

## DESIGNER DIRECTIONS

### THE RETURN TO CRAFTSMANSHIP

by Caroline Shamash



“INTERIOR DESIGN IS SUCH A COMPETITIVE industry that it can be the little things that make all the difference. What do I mean by ‘little’? I mean those sparks of genius – the beading on a cushion, the lustre of a wall finish, the beaten metal texture on a copper repousse cabinet – that set one interior apart from another.

After all, there are lots of talented designers who can create stylish interior schemes and deftly put together everything from paint and plaster effects to cushions and curtains, but what makes one interior more special than another is often difficult to define.

I would suggest that those who take a more artisanal approach are more likely to attract prestige clients. I’ve noticed lately amongst the many interior designers that I source art and design for that there is a growing interest in craftsmanship; not just because it’s a way of offering original focal points in a room, but because artisan made pieces give a sense of quality as well as the illusion of layering that you just don’t get from manufactured accessories.



Of course, such works take much longer to make and obtain but they are ultimately longer lasting as objects and less vulnerable to the whims of fashion. Chinese-American artist Robert Kuo creates furniture, vases and sculptures which he believes “will look just as good in a hundred years as they do now”.

Such perfectionism – both aesthetically and physically – is very labour intensive; Kuo’s lacquer wares often require 60 layers, each layer needing two to three days to cure, to get the sheen exactly right.

Without a doubt, high net-worth clients do not want interiors that resemble anybody else’s. It’s not that they are seeking to be eccentric or out of sync with trends, but they want luxury that is entirely customised to their tastes and lifestyles. There may be a subtle absorbing of fashion, but no-one with any real taste wants their paint colour to define the year in which they had a property made over.

“Jewellery for the house” is how German designer and maker Tillmann Koehn describes the hugely diverse bespoke pieces he creates for his clients. The antithesis of factory made, each and every piece is an architectural solution rather than pure decoration. Even a door handle will have a lot of design in it. It is this well considered approach that you get from working with artisans. “I don’t offer a website or a brochure,” explains Tillmann, “because I want clients and their interior designers to use my skills to develop new ideas rather than choosing something they’ve seen.”

Working with craftspeople also has the advantage that though they are well versed in historical techniques, such designer-makers do not necessarily want to create pastiches of antiques; invariably they are forward looking uber-creative individuals who can easily offer a fresh, contemporary spin on an old idea.

Take a chandelier; this style of light fitting is one of the most stunning focal points in a room, but although the sparkle of crystal is appealing, not all homeowners want the ornate confections their grandparents might have admired. Go though to the Milan workshop of cutting-edge lighting designers Lolli e Memmoli and you’ll find breathtaking centerpieces that easily fill large spaces, but which are strikingly modern.

There are many other examples across all the artistic disciplines that prove how craftsmanship is flourishing. I really do feel that it’s an exciting time to be in interior design and that if we can harness the huge talent that exists – globally and in the UK – all our homes will be that much more interesting.”

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