

The expert eye

Interior designer to-the-stars
JO HAMILTON shares the key pieces
 she's using in her designs this season

LIGHTING

I tell my clients that lighting can account for up to 80pc of the success of a scheme and it really is true. Successful lighting is due to number of things, including simply making sure there is enough of it, that it's directed onto the right areas, and that it's the right tone. It's also a great tool for picking out key features, architectural details and adding texture and drama to a scheme. The style of lighting is another key question. One range that's really tickling my fancy at the moment is from the Italian lighting company Gallotti & Radice (galottiradice.it). Two of their pieces are particularly stunning — Bolle (pictured in multiple, left) and Bolle Tavolo 3, a table lamp version. The glass light balls look and feel handcrafted and are so clear they really live up to their English translation name, Bubble. While they are obviously functional pieces they are also very strong sculpturally — they are pieces of art in their own right. Both these lights are crafted using a hand-burnished brass which gives them a lovely, cared-for feel; and, of course, you know by now that brass is hitting the spot for me this year! I also love the uneven colour that undulates across the glass, it gives them a wonderful, moody vintage look.



HARDWARE

At some point most of us will renovate our homes or be involved in a new development. There are numerous choices and decisions to be made and the pressure can be on. These important decisions in such projects often come thick and fast meaning that, inevitably, some elements will fall through the net. Hardware is often a low priority decision, especially when compared to big ticket items — but they are nonetheless crucial ingredients in the overall look. For too long, hardware has been — forgive me for saying this — a little boring. I can't remember the last time I went somewhere and left raving about the door handle or key plate, for example. But Buster and Punch (busterandpunch.com) is part of a ground-breaking new trend that brings celebration to this previously deprived area. They create pieces (right) that are not just functional tools, but beautiful to look at and admire in their own right.



WALLPAPER

The right wall-covering has a great deal to offer a design. It's obviously one of the larger elements in a room but it can be used as a key feature or as a gentle backdrop allowing other features to stand out against — each is as important as the other. As a backdrop, natural materials — or natural-look materials — are fabulous. Linens and silks are big favourites for me and often form part of my core scheme. As a feature paper, almost anything goes. There is currently a big trend for colour, texture, metallics, mixed patterns, geometrics — the list goes on. There is a lot of opportunity to play and have fun. The design world is having a mini revolution, and we should make the most of it. I have a secret (now not so secret) wallpaper crush on Arte's (arte-international.com, left) natural wall coverings. They have a hand-washed, worn linen look, which is cool and edgy design-wise, but by nature, they are homely and uncontrived, which I love. They are brimming with personality, making them very easy to place and they're tactile and warm so they bring an instant softness to any scheme.



BOOKSHELVES

Having spent 23 years of my life sourcing products every single day, I have become all too conscious of the elements in interiors where the options are slim. Shelving is one of those areas, for me. Why can't our shelves be beautiful, inspired, sculptural, fun? I needed two strong, sculptural shelving pieces for a scheme and I fancied a geometric feel. I couldn't find any ready-to-buy pieces that would work so I designed these (above). I love everything about these bookshelves — the geometric shapes, the beautiful polished brass finish, the sculptural element. And due to the form, they're also a really nice way of framing beautiful pieces placed within them. They're a part of my to-be-released furniture range, and available now through my website, johamilton.co.uk.



SEATING

Form is another area I really like to play with in my designs — interesting shapes, sculptural form and clean lines bring structure and interest to a space. This is particularly useful when designing open-plan living spaces. The key to success here is to create separate zones within the larger space. Structured furniture is a perfect ingredient in successful zoning. It helps to frame the space, giving it an identity of its own. The Alexander sofa (*above, thesofaandchair.co.uk*) is therefore a firm favourite of mine. Its strong outline has such strength and almost a masculine boldness, which can be softened with texture and cushions. I like to design around sociability rather than around the television. For me, a home is about the people who use it and the interaction between them, so I create relaxed, comfortable spaces for friends and family to unwind. Of course, that's not to suggest social spaces should be without a television altogether, it's just that it should not always be the focal point. Two Alexanders facing each other — and not the TV — work really well, providing definition and doing most of the zoning work for you.



COFFEE TABLE

I designed a very elegant scheme recently with layers of rich texture. It was important to create a focal point to really draw the eye in. So, I designed a gorgeous oversized coffee table in a silky, brushed brass (*above*). It is now part of my furniture range to be launched later in the year, but this is one of several pieces already available at johamilton.co.uk. The table is 120cm x 120cm, so you can't miss it! The powdery hard finish brings a welcome contrast to the other textures. I used a different fabric for each cushion in fact. I upholstered the sofa in a beautiful, rich velvet and chose inky-toned silks and wools for my rug, so it was important to introduce a contrast, to bring a hardness to complement the scheme. I think it's easy to overlook how important the balance of texture is in a room — too little variation and the room will feel sterile, too much and it will feel overwhelming. Hard and soft — each has an important role, but when the balance is right, the effect is elegant and welcoming.



TAKE A DESIGN MASTERCLASS WITH JO

Jo Hamilton is an ambassador for *House 2017*, Ireland's new high-end interiors event showcasing world-class interiors, art and design. It takes place at Dublin's RDS from May 26–28. Jo will be appearing on the Inspiration Stage, where she will give design masterclasses including her top tips on colour, lighting and layout on Saturday and Sunday. Jo will also be showing the audience how to create a mood board. For details and to purchase tickets, see house-event.ie



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