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WHAT MAKES A HOME

MIKE FISHER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER OF STUDIO INDIGO, SHARES HIS IDEAS ON DESIGNS FOR DINING AND LIVING IN THE CONTEMPORARY HOME



AS PART OF THE DINING AND LIVING FEATURE, WE ASK, HOW DESIGNERS 'DESIGN' SPACES FOR THEMSELVES WHEN CONSIDERING LIVING AND DINING ENVIRONMENTS. MIKE FISHER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER OF STUDIO INDIGO IS ABLE TO PROVIDE SOME INSIGHT INTO THIS WORLD THROUGH AN ENGAGING LOOK AT THE TRADITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THESE ROOMS AND THE FUNDAMENTALS THAT DRIVE CLIENT NEEDS.

HOW EASY/CHALLENGING IS IT TO CREATE THE ULTIMATE LIVING AND DINING SPACES?

Some physical and practical constraints are inevitable and even if you are starting from scratch, the client's requirements will shape a project – but that is as it should be. However beautiful a design for a living or dining space may be, it is only successful if the client likes it.

WHAT IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES DO YOU APPLY

WHEN DESIGNING THESE SPACES?

I start by thinking about the volume, space and layout. Even in an existing room, it is important to think about whether the flow is practical. Great architects like Sir John Soane have taught us a huge amount about proportion and balance as well as the importance of light. If an area is dark, I try to introduce more daylight by installing glass doors, roof lanterns or some other form of glazing. Once you have got the basics sorted, you can then think about materials, colours, textures and how to inject some originality and humour.

HOW DOES DESIGNING FOR YOUR OWN HOME HELP TO INFORM YOUR CHOICES FOR CLIENTS?

Designing for myself allows me to experiment more and enjoy testing new ideas. I am lucky as I live in the same kind of houses as my clients do and inhabit the same world, so I know what motivates them and how they live their lives. For example, in my London home I have a lift, which is

able to recognise my dogs (which have been chipped) so it can take them up to the winter garden on the top floor. That may sound OTT but it saves me calling them, getting them into the lift, taking them up there and then coming all the way down again.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO KNOW FROM THE CLIENT WHEN BEGINNING A PROJECT IN A DINING OR LIVING AREA?

Before I start any project, I like to understand as much as possible about the client, from their typical working week to their sense of humour. For a dining room, I like to know about where and when they usually eat, their tastes in food, how often they entertain formally and informally and whether they like to cook. Asking about a person's favourite restaurants often provides an insight into the sort of atmosphere they enjoy as well as the food they like. For a living area, you need to know whether the client wants a space for the family to relax in or



a room suited to entertaining. The way in which dining and living rooms will be used can determine everything from the importance of accessing the garden, for summer parties, to installing a second catering kitchen near the dining area.

HOW HAS THE WAY WE LIVE NOW, CHANGED HOW YOU APPROACH A DESIGN PROJECT WITH THESE REQUIREMENTS?

Although there has been a shift towards informality over the last 20 years, culture and geography still play a huge part in determining a client's priorities. Billionaire European clients often choose to live in a very relaxed way. In other parts of the world people tend to want similarly comfortable spaces but with the addition of separate and very large spaces for entertaining. It is only our Eastern clients who continue to focus on the formal rooms as they still have hundreds of servants – in some cases, quite literally. We have been asked to design entertaining spaces for 200 guests.

Many of our clients love spending time at home, but others eat out the whole time, travel a great deal and spend a lot of time in hotels or other properties. For some, 'home' may be little more than a bed! Many people now have no desire for a dining room at all, unless they use it for a study or library, and kitchens can be more like a grand bar with a state-of-the-art espresso machine in which breakfast and the odd snack is occasionally eaten. Larger houses still have formal drawing rooms but, in general, living rooms tend to be

geared to friends and family; they have become much more relaxed and comfortable.

WHEN COMBINING FUNCTIONALITY, PRACTICALITY, BUDGET, COMFORT AND STYLE, HOW DO YOU PRIORITISE AND HOW DO YOU COMPROMISE WHEN NEEDED?

Function, practicality and comfort come first, you have to have all three. Having a tighter budget makes the process harder for a designer and it requires more imagination. Creating a good contemporary scheme is now much more expensive than creating a more traditional design. Those on a budget should visit auctions and the declining number of brown furniture antique shops. Antiques can be great value and when you mix them with some well-chosen contemporary pieces the result can still look very stylish.

HAVING DESIGNED YOUR OWN HOME, WHAT ADVICE DO YOU SHARE WITH CLIENTS WHEN AT THE EARLY STAGES OF DESIGN?

Forget about the fluffy bits and start with the structure and the space, the bones. Get those right and everything else will fall into place and life will be much easier. Think about how each member of your family will use an area and come up with your own solutions. Even if you are using a designer, your thoughts will still provide an invaluable steer and they will also help to ensure that the result is specific and original to you. While it is useful to look at, and be inspired by, other people's work, do not

copy it too much or the room will feel less personal to you, lack soul and probably fail to suit your needs.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNT FROM DESIGNING YOUR OWN HOME IN THIS WAY?

I always aim for style, not fashion. Style is timeless, while fashions fade and can look dated very quickly. If a room is not practical and comfortable you will end up hating it and, ultimately, not using it however striking it may be. People are often very keen on high ceilings and big rooms but while they may be great for entertaining, they make it much more difficult to create a homely and comfortable space to relax in.

WHAT DO YOU PREDICT WILL BE THE TOP TRENDS IN DINING AND LIVING FOR 2017?

Following Brexit, I think people will be tightening their belts and be more economical. That may lead to a renewed appreciation of traditional furniture. I hope so, as it's a bargain, comfortable and practical. Many of the most beautiful rooms tend to be decorated with relatively strong colours rather than neutrals, which can often be dull and depressing. I think Instagram and Pinterest are encouraging people to be more adventurous so expect bolder colours. The trend for using different textures and new materials will probably continue as more and more people are striving to create homes which are unique and reflect their own identity.

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