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DESIGNS ON YOUR HOME

by Lisa Harrison

Sarah Sweet

OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS, THE SENSE OF WHAT is 'high end design' and what is 'craft' has become increasingly blurred. The term 'designer-maker' has become more often used by craftspeople, keen to kick the long-held misapprehension that craft means fluffy and home-made – and not necessarily in a good way!

As more and more high end consumers are looking for uniqueness in their homes, so too have interior designers had to look not just at the basic FF&E (furniture, fixtures & equipment) requirement for a brief, but have also had to source more individual pieces of 'home art' for their clients, looking for the next Ron Arad, Helen Amy Murray or Tom Dixon.

Exhibitions like Origin, individual urban galleries, pop-ups and events like the London Design Festival and Milan's Salone del Mobile have all contributed to this trend in consumers expecting high end unique designs to be part of the overall design scheme offered by interior designers, who are in turn being required to themselves find, source and commission new and up-and-coming designer-makers to create bespoke pieces for the home. This is the case across all the applied art disciplines, from textiles – be it cushions, throws, curtains and even flooring – to ceramics in tabletop and accessories, metals and glass as well as larger furniture pieces.

This is of course no new thing – the Arts and Crafts movement strove to put philanthropic, art loving (and wealthy) customers together with craftspeople by merging art and business through private commissions, galleries and the first 'arts' shop window, Liberty.

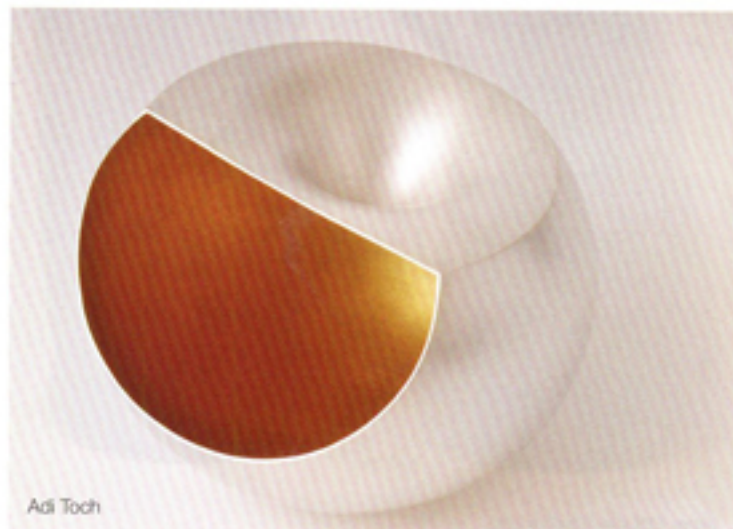
Providing these artistic and unique products for the home, made from honest materials, and often using traditional craft techniques, became desirable for the philanthropist-about-town.

However whilst the late 19th century/early 20th century saw an increased love of the bespoke in interior design, this love of 'the original' and 'the hand-made' waned from the mid 20th century. The production line and the factory-made became more desirable for consumers looking for the ultimate in modernity – mass production became the bywords for progress, in everything from cars to food to our homes.

Whilst the democratisation of style is no bad thing, the luxury consumer has, over the past two decades, returned in search of traditional craftsmanship and the providence that comes with it. New patrons of the applied arts are appearing in the market, allowing designers to once again become more experimental, daring and witty in their work.



Geraldine Larkin



Adi Toch

Creativity has also been encouraged by the new and exciting retail channels that have emerged. The rise of the internet, and specialist sites where the work of designer-makers is not only curated but sold under a third party banner, means that designers who wish to concentrate on design and creativity, rather than managing the business side of getting products to market, can be allowed to do just that – design and make, whilst commercial specialists deal with the rest... a win win situation!

Glass designer Sam Sweet's work is just one example of this contemporary renaissance that has begun to emerge – taking the humble milk bottle, such a common everyday household item, Sam has subverted this most democratic of iconic designs, and has re-created it in a range of cut crystal designs. Incorporating delicate motifs such as flowers and blades of grass, the designer obscures the boundaries between high end and mass market design.

Someone else who also shows a sense of fun in their work is the silverware designer Sian Matthews; her silver doilies take the most commonplace paper decoration, the paper doily, and completely turn it on its head by transferring the design into silver. Her silver jugs with wings again reveal a sweet and subtle visual twist. Ryan Mclean's Splash Tray is yet another visual interplay of novel ideas – freezing the moment of a splash in a solid silver tray with the drop as the handle.

In a country where traditional skills were being overlooked and undervalued, another positive element within this new sense of an age of patronage, is that crafts skills are being re-discovered and adapted for new audiences – from glass blowing to verre églomisé, metal work to ceramic art, millinery to weaving – the modern designer-maker is helping to ensure these ancient skills remain alive.



Janet Stahelin Edmondson



Jane Dornier



Emma Clegg

Rather than buying from large corporations, consumers – and not just the wealthy – are choosing to source pieces for their homes or as gifts from a designer whose story they can tell. They want to know where the designer is based, gain insight into their style, how they work and their techniques, where they studied and where the pieces are made and from what materials. All of these questions are becoming increasingly as important as “Do I like this?” – whether it's a milk jug or a table centrepiece, consumers are attaching a new sense of importance to the story of their purchase and a belief that they can and should be supporting design talent.

As traditional craft-based manufacturing industry in the UK has declined, it is these very designers that are (often) keeping skills such as weaving and ceramic design alive in this country. I think it's fantastic that these days not only can we often source our food from a growing number of local organic farmers and producers, but so too can we also find the best of British design, at work in workshops and studios – designers creating special and unique pieces for us to love and cherish.

Emma Clegg is a designer who uses beautiful porcelain floral appliqué detailing on everyday kitchen items such as teapots and jugs. She plays with the fragility of the flower in a range that highlights the beauty and elegance of her pieces; her use of porcelain as the material of choice results in robust and functional items. Janet Stahelin Edmondson is another designer who exploits porcelain, creating large vases, bowls and jugs that are stamped with textile style patterns before the firing process so the item seems to deny its own natural material rigidity.

Many of us want to keep craft skills alive in the UK – we feel that one of our best national assets is our creativity and dedication to craftsmanship. Let's keep it authentic by supporting and celebrating our designer-makers.

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