

MORPHEUS

LONDON

*Spear's*

*January/February 2017*

# SPEAR'S

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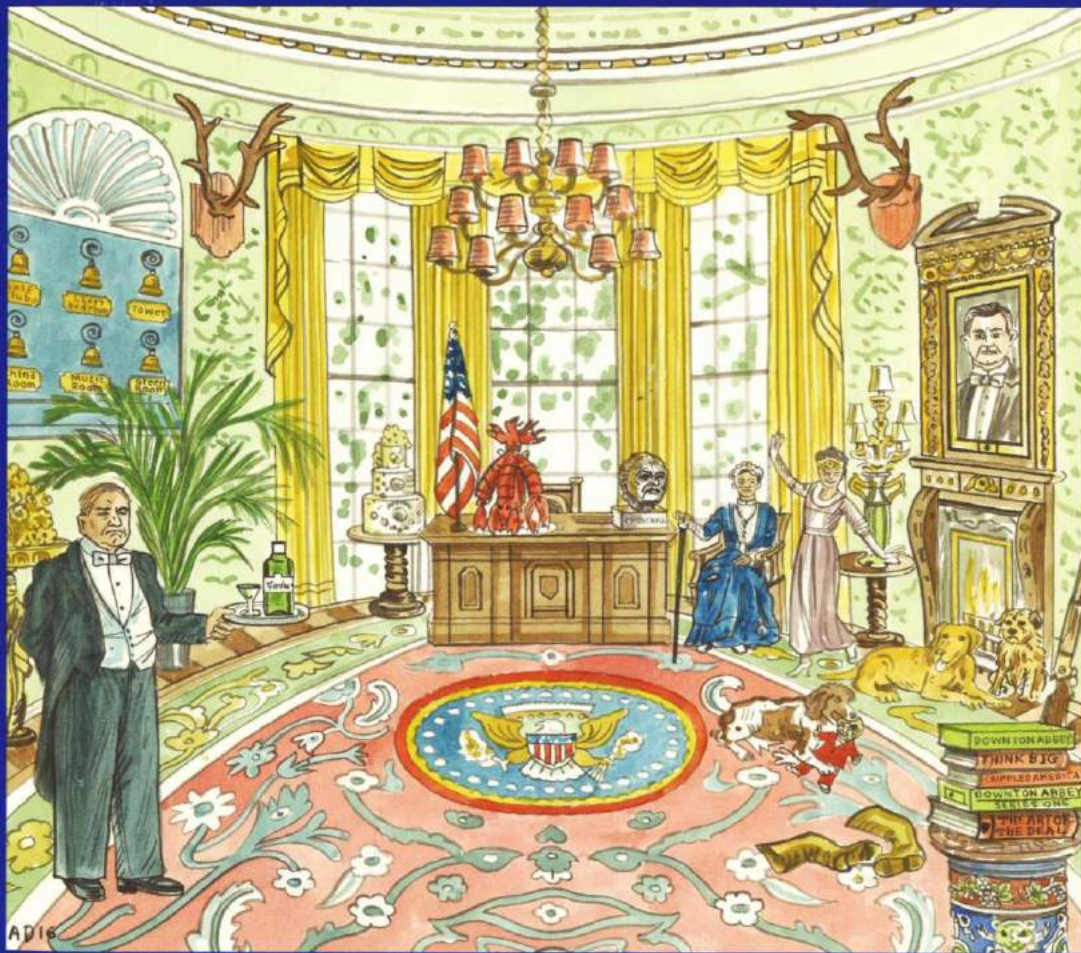
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WEALTH MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS AND CULTURE • ISSUE 54 • £5



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# THE HOME STRETCH

*London's modern-day HNWs have different priorities and needs for their homes — and fresh new designers are stepping up to meet the challenge with innovative approaches*



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IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF SPEAR'S

Every decade — or generation — London sees a new breed of interior designers or 'developer-designers' who stand out and speak with an aesthetic voice, whose vision blends effortlessly with the architectural zeitgeist. While most HNWs have heard of Candy & Candy (or at least their Monaco superyacht), Finchatton, or a bespoke firm like Fenton Whelan, these 'developer brand' firms are all now regarded as well established. In other words, they've made tons of money developing in London's super-prime market, which until recently was up 40 per cent since 2009.

However, following punitive stamp duty hikes, London's super-prime market is down 20 per cent. 'Billionaires are shunning the London luxury property market, with sales of "super prime" £10 million-

plus homes in the capital collapsing by 86 per cent over the past year,' the *Guardian* reported in October. The paper cited figures from Land Registry which revealed that only five properties were sold for more than £10 million in the three months to August 2016, compared to 35 such properties in the same quarter the previous year. Outside London, no property sold for more than £10 million.

As always in the property development business, such price falls have created new opportunities for designers who are tuned into the mindset of HNW clients, and more importantly are not trapped financially with a slate of expensive super-prime projects and developments on their books. HNW clients looking to buy 'off-plan' have different priorities — such as wanting a two-bed lateral flat with enough



HELEN GREEN  
DESIGN AND  
MORPHEUS  
ARE LEADING  
LIGHTS OF  
LONDON'S  
INTERIORS  
SCENE

entertaining space to host twenty for dinner, rather than a six-bedroom £11.5 million super-home.

The past few years have the emergence of several under-the-radar individuals who are reinventing the rules of interior design and of what it means to create a designer 'brand' today. Leaders include Katharine Pooley and Helen Green Design, which are following in the tradition of the great London interior designer brands such as Colefax & Fowler.

