



# HOMES & GARDENS®

The art of luxury

NOVEMBER 2021

## COMMISSIONING BESPOKE FURNITURE

WE DELVE INTO THE DETAIL OF HOW AND WHY TO INCORPORATE  
ONE-OFF ORIGINAL PIECES INTO YOUR HOME

**LIKE** a tailored Savile Row suit, a bespoke piece of furniture should fit perfectly, function beautifully and look fantastic: some go as far as to dub it 'interior couture'. Like their catwalk counterparts, artisan-designed solutions are an investment, but they offer standout and esoteric results.

Commissioning a bespoke piece of furniture is a chance to have something completely individual, tailored to your tastes as well as helping to support a rich tradition of furniture design and craftsmanship.

**BOUNTIFUL BENEFITS** Commissioning bespoke items can appeal to those who don't want recognisable items in their houses. 'It can answer design challenges, too,' says Mike Fisher, founder and creative director of Studio Indigo. 'Sometimes it's simply impossible to find the right piece at the right price, finish or scale – going bespoke allows us to create the perfect piece.'

But it also attracts those who like the idea of supporting the arts and craftsmanship, as well as the satisfaction of owning an original piece that will endure. 'There's a growing awareness of sustainability and things made with integrity that will be passed down the generations,' says Bruce Hodgson of Somerset-based bespoke joinery firm Artichoke.

**ESTABLISHING TASTE** 'Taste is incredibly personal so you can't make mistakes,' says Yelena Ford, managing director of The New Craftsmen, a Mayfair gallery showcasing many of the most exciting craftspeople in the UK. 'Taking the misnomer of "good taste" out of the equation can be a vital first step.'

And looking at interiors magazines, both those of today and ones that were printed around the time of childhood, to see if anything evokes an emotional response, is another good tip.

**CHOOSING THE MAKER** Look at Instagram for inspiration. Lots of makers don't have

established websites with high Google rankings but can be found more easily on social media. Don't forget to ask around, too – word of mouth is very powerful, and take a look at past commissions. If possible, try and meet the maker. Chemistry and trust are so important, on both sides.

**DEFINING THE BRIEF** A brief needs to capture the visual mood of the piece and all the technical aspects. Starting with visuals, include reference images either torn from magazines, historical images from museums or made on a Pinterest mood board. Then it's up to the maker to interpret or translate this. 'It's surprisingly easy to do this,' says furniture designer Rupert Bevan who makes both freestanding and fitted furniture for clients from his studio in Notting Hill. 'But the best way is for us to ask the right questions to prevent lots of last-minute alterations down the line.'

Interior decorator Susie Atkinson has a long history of commissioning bespoke piece for her projects. 'I first find out where it will go; what will it be used for; what size it needs to be; what will be stored inside; and if it's in a high-traffic area. I need to know how important this piece needs to feel in the room – is it the star of the show or in the background?'

**BUDGET** Having a discussion about the cost at the earliest stage is vital. It's not just the making that needs to be considered but also the cost of design and development, which is usually charged at the hourly rate of the maker. 'Don't be afraid to have an open and frank dialogue about the budget,' recommends Robert Stephenson of London-based furniture designers and upholsterers Sedilia. 'When discussing your brief, make clear what is important. For example, if it has got to be super comfortable, ask your maker to place particular importance on that. Or if it just has to look fantastic but won't be used very much then ensure the finishing is perfect.' 📸

‘Being polychromatic, brown goes with everything, but in deeper, very rich hues it is particularly good at flattering beautiful, well-drawn patterns.’

**EDWARD BULMER**, interior designer and founder, Edward Bulmer Natural Paint

‘A soft brown, like our Millbank, can be used to highlight key architectural details in a room. For a modern look, try inverting the usual colour treatments by painting the woodwork and architrave detailing or ceiling and leaving the walls off white. This creates a striking effect without the colour becoming too dominant in the room.’

**DOMINIC MYLAND**, CEO, Mylands

‘I’ve used Farrow & Ball’s London Clay in my drawing room (below, far right). I love it as a background for the paintings and the furniture.’ Its magenta pigment gives it a soft, earthy look.

**EMMA BURNS**, managing director, Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler

‘We believe north-facing rooms should be painted a dark or strong colour, like brown, to make it more cocooning and those on the south side in lighter colours. The thinking is where you have darkness you should bring colour, warmth and joy.’

**MIKE FISHER**, creative director and founder, Studio Indigo

‘An outstanding room that I have never forgotten was a library/study that had chocolate brown grass paper on its walls. It was restful, welcoming and striking. It was teamed to great effect with white ceilings and woodwork together with a printed chintz in brown and white.’

**MEG TREHERNE**, founder, Meg Treherne

‘Don’t be scared to use dark colours in a small, gloomy room. It’s never going to look light, so choose a fab rich colour and the effect can be truly transformative.’

**NATALIE FORBES AND LOUISA RIX**, co-founders, Forbes Rix Design



## A STUDY IN BROWN

Strong and warm, the sophisticated brown in this scheme by Edward Bulmer is respectful to other colours in the room, managing not to overpower the fine furniture and art. Walls in London Brown emulsion, £51 for 2.5ltr, Edward Bulmer Natural Paint. Desk, Lorfords



## CALM AND CONFIDENT

As this sitting room is primarily used as a night room, Studio Indigo upped the atmosphere by choosing this rich shade and adding tones in cream and burgundy. Walls brush-painted in 46-29T, Papers and Paints. Artwork, Willer Gallery. Sideboard, Simon Orrell Designs



## FINE ART

Emma Burns of Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler has painted her drawing room in an earthy hue with a magenta pigment that forms an elegant backdrop for her eclectic furniture and art. Walls in London Clay, Farrow & Ball. Wave table, Soane. Hindi lamp, Guinevere Antiques