

Mix and match

Wendy Flynn meets top interior designer Ali Foulds, who explains the psychology behind her personalised service





Being an interior designer, you need to have a combination of skills – you need to probe like a detective, ask questions like a journalist and have a psychologist’s understanding of what your client likes. People employing the services of an interior designer are often short of time or firm ideas, and they need someone who can cut to the chase and offer them an interior design plan that is just right for them.

Ali Foulds, who has been running her own design business near Evesham for 16 years, has it down to a fine art. She has learnt that you can never stereotype someone who walks through the door of the showroom. That’s the hallmark of a successful interior designer.

“There are several key questions you need to ask,” she tells me, laughingly adding that the questions are a trade secret and she won’t divulge them. But she does reveal that half the battle is knowing what people don’t like.

“My husband is amazed that I can find a fabric someone likes in a matter of minutes, but it is only by knowing the right questions to ask.”

I put her to the test, challenging her to pick a design that she thinks I would like in my living room... and she does, almost instantly. We have been looking at a file of pictures showcasing continuing and emerging trends for 2018, and she hones them down and picks two for me to look at.

“I think you would like restful,” she decides, immediately eliminating the darker tones or more strident styling, before making her selection. The light-filled room she shows me has blues and greys and muted tones with Sanderson curtain fabrics, and accent cushions on the sofa with a splash of mustard. The second room has neutral colours with the muted green and yellow. I could happily live in both.

Ali has a pragmatic approach to interior design and incorporates trends rather than being a slave to whatever is in fashion.

“Interior trends are very much like the catwalk. You wouldn’t necessarily wear the clothes you see, but the ideas are diluted down and incorporated into something that is more wearable.

“This is middle England after all,” she says. “People don’t want things that are too blingy, or glossy or linear. In the Cotswolds there is a more relaxed style – a lovely mix of contemporary and country, or traditional with a modern twist. It is very typical of what we do. Most of our fabrics and wallpaper are British.”

Even Londoners who have second homes in the Cotswolds do not necessarily want the same



style of interior design they have in their London residence. “People want to buy into the area and they tend to prefer a more traditional/country scheme with a few quirky elements. When they are here they want the space to feel relaxed and different.”

For Ali, it is not what is in vogue that is important but what the client likes and what they will find comfortable to live with.

Some of the sofas in the photos we are looking at might look stylish, but one senses she would not recommend them to her clients. However good it looks in theory, no-one wants to sit on a ‘brick hard’ sofa to relax. We all need a sofa that is comfortable to sink into at the end of a long day, and feel like it loves you back.

“Every client has different taste and every house is different. In any case, it is difficult to say what is actually in vogue at the moment because there are so many different themes and one style will not suit everyone,” says Ali.

The eclectic look incorporates the retro seventies look – the velvets, sequins and high gloss look, mixed with more traditional designs like William Morris which have been updated for a modern era.

The Pure Collection by Morris & Co., in greys and muted tones, are a continuing theme, but Ali thinks that mustard colours will be popular in 2018. Zoffany has just launched new paint colour

‘Tiger’s Eye’ and those saffron and mustard tones are featuring in fabrics and soft furnishings too, sometimes as the dominant colour, but more often as a highlight.

In the 16 years since Ali started her business she has seen big changes. “Styles come and go, but we have seen a lot of technological improvements. Embroidery is much more prolific now and printing is better. When digital print first came out it was dreadful, but now you can have anything digitally printed. With the technical improvements, there are now some fabulous options in wallpaper and fabrics that draw on traditional designs but have been reinvented using these techniques.”

Morris & Co’s Pure Net Ceiling Embroidery fabric has a combination of couching and satin stitch embroidery on fabric, creating an exquisite interpretation of Morris’ original ceiling paper design which dates back to 1895. Included within this collection, Morris’ most famous design, Strawberry Thief, has been transformed in neutral colours with a subtle glitter effect of crystals on wallpaper – perfect for picking up the light.

“This is just stunning,” she says, and shows me another statement wallpaper, by Zoffany, with a hint of metallic which would transform a dull room into something extraordinary. Ali clearly loves her work. She was always ‘arty’ growing up

and interior design was “not considered a proper job” so she chose a more conventional career – marketing and account management for blue chip companies, before going back to college to retrain as an interior designer.

“I was breaking free, going back to doing something I loved,” she says.

In 2001 she opened her showroom at the Blackminster Business Park and says “I haven’t looked back since”. Today she has a team of three working with her – Nicky Robbins, also an interior designer, and Lisa Vye, who runs the office and is ‘the glue that keeps us all together’.

Her husband Andrew manages the accounts, leaving Ali to focus on what she does best – designing interiors for clients.

Ali Foulds’ fabric library stocks collections from Sanderson, Morris & Co, Zoffany, Colefax & Fowler, Harlequin, Scion, GP & J Baker, Mulberry Home, Nina Campbell, Jane Churchill, Art of the Loom, James Hare Silks, Osborne & Little, Voyage, Linwood, Blendworth, Designers Guild, Lewis and Wood, and she is an independent stockist of Farrow and Ball paints and wallpapers.

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