



Interesting, & Inspiring Witty

Harriet Anstruther tells *JOSEPHINE O'DONOGHUE* about her quirky interior style, exciting client projects and what she loves about her local area



My Background

I studied fine art in London before going into fashion and textiles, selling my collection of printed silk scarves worldwide through nearly 300 stores including Barneys in New York, Joyce in Hong Kong and Harvey Nichols, Harrods, Fortnum & Mason and Browns in London. I've worked in property refurbishment and design since 1999 but I retrained at the Inchtald School of Design prior to launching my current architectural Interior Studio in 2011.

My Style

I like to mix old and new and to keep things interesting, inspiring and witty. My favourite is a Queen Anne or Georgian house; these have perfect proportions, lots of light, fantastic material and are all built to last with immense integrity and glamour.

The style of my own home reflects those who live in it, namely my husband Henry Bourne (a photographer), my daughter Celestia (a student) and my two dogs Pearl and Elvis. It's very light and contemporary in feel, although the house dates from the 1840s. Everything in it tells a story and has personal significance. I wanted the architecture to speak for itself so I have mostly left windows without pelmets and curtains and have used shutters and blinds where possible. My personal highlight is the cloakroom loo which has a fire-bucket inscribed with George VI coat of arms, which I turned into a hand-basin. The red against the black and white Fornasetti wallpaper amuses and delights me every time I see it.

My Motivation

Ab Rogers defines how I feel very well when he says that "interior design occupies a unique position, combining the functional and the inspirational, the spatial and the object, the abstract and the concrete – all at a human scale. It has the potential to alter and radically improve the way we work, shop, relax, learn, live and die; it is a powerful commercial, political and social tool. At its best, it respects function and imagination, innovation, the latest technology and an appreciation and respect for poetry and craft." Ab is head of the Interior Design MA at the RCA where I'm a visiting tutor.

My Commissions

Clients often need to see the whole picture before they realise the potential of an idea they hadn't previously

considered. By the time a client comes to me they have seen my work and know my style. I like clients with a sense of humour and a love of expert craft and detail.

One always hopes to surprise a client by giving them more than they thought they'd get – surpassing their expectations – but that doesn't necessarily mean re-inventing the wheel. The design of an interior or landscape naturally evolves as you get to know the client, whether it's a commercial or residential job. Crucially it's important to own up to an idea you may have had initially that just doesn't work. If you're not happy, they certainly won't be.

My Local Area

I've pretty much always lived in South Kensington. I've noticed it getting fancier but I also enjoy the French and Polish community life. The area certainly makes a difference in how I feel in the house; it is an area steeped in creativity. I sit on the Development Advisory Board at the V&A and it is a terrific source of inspiration, as are the people that frequent the area; we are surrounded by students from the Royal College of Music, Imperial College and the RCA. I'm also a director of Thurloe Square Gardens, one of the only private squares to allow ball-games, bikes and dogs, and my favourite spot for lunch is Tombo nearby. I also work in an advisory capacity for the Brompton Design District, which pulls together all the design threads in the neighbourhood and I consult for the Design Museum, which is due to move into what was the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington High Street. ■

Harriet's new book on interior design is due for release in October 2014 (Clearview Books Ltd); harrietanstruther.com

