

MAKING *space*



Three top London-based interior designers reveal their very different secrets to success, starting with rising star Sophie Ashby

WORDS: CHARLOTTE MCMANUS **PICTURES:** KALPESH LATHIGRA

Qualified in both art history and interior design, Sophie Ashby launched her west London-based agency just four years ago at the remarkable age of 25. Despite her years, Ashby is not a designer to be swayed by passing trends: her passions lie in art, antiques and objects suffused in nostalgia.

“We try to introduce soulfulness to interiors, creating spaces with a strong sense of ‘home’ — cosy and calm, surrounded by things that mean something to the owner,” she says. “It’s an individual’s quirks that make an interior stand out: old cameras, your three-year-old’s drawings, your Dad’s record player, ceramics picked up on a trip abroad... a home should be full of things that make you feel something, reminding you of a moment in time.”

Alongside a manager, Studio Ashby’s 13-strong team mainly consists of designers at varying experience levels. When in the office, Ashby swings from desk to desk on a green velvet stool, ensuring she is involved in all stages of a project. Commissions are diverse, running the gamut from private residences and high-end restaurants to luxury hotels. Highlights include elegantly comfortable dwellings in Mayfair and Battersea, the fully refurbished Robertson Small Hotel in South Africa and Ikoyi, a West African restaurant in St James decorated with art by Oluseye and ceramics by artisans Jess Joslin and Owen Wall. Throughout much of her work, Ashby explores experiments with contrast, juxtaposing the then and now, natural and manmade, minimalist with maximalist. Her art history training often comes through, where the mood or tones of a painting or sculpture might leave their mark on a space.

“I have a real love of old things — they are unique,” she explains. “We find special

items from dealers and antique or flea markets, as well as on my travels. I also like cool independent shops, such as The New Craftsmen in Mayfair, and there are some amazing online resources, such as 1stdibs, for one-of-a-kind pieces. As a result of my heritage, my work often has a subtle South African undercurrent — we work with makers and artists there too.”

Ashby is expanding her repertoire with shoppable products. Collaborating with British artisans, the Peninsula Collection — born from her designs for up-and-coming Greenwich Peninsula residential development — encompasses covetable pieces such as ceramic homeware. She is also the first British interior designer to join the ranks of prestigious online platform The Invisible Collection.

“I do my best to create beauty and happiness for people,” she says. “You shouldn’t take your home too seriously — it should give the impression that the owner has just walked out of the room, rather than feeling contrived.”

studioashby.com

THIS PAGE: a moodboard in Ashby’s London studio. **OPPOSITE:** Ashby’s design approach is rooted in art, antiques and objects suffused in nostalgia





“My goal is to create interiors that sit effortlessly with their surroundings”

From houses in the Scottish Highlands to Television Centre in London, Suzy Hoodless has a signature style that suits a diverse range of clients

Few could deny that Suzy Hoodless has strong instincts when it comes to interior design. Following successful stints at design-led titles *Wallpaper** and *House & Garden*, Hoodless left the world of publishing to set up her eponymous consultancy, which is now in its 18th year.

“After creating so many interiors for photo shoots, I wanted to create homes that wouldn’t be dismantled hours later,” she explains. “My first client wanted me to help with her Notting Hill flat, so I used my extensive contacts to buy interesting furniture from designers.”

In demand both in the UK and overseas, Hoodless is equally at home on a large-scale commercial project as she is on a private residence. High-profile commissions range from The Hospital members’ club to Working Title Films’ HQ and Soho House Group’s Hoxton Grill restaurant, in and among luxurious residential spaces in areas including

THIS PAGE: a design detail at Television Centre, where Hoodless has been recruited as official creative consultant. OPPOSITE: Hoodless takes pride in her diverse portfolio, which she credits to the tailor-made service it offers

CREATIVE



Kensington, Barbados and the Scottish Highlands. However, the real jewel in Hoodless’s crown is the on-going transformation of Television Centre in west London, for which the agency has been recruited as official creative consultant. Previously the famous BBC building, its new residential manifestation showcases the crème de la crème of contemporary European design while retaining a hint of the site’s 1950s roots.

