



Attention to detail runs through this bedroom designed by K & H Design, from the hand-painted triptych behind the bed to the fabric covering the headboard, a bespoke design and colourway woven by Soie de Lune.



## WHAT INTERIOR DESIGNERS DESIRE

Interior designers reveal the products they love and the makers they turn to for that special piece within a scheme

The relationship between interior designers and their clients is never a one-way affair, always a conversation. Designers have the product knowledge and skill to deliver rooms that interpret each client's vision without compromising their own, yet the to-and-fro of decision-making on colours, finishes and furniture sparks a fascinating interplay in the choices designers make with their clients. Here we discover some of the products, craftsmen and treasured pieces designers admire and have included in projects, and their own homes.

### THE VIRTUOSO MAKERS

Craftsmanship is a quality that designers mention often about the products they choose for their own homes and suggest for clients' projects. The value found in well-made pieces does not go unnoticed either. Quality never dates says Henry Miller-Robinson co-founder of K & H Design in explaining his regard for the Crillon chair from Soane. "This is a perennial classic," he says, "and one that will certainly be a collector's piece of the future. The craftsmanship is outstanding and the comfort, sublime. Although I love the classic leather-wrapped finish, we have also specified chairs in a two-tone textured Claremont Cunard weave, giving the chair a totally different character." ▶

**ABOVE LEFT** Basalt by Little Greene is a blue-black that designer Irene Gunter likes to use to introduce drama to a scheme, here to frame glazed doors and windows in a kitchen where walls are in a pale tint.

**LEFT** Historical relevance but also scale were in interior designer Georgina Cave's mind when she went out to find a period fireplace for a client's Grade II listed house. Her research led to this unusually tall Louis XVI fireplace, perfect fit for the sitting room with its high ceiling.



For Henriette von Stockhausen at VSP Interiors it is Max Rollitt's Lyre chair, early nineteenth-century in style, that attracts her special praise. "The lines are perfect, and the craftsmanship and comfort are second to none. My clients always adore this chair," she says. "That is true of all Max Rollitt's pieces but this one is my own special favourite." Similar enthusiasm for fine workmanship comes from Gavin Houghton at Gavin Houghton Interior Design. "I value almost everything that Jamb produces, from lanterns to fireplaces, and as for its Pantry Collection of racks, table, stool and tray, it's genius. I want all of it." So it seems do his clients.

Contemporary pieces with character and craftsmanship are predicted a long life and ongoing esteem by Irene Gunter, director of Gunter & Co. "I adore the Man Ray glass leaf mirror by Cox London," she says. "The fine workmanship and detailing are second to none and I dream of owning this piece one day." As for the range of Lily pieces by Tom Faulkner, "the curves are so thoughtfully devised and beautifully executed, whether in side tables, mirrors or coffee tables," she says, "they bring a smile to my face every time I see them at home or in a client's sitting room."

Working with a contemporary furniture maker of note can also give the opportunity to request bespoke sizing. Georgina Cave of Cave Interiors recently commissioned a Pyramid table from Matthew Cox for a client, a piece that blends early Egyptian elements with country vernacular. "We love it not only for its considered and simple design," Cave says, "but for the integrity and expertise that has gone into perfecting the finish."

#### AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

When interior designers fall in love with an object for their own homes or have found exactly the investment piece their client jumps at the chance of acquiring, it will come with the implication that the attachment will be long term.

For antiques dealer and designer, Christopher Howe, it is condition and association that can give a piece forever appeal. "Antiques don't disappear," he says. "They move around, are restored and placed in centrally heated rooms. I value the increasing rarity of pieces in a pure unrestored state such as the pine etagère in my living room. It is a simple country piece on turned legs dating from around 1880. It had belonged to Elizabeth David, whose books revolutionised British cooking, and I bought it at the auction of her effects. The auction label is still attached with her name on it." Howe also puts his understanding of traditional craftsmanship into the Made by Howe furniture he produces to complement antiques, and one piece from this collection has provided Gavin Houghton with his most cherished buy. "I bought a Den sofa from Howe London," he explains. "It has layers of traditional webbing, hand-fitted springs, horsehair stuffing and feather-filled cushions. It is so comfy that everyone exclaims with joy when they sit on it."

History and previous ownership also surround the most treasured piece in Hugh Leslie's sitting room. "I purchased an Edwin Lutyens sideboard made for the Viceroy's palace in Delhi. It is a stunning piece that together with its historical interest is something that gives me constant pleasure," he says. ▶



#### CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

K & H Design's clever choice of Stiffkey Blue by Farrow & Ball for cupboards and shelves lets the colours and patterns supplied by the books stand out. Nothing can compete with the comfort and dependability of a traditionally built sofa suggests Gavin Houghton when describing his love of the Den sofa by Howe London. Furniture with a known history, such as the Edwin Lutyens sideboard in Hugh Leslie's sitting room, will always hold attention, even in the context of surrounding pieces from different eras. When Henriette von Stockhausen purchased an antique painted chest and decided it would be star attraction in her kitchen, she protected the surface for everyday use by adding a marble top.







One of von Stockhausen's most-loved pieces is an antique painted chest from Robert Kime she bought for her kitchen. "It always gets admiring glances and comments from friends and clients," she says. "One never regrets buying pieces like this. Every morning when I walk into the kitchen it gives me joy."

