

Q&A with Katie Glaister and Henry Miller-Robinson of K&H Design

K&H Design was founded in 2015 by Katie Glaister and Henry Miller-Robinson. Their West London based studio works on projects including private residences, hotels and developments in the UK and further afield.

Katie and Henry come from very different professional backgrounds and this breadth of experience influences their unique style. Henry comes from a commercial construction background and Katie covered sales, marketing and design of high-end residential developments. They both understand the importance of listening to the needs of the client and really understanding their requirements. They both believe in inspired design, practical thought and attention to detail.

We are thrilled to welcome them to the Top 5 Picks and to share their choices with you next week.

We enjoyed sitting down with them and learning more about their backgrounds, how they work together and what the future holds for K & H Design.



Katie and Henry, thank you for taking the time to talk with us. Firstly – tell us a little about your backgrounds and how you met?

It is important to stress that design creativity is at the forefront of our business because when we describe our professional backgrounds it can get forgotten!

Katie – I began a career in Financial Futures in London, New York, Chicago and Sydney. After my daughters were born, I returned to work, but this time building a career in prime residential property development.

Henry – I was always creative from a very young age, sketching, painting, needlework and weaving – readily turning my hand to anything creative. However, for my first career, I decided to take a more conventional opportunity and joined my family steel fabrication business. Whilst working there I attained a degree in Quantity Surveying and Cost Management and garnered fantastic experience in all facets of the commercial construction world. It was the successful sale of the business that allowed me to follow my lifelong passion for interior design.

We met at work, working in different capacities for another interior business. We both moved on but stayed in contact. It took for our 'dream clients' to find us before we co-founded K & H Design.

What prompted you to set up K & H Design?

We noticed that our combined range of skills and experience was unusual. We recognised that we could offer clients and the project team a very broad and thorough service. We both have always shared a love for homemaking, transparency and creativity. We got a break when we met a wonderful couple who had been searching for some time to find a design team, they both felt comfortable with.

It was a very large project with a not insubstantial budget. We were honoured that they put their trust in us. We formed K&H and over the next two years we worked with them and their children to expand and design every square centimetre of their home.

We are now the proud owners of their kitchen table and a sweet reference came through recently saying, "and please make sure to tell them that we are still friends". A privilege and a great opportunity.

It was this project that allowed us to form our values and DNA.



You obviously set up in partnership – what challenges and advantages has that presented?

Katie – So far none! We are 50:50 shareholders, we share the workload, we both work very hard and we both have different interests out of work. We don't count time or holiday or distractions, it works.

Henry – We have enormous respect for each other and share a determination to create an office environment where our team thrives.

Katie – Our office studio has no ego, it is energised but peaceful with lots of dogs to share the space.

How does the partnership work – do you work on all projects together or do you work with different clients in different ways?

Katie – Henry is the creative, and I am the energy. Whilst I am involved in every project and have strong relationships with all our clients, it is Henry who drives the design and works closely with the designers.

Henry – This is probably the success of the business – one founder with their head in the design and the other driving the business and challenging all aspects. Katie has her head firmly up, always looking for the next opportunity, whilst maintaining high standards of design and service from us all.

Do you have any advice for someone who is thinking about setting up their own design studio?

Henry – Embrace all aspects, not just the design element.

Katie – Don't over-promise. Be prepared for a lot of administration, the design will probably only be about 10 percent of your time.

Both – Above all focus on client service and building a trusting relationship.

Are there any projects you are especially proud to have in your portfolio?

All of them, we don't have a practice style. What we love is the challenge of designing an interior that is a true reflection of our client's personality. We create real homes. We think you can see this in the diversity of our portfolio.



Are there any “ones that got away” that you still can’t forget?

Not yet!

Any dream projects?

Katie – For me, it’s a prison. I want to work closely with a rehabilitation team to understand the impact of a prison’s environment on the inmate. As much as I enjoy working on prime properties with commensurate budgets, I think it is stimulating for all the team to explore practical and appropriate finishes at competitive price points. Good design is not necessarily budget dependent.

Henry – I’m particularly passionate about sustainability and upcycling in this fast-paced technological age of limited resources and homogenous commerce. And then there is the support needed for lost or endangered artisan skills that are incredibly complex, beautiful and truly unique. I dream of designing beautiful homes from recycled, upcycled and sustainable materials. Whilst reviving and supporting small local artisan projects globally, to ensure the world is working a level playing field.

How much do you engage with Social Media? How has its growing influence impacted your design process, if at all?

Katie – Such an interesting element for business growth – expensive but necessary for small businesses isn’t it. We invest in the photography of our work and we travel and source a lot. We understand the importance of Instagram. We post our imagery and travels to promote the ethos of our company and build our authority.

