple years before his death and was his last protégé,” Lynne reports.

Through Larry, Lynne met another artist, Tom Ciesla. In partnership with Tom, she worked on a massive restoration project including a 9,000-square-foot ceiling for the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Sacramento, Calif. This project turned out to be pivotal for Lynne and also helped in landing more work. She mailed a postcard of the ceiling to interior design firms as a way of promoting her abilities. “One designer



This project involved a 860-square-foot hexagonal ceiling ornamented with hand-painted borders and gold-leaf stars. Ornament is based on work found in the Church of Santa Croce, Florence. Acrylic on canvas. Photo by David Papas



Detail of the hand-painted ornamental border. Ornament based on circa-1520s painting in the Church of Santa Croce, Florence. The colors are adjusted to work with this client’s interior design.



Lynne's hand-painted "Japanesque" mural in peach with almond blossoms and accents of 12k gold leaf. The "far-too-white" marble floor tiles have been painted with a faux finish of a different marble.

took that postcard with her everywhere she went," Lynne recalls. "Years later, she called me regarding the Paris Las Vegas project."

Lynne landed the casino project before the property was even built. Once there was a physical space to decorate, she flew to Las Vegas to do the measuring and then flew back home to create the design. "I painted the ornament on muslin to fit the

space, and then flew back to Las Vegas for the installation," she reported. "Other elements, I hand-stenciled on site. The project took months, but I was only in Las Vegas for four days. The client loved that the scaffolding was only up one week. There were also less housing and travel costs involved, so it was far more cost-efficient."

While she enjoys large-scale

commercial projects such as these, most of Lynne's work is done in upscale homes, including a number of Victorian or period revival residences. And for the more modern homes in her repertoire, one of the things she enjoys creating is historic-inspired ornamentation to transform the space into another era.

"Most of my clients are repeat customers," Lynn reports. "I have some clients who've stayed with me for 20 years. I have one client, whom I've done three homes for all over the country. I do a lot of work on canvas and then either go on site to do the installation or have someone else install it."

Lynne prides herself on her flexibility and creative problem-solving for adapting to whatever it is the client has in mind. "A lot of time, the client or the designer has something in mind, but I'm often brought in because they have a problem they can't solve," she says. "I need to work with them to find out what it is they want. Do they want formality? Do they want something grand? What do they want the room to be used for?"

An example of a project that took a bit of creative problem-solving involved a master bathroom that previously had a view of a fire escape and a brick wall. The client walled over the window and asked Lynne to create a mural in its place. Her unique solution was to create a surreal mural rendition of "Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Vermeer.

"It's something to look at when walking down the hall," Lynne explains. "You can see it, if the doors are left open, from clear across the house. It's not so much a decorative painting job as a fine art piece that was site-specific. Many would have done a trompe l'oeil window with a nice view, but that's not the sort of thing I do."

Lynne's knowledge of architectural styles has come into play in many of the projects she completes. Even if a room starts out as a plain white box

with doorways and windows, she creates visual interest by using decorative art techniques to add architectural detail. “Every wall can be broken into architectural elements,” she says. “You can add a frieze around the top of the room, embellish windows or doorways with trompe l’oeil moldings, or add ornaments to the ceiling. All of those are great ways to change the atmosphere of a room.”

Decorative artistry is also a mode for changing the style of a room. For instance, Lynne recently created historic ornament for a high entryway in an upscale home. “The owners wanted it to look like an Italian villa,” Lynne reports. “And even though it was a modern home, the use of historic ornamentation makes it look like the home has been around for a long, long time.”

As a resident of San Francisco, Lynne feels she has a definite advantage in the artistic world. While she has traveled the world over, she gains much of her inspiration from the beautiful City by the Bay. “I grew up in Southern California, but San Francisco is my home,” she reports. “I decided to go to school in Berkeley not only because it had the No. 1 ranked architectural school but also because I love San Francisco. It’s really the most European-feeling of all American cities.”

Lynne’s studio is located in the vibrant Dogpatch neighborhood of San Francisco, just below Potrero Hill, a part of the city that was once home to canneries and shipbuilding operations. Now, the neighborhood is a haven for artists, graphic designers and others who indulge in creative professions.

“My studio is heaven,” she says. “It’s located in the old American

At right: “Euterpe” inspired by Tiepolo, detail of a large figurative ceiling mural in Raleigh, N.C. Figure is life-sized and painted on muslin, then installed over cloud ceiling mural.



“The Pearl Earring” surreal scale mural after the Vermeer masterpiece, in a contemporary minimal master bath in San Francisco. 10’ by 13’ acrylic on canvas. Photo by David Duncan Livingston



At right: A recent project designed and produced by Lynne Rutter for a residence in Menlo Park, Calif. Ceiling panels and map mural are painted on canvas in acrylics.