Designers can also retain strong feelings for pieces found for their clients. Cave is one who recalls the wrench of parting with several of them. "We sourced an Italian 1950s mirror with a beautiful integrated beaten brass console for the entrance hall of a client's Grade II listed house and, for another project, it was a wonderful Louis XVI fireplace that happened to be particularly tall and therefore perfectly proportioned for the high-ceilinged space, but it was hard to see it go."

Miller-Robinson is a huge fan of Danish mid-century furniture and relives a special purchase sourced for a client. "It was a fabulous set of Niels Møller model 62 rosewood dining chairs with wonderfully seductive lines and original paper cord seats," he says.

#### ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Certain colours, patterns and textiles prove their worth in a variety of contexts and designers revisit them for their own homes as well as their projects. Paint retains its status as provider of plain tints and bold colours but subtlety is always part of the comments made on a particular tint or shade. Louise Bradley points to Little Greene's Slaked Lime as one of her signature paint colours. "It's a warm off-white that can be a backdrop in any space, a soothing choice for a bedroom and versatile in both classic and contemporary interiors." Little Greene is also chosen by Irene Gunter for its Basalt. "The best deep blue we've come across and we keep coming back to it," she says.

Cave enjoys mixing colours herself but adds "we're often using Edward Bulmer's plastic-free paints and right now rather like Farrow & Ball's Setting Plaster and Drop Cloth, with Light Blue having been a favourite for many years." Miller-Robinson marks Farrow & Ball's Pigeon and Hardwick White as incredible hues and Stiffkey Blue as fabulous, but says, "most of the time we go first to Edward Bulmer's paints. He is a master of historic colour knowledge and the paints have unique depth and tone. Currently I'm addicted to their softer, warmer tones such as Cinnamon, recently chosen for a dining room. But pink is my favourite colour above all others so there is always the ever-irresistible Cuisse de Nymphé Emue." Applause for Edward Bulmer's colours continues with von Stockhausen identifying another pink. "Among these superb paints my personal favourite is Jonquil, a peachy old-fashioned soft pink which is otherwise almost impossible to find," she says. ▶

**FAR LEFT** Bespoke possibilities are one of the joys of working with a furniture maker such as Matthew Cox. Cave Interiors was able to order his Pyramid table in a size that is perfect fit for a specific location.

**ABOVE LEFT** Flora Soames has brought fresh recognition to period floral wallpapers with brilliant colourings that demonstrate their exceptional quality, now lauded by a number of designers including Georgina Cave.

**LEFT** The appeal of wallpapers that reflect nature and its theme of growth is noted by Gavin Houghton who has hung Espalier by Pierre Frey in his own home and found it often requested by his clients.



Wallpaper sees Houghton reporting from his kitchen, where walls are papered in a Pierre Frey design. "It's called Espalier and I've loved it from day one," he says. "If ever clients come to my house and see it, they nearly always request it for their own homes. It is bold but also amazingly serene, I think because its leaves connect it to nature." The floral and leaf patterns in Marthe Armitage wallpapers are at the heart of their appeal to Leslie. "These are timeless patterns, classic and very modern at the same time." Gunter celebrates the textured wallcoverings by Phillip Jeffries, which come in a range of yarns and fibres from silk, raffia and hemp to grass and linen. "There's nothing quite as soft, luxurious or soothing as these in terms of wall treatments," she explains. Meanwhile, von Stockhausen keeps the whole house in focus when she "adores Robert Kime's small scale wallpapers for attics and smaller rooms that can often feel neglected."

The overlap between classic and contemporary is expertly summed up in the fabrics Cave uses time and again. "We love a Howe stripe," she says, "never bore of a Josef Frank 1920s to the 1950s print in brilliant colours, and a new collection we particularly like is from Flora Soames for her glorious use of timeless florals and an unexpected mix of colours." For Paolo Moschino, Aurora Green is a print rooted in tradition that remains in the Nicholas Haslam collection year after year because designers keep discovering its possibilities. Instant attractions for von Stockhausen were Pierre Frey's new collections, Réveries Orientales, inspired by antique ikats, paisleys and ottoman florals, and Maharani, where Indian references include abstract interpretations. A classic favourite for Gunter is the ingenious Abbey Stripe by Fermoie, "and we often choose Johnstons of Elgin cashmere for covering cushions - or bedspreads when a client feels like splurging."

Textiles also offer opportunities for a bespoke element and are one reason Henry Miller-Robinson keeps coming back to Soie de Lune for its hand-woven textiles. Designs can be modified, yarn chosen and, he says, "the ability to customise hand-dyed colours has made these weaves perfect for schemes as diverse among recent projects as a luxurious bespoke headboard, curtains for a study and feature backs for a set of dining chairs. The natural texture with refined traditional weaving techniques and patterns is sublime and the opportunities offered to the designer become limitless."

The two-way current between interior designers and their clients generates sparks that bring rooms to life. Clients gain access to furniture and finishes they are unlikely to have found without guidance and the interior designer keeps on evaluating furniture, colour and pattern for quality, visual relevance and craftsmanship. Interiors should always be a good fit for the people who live in them so the overlap between interior designed projects and the elements the same designers bring to their own homes should come as no surprise. Good choices are made for sharing. ■

**ABOVE RIGHT** Every piece made by Cox London promises an exceptional level of handwork, including the Man Ray glass mirror, a favourite of designer Irene Gunter.

**RIGHT** Finding mid-century Danish furniture is always an exciting prospect for Henry Miller-Robinson of K & H Design, whether Grete Jalk chairs for his own home or these Niels Møller dining chairs he sourced for a client.



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