

Designs on your home

Decorating insights from Cotswold
interior designer Diana Blanchard



Interior Designer Diana Blanchard lives in the Cotswolds and heads eponymous design studios in London and Dubai. She works for clients around the world on projects as diverse as elegantly contemporary new builds to the classicism of period homes. Here she reveals some decorative insights and favoured resources.

With regard to the infrastructure of the property, period features really give character and a premium to older houses so think carefully before you take these out. Whatever the age of the home, once you have the framework as you want it, take time to fill it. It's a great pleasure to choose just the right thing and creates a very organic environment.

1 When redecorating, how should one assess what to keep and build upon, and what to replace?

We all have treasured possessions with lovely memories attached, so these need to be the first to find a home when moving or upgrading a property. Beyond that, there comes a moment of truth as to how much of what you have will fit into the new vision that you are creating. Sometimes we are just holding onto things because they have been around for a long time...even though we don't really like them anymore! So, keep the objects that you love and that will work (you will always be able to find a place for these) and then think about letting the rest go. There are many ways to positively recycle goods these days.

2 Is it important to decorate to exactly match the period or style of a property?

If you decorate slavishly to a period you may well end up with a house that not only feels like a museum but will be seriously lacking in all the benefits and comfort of modern design! So, it's helpful to strike a balance of installing cutting edge plumbing, heating and electrics whilst being sympathetic to the age and 'feel' of the house.

3 We all have a set budget to spend so where should one invest, and where can careful savings be made?

It's good to bear in mind longevity of design. Most of us at some point have had the 'money pit' experience, particularly in period homes (for example the unexpected cost of stripping wallpaper and the plaster and lath wall behind it coming away at the same time). So, it's very important to invest wisely in the infrastructure of the property so that it will last without major surprises and expense in coming years. It's tempting to direct the budget at the things that will be on show but actually this is a mistake if you haven't got your roof, dpc, plumbing, etc in shape. In terms of capital investment, once the shell is upgraded, good -looking flooring, kitchens and bathrooms will enhance the desirability and value of your home. Savings can often be made through careful comparison shopping on the

internet or by timing project stages to align with the traditional summer and winter sale periods.

4 When considering a new colour scheme, what should one consider?

Firstly, whether you really love those colours or are just looking at the current fashions. Choose colours that you relate to and feel comfortable with. Secondly, colour has amazing power to affect atmosphere and energy so consider the light, size and purpose of the room. For example, you may use a dramatic colour to create an intimate, jewel-like dining area but would not choose this for a relaxing bedroom. You will instinctively know the right palette if you spend time just sitting in the space.... The Architectural Colours range from Paint Library is a great starting point if you are looking for a tone on tone effect - and Edward Bulmer's Pots of Paint palette has 50 stunning heritage colours that are made

entirely with natural materials.

5 What key mistakes do homeowners make in decorating?

One key mistake, which I can really understand, is to try to do everything at once! It seems the obvious thing to do to lessen the disruption, but actually there are then so many decisions to be made that it can make the project feel both daunting and overwhelming. If possible, it is preferable to live in a new space for at least a few weeks before making any decisions; this allows you to get a great sense of the light, warmth and energy of the property and to make good choices about the design.

Another mistake is not considering the design holistically, which you need to do in order to create harmonious flow throughout the property. Think about the interconnectedness and ergonomics of the whole space rather than just a room at a time, even if you are decorating in stages.



Plain, two-toned linen full-length curtains with sheerweave blinds to give privacy whilst letting light through



Above: Tone on tone palette (with accents of charcoal grey) that gives a welcoming and restful effect. Mirrors are great for adding light and a sense of space
Below: High quality marble, glass and brassware give a gleaming finish

6 Can you offer insights on successful window treatments?

In our cool northern clime the best treatments allow for maximum light to enter the room whilst at the same time offering comfort. Much as we here in Britain have learnt to embrace layers in our clothing to align with the weather, a combination of blinds and full length curtains works well to give varying degrees of light, privacy and warmth in the changing seasons. Natural and organic materials such as cotton, wool, silk and linen are a great choice for both contemporary and traditional settings. Z & R, de Le Cuona and Romo all do some lovely natural linens. My all time favourite fabric is Fox Linton Satin - a wool/silk mix that has the most beautiful drape and looks stunning as curtains

7 Can you recommend any fabulous resources in the Cotswolds?

Debbie Kedge at MasCo Architectural Salvage in Aston Down, Gloucestershire (www.mascosalvage.com). She is a walking encyclopaedia of fascinating information about the supply and restoration of sustainable materials

Sue West at Housemade (07950 471233) makes the most perfectly tailored blinds and curtains. Sue used to run a design business in London and has brought a wealth of knowledge and talent to the supply of soft furnishings in the Cotswolds

Scumble Goosie at Griffin Mill, Thrupp, Gloucestershire (www.scumblegoosie.co.uk). Jon Madeley and his helpful team offer a delightful range of handmade Gustavian style furniture and accessories, derived from ethically sourced fruitwood.

8 What can an interior designer bring to the entire process?

A good designer is like a new best friend... They will be both sympathetic to your vision and empathetic to bringing out all the finest qualities of the property. Their experience of having designed many more homes than you are likely to inhabit in a whole lifetime ensures that you will not be making expensive mistakes and will not feel the potential impact and stress of the project - as they take the strain. They will challenge your habitual ways of thinking about space, texture and colour and will inspire your own thinking to create beautiful and life-enhancing design. ■

For more details visit www.blanchard.uk.com or call the Cotswold office on 01453 765565. The London showroom is at 55 Regents Park Road, London, NW1; tel: 020 7722 1242; email studio@blancharduk.com



The soft summer blue in this bedroom is given impact by accents of black and gilt



This hallway retains period features while emphasising space and light with a pale (non-traditional) colour