Photo by David Papas

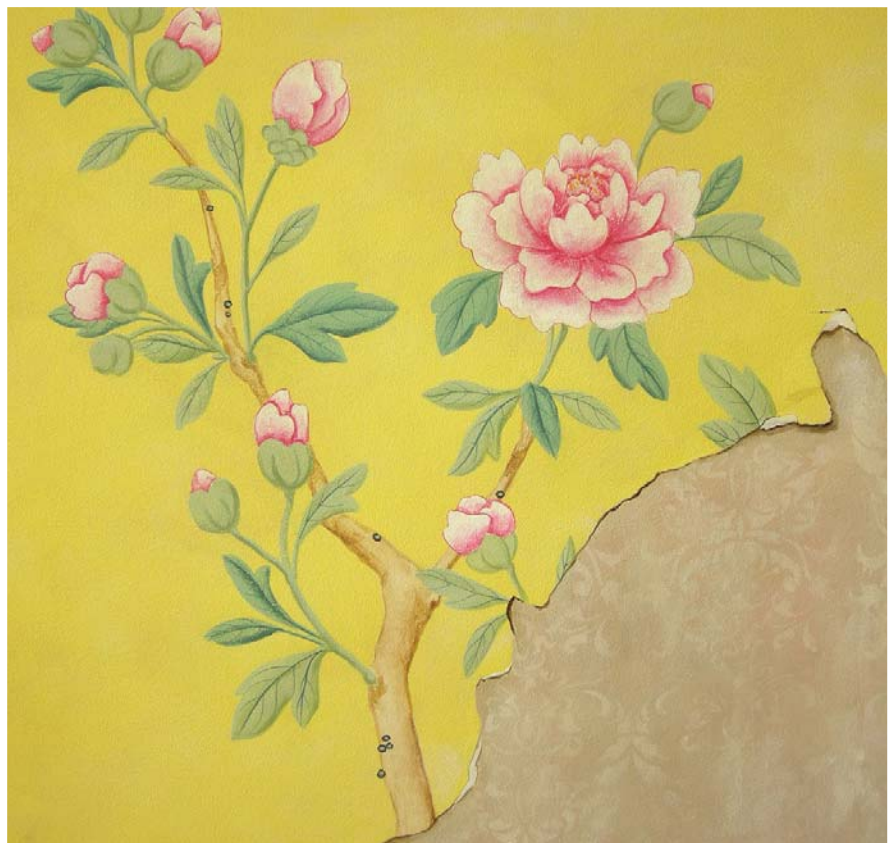
Can Company building. It's a massive brick building with large windows, 14-foot ceilings and 1,200 square foot. And it's only eight blocks from my home."

Lynne appreciates the fact that she has apprenticed with some great artists, and she has reciprocated by hiring artists to serve as apprentices in her businesses. Several of her apprentices have gone on to start businesses of their own, and Lynne is very proud of that fact. She's even referred jobs to them, confident that they will do an excellent job for the client.

"I've always had apprentices and assistants working in my business, whom I have trained," Lynne reports. "They tend to be art students, and I typically hire those who are looking for a career in decorative painting. They learn everything they need to know—not only painting but also laying tape, prepping canvas, sanding and priming. I find that people who want to work with me consider it an investment in their careers."

Lynne currently has two assistants, both whom have been with her for many years. She also hires artists on a per-project basis when she needs a larger crew.

Lynne takes advantage of various networking opportunities, both in person and online, to connect with people in the industry. She belongs to Artistic License, which is a small guild of Bay Area artisans who work



Hand-painted chinoiserie paper "torn up" revealing its predecessor, an antique neoclassic stencil pattern. Lynne reports: "The tear is trompe l'oeil—no chinoiserie was harmed in the creation of this painting!"



At left: “La Pourvoyeuse” large-scale interpretation of a painting by Chardin. 9’ by 16’ acrylic on canvas.

Photo by David Papas

on period buildings. “The guild is like family to me,” she reports. In addition, Lynne has enjoyed networking with her fellow artists at industry venues such as Salon and IDAL. She also regularly contributes to the Faux Forum, where she has networked with an even broader range of artists, becoming close friends with several of them. She loves the immediate feedback she gets from the Faux Forum. “Any time of the day or night, you can get a response from someone. If you’re posting in the middle of the night, you might get a response from one of the Forum members in France. You post a problem, and you come back in the morning and there could be a dozen responses.”

While Lynne has a thriving business as a working artist, she has begun teaching workshops again after a 10-year break. She will be teaching classes both in her studio and also at other venues, such as the upcoming IDAL convention in Portland, Ore. Among her classes are Traditional Oil Gilding, Gilding for Decorative Painters, Ornamental Borders and Painterly Cloud Ceilings.

“My goal in my teaching as well as my work is to raise the level of artistry so that everyone benefits,” she says. “It’s important to do good work, since the public sees the work and it raises their perception of what decorative painting can be. Don’t cut corners and do just one step. If the work requires three steps, then do all three steps. If the project is worth doing, then it is worth doing well.” TFF

To learn more about Lynne Rutter and to view her work, visit her website at www.lynnerrutter.com and follow her blog at www.ornamentalist.net.



Red Chinoiserie powder room designed by Lynne Rutter for the San Francisco Decorator Showcase. The mural is hand-painted in matte acrylics. Photo by David Papas