Hoodless’s signature style combines tasteful aesthetics with an undercurrent of play, where colours pop in unexpected places and eclectic combinations of material and style abound. That said, she takes pride in the diverseness of her company’s portfolio, which she puts down to the expressly tailor-made service it offers. Her team goes to great lengths to pinpoint a client’s vision for a space, maintaining a creative rapport over a series of meetings to establish such aspects as where the person is from, where they like to travel, if they entertain, whether they cook often, and so on down to the smallest detail, such as the music they enjoy listening to. Carefully balancing inspired design vision with realistic consideration of budget and timeline, Hoodless says the ultimate goal is to create inviting spaces that completely satisfy the needs of the end user.

“Every project looks and feels unique, as every client is unique. That’s the dream — I love the mix. A space needs a confident hand and honed eye — it also needs a rhythm. My goal is to create interiors that sit effortlessly in their surroundings.” suzyhoodless.com

By not following trends and being true to the space, Tara Bernerd has built up a large client list that includes luxury hotels across the globe

PICTURES: JASON ALDEN/ADRIAN GAUT

Before forging a path in interiors, Tara Bernerd describes her career trajectory as “a little unconventional”, having experimented with different arts from an early age — including a stint at film school — before settling on design. Having cut her teeth at leading studio YOO alongside industry bigwigs John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck, Bernerd established her own interior architectural practice in 2002.

“As a designer, you have the ability to influence how someone will experience a space,” she says. “Seeing how we can enhance an environment with our designs is always a thrill — each project is so different.”

Based in Belgravia, Bernerd’s team of 25 consists of interior architects and designers, in addition to an in-house CGI team. The agency operates on a truly global scale. Of late, only one project was located in the UK: The Principal London in Bloomsbury, which saw the former Hotel Russell completely transformed with 370 remodelled bedrooms and suites, as well as reception, lobbies and a new-look Palm Court. Other commissions include a resort in Mexico featuring entirely locally sourced furniture, a deluxe villa in Ibiza and multiple hotels in Los Angeles, in addition to creating the design DNA for a new hotel brand in Japan.

As might be guessed, upmarket hotel design is Bernerd’s forte, having worked on an assortment of prestigious locations including the Four Seasons in Fort Lauderdale, SIXTY SoHo in



New York and The Hari in Hong Kong. Other projects range from restaurants and bars — Marco Grill, The Natural Kitchen — to residential commissions and even luxury yachts.

She describes her approach as a “layered process”, starting with concept and layout before progressing to palettes and the design story spec. From there, additional “layers” are factored in, from the interior fabrics and furniture up until finishing details, such as books and vases. By taking note of the local culture, heritage, climate and the ultimate purpose of a space, Bernerd believes that a project will fully embrace the character and identity of its setting. “The most important aspect of design is being true to the space and seeking authentic components,” she says. “We don’t follow trends, so our projects possess a certain timeless quality, although aesthetically there is a bold, industrial edge present in most of our work and we tend to incorporate architectural materials internally.”

On the job, go-to brands include London-based House of Eroju for ironmongery and Tibor for fabrics. However, in Bernerd’s own home, rooms are decorated with chunky pieces of Murano glass in smoky shades, along with artwork by close friend Harland Miller.

Her tips on making an interior truly special? “Art is a great way to elevate a space. Traditional rooms take modern art and modern rooms can work with older-style paintings. Be eclectic and mix it up.”

tarabernerd.com

LEFT AND TOP: interiors from SIXTY SoHo, one of the prestigious hotels Bernerd has designed. OPPOSITE: Bernerd believes that a project will fully embrace the character and identity of its setting by taking note of the ultimate purpose of a space



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