



PHOTO: MARC O'SULLIVAN

What's your colour PERSONALITY?

INTERIOR DESIGNER TO THE STARS JO HAMILTON ON USING COLOUR TO CREATE THE FEEL YOU WANT IN YOUR HOME

Every client has their own priority for the interior design of their property when I first meet them and, in their eyes, that priority may well define the personality and feel of their new home. They may have found a piece of art they adore, have fallen in love with a luxurious fabric, have a chair they find particularly comfortable or even a kitchen sink that they thought looked cool on Instagram.

While each of these is entirely justifiable and can be accounted for in the final scheme, it can quite often also be a case of putting the cart before the horse.

Listening carefully to what a client says they want at those super-important first few meetings is therefore more than just writing a shopping list of the things they explicitly say they want. It's also about reading between the lines to pick up on the motive and emotion that's driving them to choose those particular pieces and gaining a clear understanding of what their overall vision is.

I'm listening to find out what makes them tick, how they view themselves and what they think their design personality is. I want to know about the emotional response they would like to experience because of being at home.

The key question for me is 'how does the client want to *feel* when they put their key in the front door and walk in to their home?'

The answer to this question can take me as the interior designer down a number of very different routes with contrasting solutions for colour, lighting, fabrics, furniture, etc — basically, the entire scheme will evolve and grow from the seeds planted during that initial briefing.

My inspiration for the scheme comes from the client themselves right from the very outset.

What I am looking to do here is to deconstruct, in a very gentle way, the image the client has in their head of their new property and get back to basics — to really understand what is driving them. For me, a home will never truly be a place of peace and rest if the client doesn't feel it is utterly their, however beautiful the design may be.

The key is to design around emotion, rather than things — to work around a fuller view of who the client is as an individual or a family, and their personality rather than just delivering on their inclination towards a single specific item.

Getting to this point with a client can take more than the initial one or two meetings, and often means developing a very real relationship with them to the point where they are comfortable enough to really open up and show me their personality.



PICTURE: MINDTHEGAP

The lovely thing about getting to know the client to the point where I can see the world through their eyes, is that it gives me the opportunity to produce something unique and perfectly in tune with them. Designs that not just meet but exceed their expectations.

People are as individual as the briefs they give, so no two jobs are the same. Some say they want their home to be a place of sanctuary, of relaxation and peace, while others want more of a busy vibrant feel — a buzzy, social space. The trick is to listen for key words clients use to describe their vision and then apply them to the some good, solid interior design knowledge and experience.

For example, as an interior designer, I know that cooler colours are more calming and serene so, the moment I hear a client talking about their chilled, sanctuary surrounded by woodland, I'm leaning towards blues, greens and violets. Warmer colours — reds, oranges and yellows — have the opposite effect. They are vibrant, alive and fun, so a twinkle-eyed client buzzing with the joys of city life may well lead me in that direction instead.

Once the general colour scheme is outlined, the visual effect of the colour palette comes into play and the issue of tone and depth comes to the fore.

For example, cooler colours appear to recede and can have the visual effect of making a space larger, while warmer colours appear to advance and therefore have the opposite effect — they can close a space down and make it feel smaller.

Depth of tone also has its part to play. Lighter colours will visually recede, with darker colours advancing, so it's a bit of a balancing act getting all the ingredients to work and play off each other.

So the gregarious, socialite who loves warm interiors but has a smaller home could choose to create a cosy feel using natural materials, warm-toned woods and hand-woven linens, bringing in the odd pop of colour here and there rather than on all the walls.

Equally, I once had a client who had an amazing, huge warehouse home in the heart of London. It was the most glorious space to be in during the day but it felt cold and uncomfortable in the evening because of the sheer vastness of the space.

We did a number of things to address the issue. We increased the scale of the furniture, so it was more in proportion with the space, created some smaller, more intimate spaces to break up the vastness and brought in layers of texture using fabrics, rugs and soft furnishings. But colour was vital to the success.

By using a dark but warm-toned colour on the ceiling, we were able to give the impression that the ceiling was lower than it actually was, thereby making it feel more welcoming and comfortable.

The warehouse was a great example of the knock-on effect of colour and how it can be used to turn the volume up or down depending on how much you use and where you use it. Colour is not just about getting the mood or emotion right, it is also a useful tool in playing with the architecture, adjusting the proportions of a room.

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PICTURE: ROCHE BOBOIS



PICTURE: OLIVER BONAS

Sitting pretty: From dark, cosy rooms to bright and relaxed pastels, choosing the right colours will help you to create your desired ambience in your home and shape the space accordingly



PICTURE: CUCKOOLAND

Clients come in all shapes and sizes, some with a very clear vision while many more are unsure and struggling to tie down what they really want, but we all know how we want to feel when we throw our keys on the hall table at the end of the day, and it's that bit of my client I'm interested in designing for.

One of the biggest compliments a client can pay me is to tell me I have interpreted their style perfectly, even though they didn't realise they had a style. I am not designing for me but for them, so to have successfully found my way to their core and to have delivered a home that feels right for them is wonderfully rewarding.

For clients to confidently say they like certain pieces is, of course, always useful, but knowing why they like it and how it makes them feel takes me as

a designer beyond that single piece and helps me get to the heart of them and their dream home.

Interpreting a client's wants and desires for their property, when done properly and effectively, ultimately means understanding them, their drivers and their emotions. It means drawing out their personality and putting that back into the property.

Jo Hamilton is an ambassador for House 2018, the high-end interiors event run by INM. She will be appearing on the Inspiration Stage at Dublin's RDS from May 25-27. See house-event.ie.

NEXT WEEK: Jo's five key items to get right