What is most striking about such iconic 'designer' brands is that, on the whole, clients came to them because they wanted their trademark look. Colefax & Fowler pioneered what is known today as 'country house style', offering a refreshing blend of contemporary chic and classic chintz that stripped away the cluttered gloom of Victoriana. But the new breed of

designers are moving away from the signature brand look. Instead their clients want provenance, originality, artisan-craftsmanship, quirky architectural details. These designer-developers have a philosophy of design that transcends the aesthetic into the utilitarian.

Edo Mapelli Mozzi of Banda is passionate about the stage set of contemporary metropolitan life. For each Banda project, 'designers, artisans and contractors are carefully selected to ensure the homes we produce appeal to the relevant market. Our aim is to exceed expectations in terms of the quality and service in the properties we deliver.'

Banda's acutely detailed bespoke work reflects the deepest aspirations of HNW clients today and society's changing architectural tastes and domestic style. Edo, who was brought up and educated in England, has adopted the title of Noël Coward's 1932 play *Design for Living* for his own branding purposes. 'At Banda, our homes are built for life,' he says.

#### IDENTITY CHECK

With twelve years' experience, Edo and his team use their deeply embedded 'market intelligence' (i.e. relationships with agents and buyers' agents) to source quirky properties, often with some industrial heritage or architectural provenance. Using a team of 'artisan-craftsmen' and designers, the Banda concept is to only put its name to a development that has 'an original identity' and will 'make its own mark'.

The Banda Design Studio is unusual in that it offers a genuinely 'full service' experience for HNWs, from interior design to architect's layouts, through to the dressing of all show apartments within developments. The most talked-about decorators of each generation are more than mere designers: they offer up a window into the soul of our times and the Way We Live Now. Some 95 per cent of Banda's work is 'speculative development'; the other 5 per cent is private commission or project work.

Edo has been developing 'character' properties in areas like Battersea, where he has had notable success converting an old bakery. 'A lot of our business model has been producing prime lateral flats outside the traditional zone 1 area,' he says. He points out that in areas like Nine Elms most two-bed flats range from 900-1,300sq ft. Think kitchen supper for four — six if you squash around the table. 'So you can't really entertain.'

His two-bed flats tend to be 2,000-3,000sq ft. In one flat he had a 'master bedroom that had his-and-hers dressing rooms, a very large bathroom with an entertaining space where you could have twenty for dinner, or 40 for a drinks party. But it's a two-bedroom flat. And that doesn't exist on the market.' When Banda took these 'two-bed prime lateral' flats to market, all sold in 24 hours. 'We produced something that is not cookie-cut, is not what everybody else is producing.' >>



» Edo says his client focus has always been based on listening to what 'owner-occupiers' want, rather than the sales pitch of agents. 'We know there is a demand from these sorts of downsizers, people in their early fifties whose children have grown up, have left home. They need a spare bedroom but they don't need a five-bedroomed house any more. But they still want the space they had.' Most also have a home office space.

### CANNES-DO SPIRIT

Another leading example of the top new breed of designer is Andrew Murray, founder of Morpheus London design. I first met Andrew in May at the MIPIM exhibition in Cannes, where he had invited me to an exclusive lunch party. Andrew is also a co-partner (with Simon Davis) of the Rosebery, Britain's most exclusive double-decker private box bus — more like a private yacht decorated like a Mayfair club than your usual bus.

I asked him how a designer today can get the balance right between being a luxury 'brand' (like the Rosebery) and at the same time keep being unique and individual as a company with private commission work. The answer is that Morpheus is rooted in artisan design work. His mother was an interior designer and his father 'very creative', and this is the common DNA design factor to all its projects. Andrew started off as a cabinet-maker and joiner, pretty much self-taught. 'This has been invaluable because I know how things are made, and I know how things should flow,' he says. 'So, coming from that craftsman background, the company evolved as my exposure to luxury property evolved.'

Andrew's vocation began at Canford School in Dorset, which had an excellent carpentry department. 'I set up my business when I was still at school,' he says. 'I decorated an office block when I was about sixteen and employed people from school, which was quite fun. So it evolved from there.'

Clients began asking him advice on all aspects of the design project — not just the cabinet he was

making. 'I realised none had a full service, and they were always at a little bit of a loss. So they were having this lovely piece of cabinetry made, but everything else didn't really match, and the provision of service wasn't there. It was very historic. It was very in the old school. And so I saw an opportunity to provide the sort of end-to-end service.'

Morpheus is now one of the most sought-out design firms in London, with clients all over Europe (hence the chic but discreet lunch party at MIPIM). It wasn't always so glamorous, though: his first big project was the conversion of a large house in Stockwell in which the dance act KLF used to live. 'Then I got in with a developer in Mayfair who had a portfolio of 60 apartments — rentals. I was about 25 then, and I took over the development management of their maintenance, archive, refurbishment — so it led from there.'

The next move was to develop his own aesthetic style — putting the Morpheus imprint on projects without them becoming more about Morpheus than the client. 'I look very much at the function of space. Our designers do the interior design and the styling, but I do the function, the flow, the purpose. And that was coming through very strongly then, and I think that's what led to success and led to growth.'

What makes Andrew the choice of moguls, UHNWs and City tycoons who want their houses to stand out but also stay under the radar design brand-wise is his knowledge of who the very best craftspeople are. 'I can still go onto a site and say, "Actually, make it like that. It's much more commercial." So Morpheus is a design house, but we are also so much more than that — we understand commercial realities. If a client says, "I've got four apartments that I want you to design," I'm not even going to look at the design until I've understood the commercial business case. And I'm going to go, "Who's going to buy it? Why are they buying? What do they want?" And then that will lead the design.'

Were Noël Coward alive today, his catchword would be 'Designers for Living.'



TOP: BANDA PROPERTIES IN LANCASTER GATE, LEFT, AND BATTERSEA, RIGHT; ABOVE: A MORPHEUS DESIGN IN MONACO FOR THIRTY NINE MONTE CARLO