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ENGLISH HOME

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ANNIVERSARY

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INVITING INTERIORS

Ideas for creating cosy & welcoming rooms this autumn



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From statement bathrooms
to glamorous dining rooms

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PATTERN**
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with wallpaper

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PLEASURES**
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for the table



COUNTRY HOMES

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• Eclectic & contemporary farmhouses

MAX ROLLITT

REFINED DESIGN

The antique dealer and interior designer reveals his passion for antiques and creating timeless interiors



When did your love of antiques begin?

My mum had an interiors shop selling antiques and fabrics to all the ladies of Winchester, so I was introduced to the world of antiques from a young age. I used to help out in the shop and spent my holidays and weekends hunting for antiques with her. She came from a fashion background, so understood about colour and design, but was also a fantastic saleswoman.

What were your first steps to becoming an antique dealer yourself?

I studied furniture design at Rycotewood College in Thame and then did an apprenticeship in furniture restoration at Frearson & Hewlett, a highly regarded local workshop. It gave me a real appreciation for craftsmanship and a passion for patina. In 1993, I took over my mum's antique shop, but it was when I started exhibiting at Olympia, that things really took off, and interior designers in both the UK and America started buying my pieces, so I knew I had a certain look.

What do you look for when choosing antiques?

I look for beauty, purity in design and authenticity. Patination is key, so pieces that haven't been over-cleaned, polished or modified in any way, are far more appealing to me. The best pieces are still in their original state, that show a lifetime of wear and tear.

How did you move into interior design?

It seemed like the natural progression, as I'd always sold antiques to interior designers and it all links. In 2006,

a couple who had bought a sofa from me, asked for my help to decorate their vicarage. My passion has always been furniture, but moving into interior design, has meant my knowledge has broadened. I look at everything now – furniture, fabrics, wallpaper, paint colours, china, paintings and prints. I'm drawn to pieces with character or interesting colours. I look at my peers – it's a constant learning process.

What makes your interiors unique?

There's a spontaneity and intuitiveness to my design work that's brought about by the random nature of antiques. I also have a willingness to be quite bold with colour and pattern. My aim is to create joyful, elegant, comfortable homes, with a mix of formality and informality. I like to layer my interiors with an eclectic mix of artefacts, prints and paintings to create a lived-in, accumulated feel. I often feature quirky, humorous objects, such as a bust with a top hat in the dining room of my Hampshire clients' house, or a galleon-shaped 1930s chandelier above a dining table in a London house. These fun elements create a sense that a house is loved and lived in, rather than just designed.

Describe the process when designing interiors for clients?

I listen to what my clients want, look at the internal architecture, how the house needs to function as a whole, and the flow from one room to the another. Then I design each room accordingly, but I keep returning to the flow and movement throughout the house. When I bring all the rooms schemes together, I might have to throw some ideas out and reconsider

until I get it right. So much of the design is affected by the architecture and light. The light is key to it all because it affects your colour palette, the textures that you use and how things respond, so you have to be really mindful of that.

When do you know a room is finished?

It's the point when you're satisfied, like an artist composing a painting, although I tell clients there's never a time when you have to stop. You can keep rearranging and moving things around. I don't ever want to design a room that is too fixed. Interior design should be fluid rather than too formulaic or set.

You converted a barn on your property into a large showroom. Why is having this space crucial to your work as a designer?

When I decorate clients' houses, I need to have a reasonable-sized stock of antiques to draw on – the shop is my arsenal when it comes to interior design. I can try things out in clients' houses and if they don't work, I just bring them back to the showroom. Also, it being such a big space with high ceilings means I can indulge in my love of large-scale architectural pieces. I combine furniture and interesting objects to create room sets so clients can see how everything works together. I also display my range of bespoke furniture, including sofas that are copies of some favourite eighteenth and nineteenth century designs.

To view Max Rollitt's range of bespoke furniture and antiques visit his website maxrollitt.com or visit the showroom in Avington, Hampshire. ■