

At home with: Jo Hamilton

Renowned for her use of colour and space, *Jo Hamilton* is one of Britain's most sought after interior designers. For the past 16 years she has run her own highly successful consultancy, and she will be talking at *Grand Designs Live Birmingham* in October. She tells *Lynda Clark* about her exciting career and her first steps on the property ladder. Photos: Luke Foreman

FTB: Tell us about your first step on the property ladder.

JH: I was very young when I got married, and we decided to buy a house together. It was during the boom in the 80s when it wasn't difficult to get on the property ladder. We bought a tiny terraced cottage, which was built in 1820. It was small but really lovely and very special. The mortgage was based on my husband's salary, and we really didn't have any problems. It's not like it is now, and I feel very sorry for young people who are trying to get on the property ladder – I have friends in their thirties who are still renting. The cottage was really lovely, and we made it look very pretty with whitewashed walls, vintage fabrics and lots of checks and pastel colours.

FTB: What is your current home like?

JH: At the moment I am looking for a place, and I would ideally like a warehouse as I am very into the industrial look. I like the idea of lots of space and huge windows that let in loads of light, which is so important to an interior. When you have a big space, you can break it up and create little islands – it's very flexible, and you can adapt the space to what you are doing. If you have friends round for dinner, you can make it more intimate or open it right up if you are having a party!

FTB: How did your career start?

JH: I originally wanted to go into the fashion world and I was going to go to fashion college, but it wasn't possible because I had young children, so the next best thing was to do interiors. It had always interested me, and I was forever changing my bedroom around when I was a child, much to my mother's distress! So it seemed a natural path to take, and then my local pub asked if I could help them to redesign the interior, which I did. It was the best thing I could have done. One of my favourite projects was for

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a spa in Kensington. The client was from Saudi Arabia, and money was no object, so everything was bespoke and handmade. It wasn't always easy, though – we had to keep changing the staircase, and we had five different ones in all!

FTB: What have been your favourite projects?

JH: I did a 6,000-square-foot house near Hampton Court, which was breathtaking, and the clients were fantastic. It was a Victorian house, and we literally tore it to bits, added to it and extended it, too. The space was wonderful to work with, and they left me to design everything. I wanted to ensure it was historically correct, so I did lots of research beforehand. It was a beautiful property for beautiful people. I am currently working on a house in Holland Park. I think it is very important to talk to my clients first to find out exactly what they want. These current clients have very busy working lives, and when they get home they want a house that is calm and peaceful, so I've used lots of greys and inky tones, which are very calming colours. I have also mixed antiques with edgy contemporary pieces and it gives a great eclectic feel.

FTB: You do a lot of charity work for the Brompton Hospital in London – can you tell us about that?

JH: One of my sons has had heart problems since he was six months old, and he is now 18. He had life-saving surgery at the Brompton Hospital, and they have been amazing. They help save so many lives, and I think it is very important to give back

what you can. I am helping to raise their profile, and we are also fighting to keep the children's surgical unit open, as it is being threatened with closure. I campaign as much as possible, and I do everything I can to help. They are also planning to turn some buildings nearby into a hotel for relatives who need to be close to the hospital. I have offered to help with the design, and if I can use my skills to their advantage that is fantastic.

FTB: Tell us about the interior design courses that you run.

JH: I run the courses at London's Sanderson Hotel. They are for absolutely anyone who wants some inspiration and dispel all the rules that people think exist when it comes to interiors. I just want people to understand the basics and give them the confidence to get started.

FTB: You are talking at Grand Designs Live Birmingham – what plans have you got for that?

JH: I will be doing sessions every day – a basic mini course on interior design. I also have some sessions with Kevin McCloud, which will be good fun as we approach interiors completely differently.

Jo Hamilton will be giving her expert advice at Grand Designs Live Birmingham, which will take place at the NEC from 12-14 October 2012. For more information and tickets to this inspirational and leading contemporary home show, please visit granddesignslive.com or call the ticket hotline on 0844 854 1348. johamilton.co.uk

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