

Wallpaper*

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5 emerging interiors experts

Introducing the high five - young, talented designers making creative waves across the world

Writer Nick Compton

Here we present five of the world's most promising young interior interventionists, for want of a better word. In fact, most are trained architects and are engineers of spaces and voids, stripping away non-essentials, rethinking privacy and functionality. Their work is not about dressing and props, but rather the replanning of private space. Some are working out the true potential of the industrial spaces Londoners and New Yorkers have made domestic over the last decade, others are working in India and China, in the cities where ideas of private and public space, and what you do with them, are changing fast.



1 Ebba Thott

London-based Ebba Thott is a woman all about texture and colour, cohesion and cosiness. A request then to design a converted church for a pair of local photographers was not her thing at all. 'That very sleek, all-white thing is not something I've ever been particularly attracted to or ever really wanted to do. But a photographer was living there and he wanted to use it for shoots, so it had to be white. It was a very challenging project.'

Another big challenge for Thott was that the photographer client wanted her to create six distinct areas as potential backdrops for shots. But, to meet the brief, she struggled with her natural instinct for flowing harmoniousness and made it work.

Swedish-born with stints at the Beckman School of Design in Stockholm and Parsons School of Design in New York behind her, 28 year-old Thott trained in product design and 'has a complete fetish for lighting.' And, despite the success of the photographers' live/work space, she still doesn't like white. Ebba Thott, tel: 44.7 352 5357, ethott@design-et.net



THE NEW RELIGION
Top, Ebba Thott and her church hall project
Above, Laurence Quinn in front of Fay Ripley's steel-skinned staircase

2 Laurence Quinn

RCA-trained Laurence Quinn is fast becoming the in-house architect for loft-owning East London luvvies. Playwright Patrick Marber and the actors Fay Ripley and Rupert Graves are all clients. But clear any images of Quinn as frou-frou cushion thrower - for Ripley, 32-year-old Quinn worked on creating an enormous duplex within a former asylum in Hoxton. Quinn sees his mission as subtraction, rather than addition, what he calls 'reductive planning'. Walls should be movable, if possible removable. He is not beyond a dramatic statement, though. The centrepiece of Ripley's apartment is a very serious steel-skinned staircase, built by a contractor who normally works on ships.

However, Quinn insists that old and new remain distinct. 'Our new walls are simple and the existing space is almost left to its own devices.' Not that he is scared of old buildings. At Rupert Graves' place, Quinn is adding a series of glass blocks that penetrate his blank end-of-terrace outside wall. 'We use the existing architecture but don't bow down to it,' says Quinn. >> Laurence Quinn, tel: 44.7 613 3843, info@quinnuk.com



3 Mike Latham

Mike Latham asks a lot of the stuff that surrounds him (or surrounds his big-spending client base of New York art collectors, writers, musicians, record producers and sundry 'visionary' creative sorts). The 27-year-old, Columbia-trained architect does not like furniture that is 'fixed and stupid'. A dining table, for instance, should also be an e-table; a multimedia hub from which computer screens emerge and projectors project once you've knocked back your noodles.

Latham insists the furniture he designs should do more than just sit there. It should 'consolidate technology and functionality' and always have multiple purposes. Fixtures and fittings should be neither fixed nor fitted; nor walls or rooms for that matter. All should be fluid, mobile. And Latham really doesn't like appliances or products that 'lie' to him. All wires, piping, ducting and other technological tendrils should be on display, out in the open or at least behind glass (Latham loves glass). In this way, according to him, appliances and service providers are both 'honest and sculptural'.

Over the last three years, Latham's company, Arts Corporation, 'a multimedia laboratory interested in the intersections of architecture, art and technology', has profitably spread and applied this kind of thinking in apartments across downtown Manhattan (he is also currently working on a boutique hotel uptown). But nowhere is Latham's ethos more fully realised than in his 1,900 sq ft Williamsburg live-work loft space - one of the first living areas he developed. *Mike Latham, tel: 1. 718 302 4164, mlatham@artscorporation.com*



4 Rajiv Saini

Wallpaper* readers may be familiar with the work of Bombay modernist, Rajiv Saini, at the 240-year-old Devi Garh fort in Rajasthan. Completed in 2000, Saini's 23 suites brought boutique sophistication to the traditionally inclined tourist traps of the area. 'Most of the forts in the area had been converted into hotels, but with an overdose of the traditional vocabulary,' says Saini. 'I wanted to give it a very clean and modern feel. I used a lot of local craftsmen and materials, but the shapes and the volumes are very contemporary.'

Saini, 32, studied computer engineering before deciding that fantasy interiors were his thing. He had been working for five years before Devi Garh, but that project established him as the go-to man for the old money of Bombay as well as helping him win work in London, New York, Cannes and the contract to create a Thailand beachside home for a former chief of HSBC.

Rajiv Saini, tel: 91. 22 264 92870, rajiv_s_saini@hotmail.com

SALAAM BOMBAY
Above, Rajiv Saini and a private residence he did in New Delhi
Left, Mike Latham in the Arts Corporation studio, Williamsburg
Below, Andre Fu and The Wing, at the Exhibition Pavilion for the Shanghai Kai Xin Yuan development



5 Andre Fu

Hong Kong-born Andre Fu developed a taste for food and beverage while studying architecture at Cambridge (we presume he doesn't mean kebabs and Newcastle Brown Ale). His passion for the theatre of the food business meant that London restaurateurs were offering him work before he graduated.

After a short alliance with arch-minimalist, John Pawson, Fu formed AFSO with Stephane Orsolini. Soon after, he took on a job in Shanghai and realised China's big cities needed him. Inevitably, Fu has had a hand in the modernisation of traditional Shikumen houses in Shanghai's garish Xin Tian Di area, what he calls 'Canary Wharf with a cultural conscience'.

Fu's spaces have more than a touch of the Verner Pantons about them - colourful, curvilinear sci-fi



fantasies. 'My leanings are to the minimal, but for me minimal only applies in spatial terms. If you bring in certain colours and patterns, they bring a sense of playfulness and a sense of life or even happiness,' he says. And while most of Fu's projects to date have been public playgrounds, he is now moving more into residential work. However, Fu admits that cultural differences mean these are harder gigs to get than they would be in London. 'People are much less conscious about their homes here. But slowly they are becoming much more educated about lifestyle - they are getting into Muji and Franc Franc. They do want to improve their personal space.' ★

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