As part of the David Owsley Museum of Art expansion, Charles B. Froom has been engaged to guide the installation of the museum’s collection into what he calls the “remarkable gallery envelopes” built by Ratio Architects. Four new galleries designed by Froom will greet museum guests when renovations are complete in 2013.

Prior to opening his own museum exhibition design and planning business, Froom was a designer at the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. Since then, he has participated in and directed projects at more than 50 institutions in the United States, Europe, Central America, and the Middle East.

Froom says his design process always begins with a checklist of all of the works of art in a museum’s particular project.

“This museum is blessed with a heck of a collection,” he says. “It’s got great breadth and depth.”

Working with that checklist, Froom begins to design the installation space, working with the museum staff to put the collection on view in the best possible way. For Froom, the highest priority is to maintain the integrity of each work of art.

“From both a visual standpoint and from a conservation standpoint, my first obligation is to do no harm,” Froom says.

Froom firmly believes art is universal and timeless, and while the interpretations museums offer alongside objects from an unfamiliar culture may help visitors understand a different language or how an object is used, in the end, all works of art occupy the same cultural, visual, and ethical space.

“We are all hindered by our familiarity with our own culture, whether that’s here in the United States or Western Europe or in the Middle East or Asia,” Froom says. “But the integrity of each work of art is something I believe in completely. I simply try and honor that. I believe all works of art, from cave paintings to contemporary installations, have some kind of spirituality about them.”

As for what he does as a gallery designer, Froom sees himself as something of a “visual tutor” for museum visitors, one who helps determine how the collection—from individual works to groupings of works in a gallery to groupings of galleries—can best be seen.

“It’s my job to notice if there is something in the way, if there is a reflection or an unnecessary graphic, if things are too crowded,” he says. “Anything that is surrounding a particular work of art shouldn’t distract the viewer, it should propel them back to look at the object, it should cause them to say, ‘I think I understand.’”

Froom is hands-on, from mock-ups right through construction and on to the day the galleries open to the public.

“I wouldn’t do all this if I couldn’t be there for the final installation,” he says. “That’s what I work for—I work to be able to close out the galleries, finish them to my satisfaction and to my client’s satisfaction. And then I go to the opening, happily. That’s the process. Walking out of the galleries at the end of a finished installation is a happy time.”