Henry – Social media is also a great source of inspiration for us and our clients in this visual world – it’s our job to weed out the more commercial fads and trends to ensure our clients attain finished projects that are timeless and are a reflection of them.

We are also quite opinionated. This makes the day to day process that much easier. We enjoy communicating through Instagram and find it an interesting forum for both our clients and suppliers. We see it as a three-dimensional dynamic.

How would each of you describe your personal styles?

We both love making real homes. We both love colour, texture and pattern. We take pleasure in re-purposing a loved piece; an old rug becomes a headboard; a mask becomes a curtain pelmet.

Katie – When it comes to true style, Henry undoubtedly has the edge. It was a tough call for him whether to develop a career in fashion or interiors.

Henry – Eclectic and often contradictory, I love decorative antiques and textiles, my walls and shelves are packed with art and ceramics collected from my travels. Georgian architecture with strong injections of colour, along with some fairly traditional furnishings, spiced up with repurposed textiles, are my ideals.

Fashion is similar, classical blazer one day, brogues with neon laces then trousers fashioned from a vintage silk kimono the next. Variety is the key! It’s an opportunity to express your mood in your interiors and what you wear and all of this sitting alongside an underlying desire for absolute minimalism – a paradox indeed.

Katie – I have a bit more of a thrown-together look. Shoes are always flat. I like to get around fast, from walking the dogs at 5 am to biking to meetings. I need clothes which are comfortable as well as smart. I also love wearing colour, I would define my style as never ostentatious, understated but also a little humorous.

What do you see as the biggest challenges currently facing the interiors industry?

There are currently so many opportunities with easy access to incredible artisans. We think these exciting things far outweigh challenges.

However, if asked we think:

1. Getting the fee right. If you want to deliver a truly bespoke, thoroughly considered design service is nigh on impossible to accurately set to a fixed fee. The challenge, therefore, is to build that relationship of trust and understanding and to work with clients who truly understand the design process.

2. There are so many talented interior designers always setting up and working independently. It is really hard to compete with these as we believe great design needs collaboration, and a well organised team to deliver efficiently and get the best value overall.
3. Concern about properties decreasing in value and impacting design decisions.
4. Copycat design – a bit like fast fashion, fast interiors are now everywhere, and it is very easy to go online and buy a look. Often cheap, poor quality overpriced, wasteful and not a true reflection of the client but hard to compete against.



On reflection each decade has a defining look, how do you think people will describe the current style of interiors in years to come?

Katie – I think we are now past the idea of defining looks. The world has changed significantly over the past ten years and people have become more visually stimulated with tablet phones, the internet and social media.

Henry – One of the upsides of this change in society is that it has created the confidence, support and forums for individuals to choose what they like rather than following a trend based on magazines, media or advertising.

So, we think there won't be defined looks attached to this period but more of a variety of looks and styles that hark back to lots of previous periods – some more pure interpretations and others more carefree and eclectic blends of style.

We do know for sure that this decade is out with beige and taupe and in with colour and texture; eclecticism over minimalisms and design is now being built on rather than just matched. And we won't forget the increasing need to recycle, recycle, recycle.

Are there any trends or styles that you think are due to make a comeback?

Lots, however, rather than them being rehashed the key will be to incorporate them with a modern twist.

Due to make a comeback:

- Coloured sanitaryware
- Lino
- Cork – flooring and furniture finishes.

- Chrome and stainless steel – back to basics
- Bauhaus, modernism, deco style.
- Timber kitchens – they have been off the scene for too long. We designed a fabulous Burr Walnut one!
- Arts and crafts – the movement – think this is here already but definitely to stay.



How did you choose your Top 5 Picks?

We think these items are great examples of design, beautifully decorative, functional, playful but they ultimately will provide intrigue and depth to our interiors.

However, there is so much to choose from so it really is hard to narrow down to five. Honestly, it should be the top 500 pics – it all depends on the circumstance and the brief.

What does the rest of 2019 hold for K & H Design? And for you both personally?

Katie – Continuing to provide individual and energised design solutions for our family of clients. We are developing some product lines which will add another tier of interest to our offering. Make time to build my kitchen extension and walk through the Ethiopian mountains.

Henry – Delivering fabulous individual homes for our clients is first and foremost. Additionally, I am hoping to finally curate the knowledge garnered from the last 20+ years of travel and meeting artisans globally, into the start of our product lines. I need to visit a country beginning with 'G' as part of our Alphabet tour – but just can't decide between Guatemala, Georgia or Greece... Refurbish an unloved converted hayloft at my home in Derbyshire.