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DESIGN



LIVING ROOMS

International interior designer Manuela Hamillford can turn any property into a modern masterpiece. The founder of Hamillford Design tells us how UK style compares to our overseas neighbours and how to make more from minimalism

Words: Judy Cogan

Manuela Hamillford has excelled in luxury home furnishings and interiors for decades. From revamping listed London homes and New York brownstones to recreating English country estates in Italy, she's the person to have on speed dial when renovating a home. Her London-based design studio Hamillford Design, open since 2000, offers services in design, architecture and renovation with a signature touch of elegance and warmth. The team is currently juggling 12 projects including a large house in Majorca and a property in Windsor that's being transformed into a replica castle.

"We're always busy and every project is

completely different," Manuela says. "The house in Majorca is in-keeping with a traditional Spanish look but, in Italy, the client wants a quintessentially English estate overlooking a vineyard, which is absolutely stunning."

Manuela approaches each project with an experienced eye in both furnishings and interior design and a clear vision of what her client wants. "I will meet them and get a feel for their remit and the space itself. Projects like the replica castle in Windsor are just crazy, but we've also done really quick 12-week turnarounds of central London flats, which are really fun and always challenge our creativity. It's absolutely about making a smaller place sparkle like a jewel."

OCEANS APART

Manuela notes the differences in client demands between the US and UK. Across the pond everything is on a much larger scale, she explains.

"Americans love anything oversized. Houses in the Hamptons tend to be second homes by the beach; the enormous scale of them gives us scope to introduce beautiful bespoke furniture. We've brought in 4m-long dining tables made to order by local joiners."

In contrast, her British clients lean into their lifestyle needs. "The properties we work on in the Cotswolds are often second homes, too, but they are driven by lifestyle," she explains. "You have the muddy shoes, the dogs and kids running around, 20 bikes outside and a crowded boot room. These houses tend to be massive, with 4m-high fireplaces and enormous bunk beds that sleep 10 children."

A particularly memorable and challenging renovation was at West Lodge, a 9,000sq ft grade-two listed building on the Thames River in Hammersmith, London.

"It's a huge sprawling house and we faced several restrictions with it being listed," she says. "We had a turret we had to keep intact, and certain trees aged over 100 years old that couldn't be touched – all while doing a major refurbishment."

Working on such an old house with a modern design vision isn't always easy. "We wanted to move the kitchen into one of two large sitting rooms to create a much bigger space overlooking the Thames," she recalls. "We had it all drawn up and it didn't even occur to us to ask for planning permission. And then, of course, the architect said 'no' because it's listed, so we had to keep the sitting room as a sitting room. That was an interesting project."

A modern classic:
Grade-II listed residence
Westcott Lodge is
transformed into a stylish
oasis (previous and this
page's colourful, informal
dining at the Bohemian
Bretel, Lakes by Yoo
topposite)





DESIGN

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TRUE COLOURS

When it comes to adding colour to a home, Mamula advises a 'less is more' approach. 'Colour is great, but I'm not a fan of adding it everywhere all at once. It can be garish and hard to live with and it expires quickly. The overall design of a house must be cohesive.'

A mistake many of her clients make is to seek interior design inspiration from their favourite luxury hotels. 'It's easy to confuse a weekend at Soko farmhouse with a place you can actually live in. Hotels are gorgeous, but I emphasise the question: could you actually live with such a bold design day in, day out? Can you imagine yourself waking up in this room every day and drinking your morning coffee? I normally take what they want and deliver a cleaner version.'

Mamula relies heavily on a team of loyal suppliers to get things done. 'They come into the studio to show us the newest wallpaper styles, paint colours and beautiful fabrics. As a team we're constantly thinking up ways to channel them into a really contemporary look that's inspiring and exciting.'

A major project for the studio was working on Lakes by Yoo, a new exclusive 850-acre luxury housing estate in the Cotswolds overlooking stunning lakes. The cabins, apartments and houses on the estate were the perfect blank canvas for Mamula.

'From the very beginning, my team was on the ground working out every detail. We started with the colour of the window frames, hinges and locks and built it up from there. They are very big spaces, so it takes a lot of work to make them feel cosy and warm.'

Mamula is constantly trying to find a balance between creating a functional space her clients can live in while staying ahead of the latest interior trends and lifestyle shifts. A major shift in recent years has been a return to the kitchen as the heart of the home.

'Across all the projects we're working on, people are spending a lot of money on kitchens,' she says. 'It's the heart of the home and everything from the colour of the tiles to hot water tap fixtures are important. The mid-century look is very strong right now.'

The rise in working from home has also impacted interior design with work spaces a priority, but the biggest shift can be found elsewhere. 'Children's bedrooms have changed dramatically. Kids now want gaming areas and a separate place to study. Girls want a theatrical room where they can get dressed up and make videos to post on TikTok.'

'It's all changing, no two projects are ever the same,' says Mamula, who, it seems, wouldn't have it any other way. hannah@jordanmama.com

Back to nature: Natural materials make a statement at the Bohemian Retreat, Lakes by Yoo (this page)