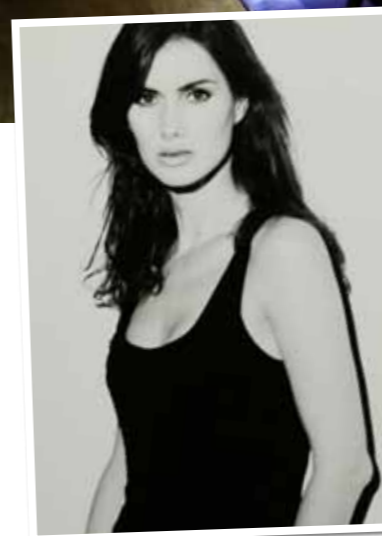
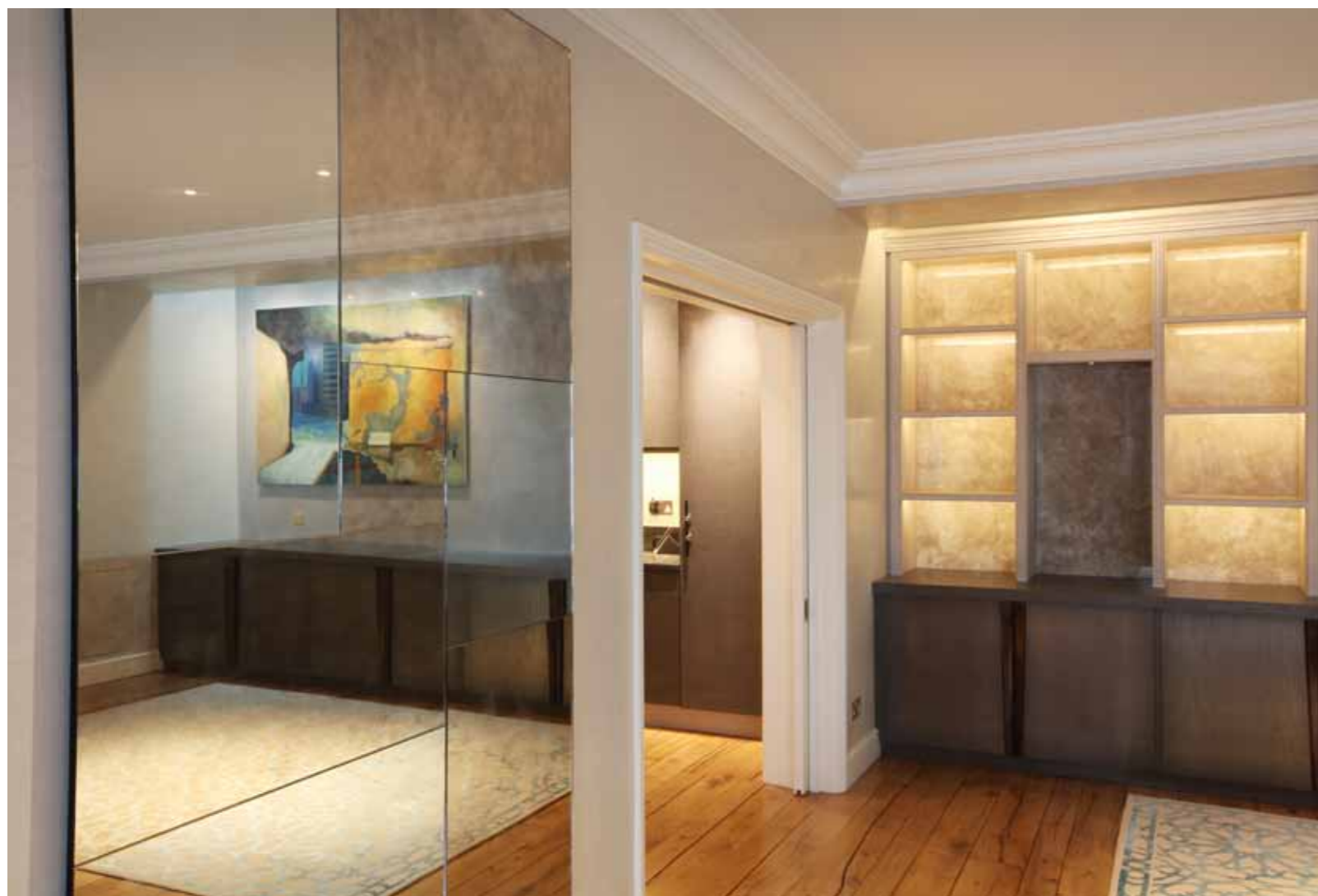




Game Of Throws

After nine years away from the catwalk, *DANIELLE BETTS* explores Catherine Milner's trajectory from international model to professional interior designer



WHILE IT MAY be naive of us to assume that strolling off the catwalk and into the field of interior design would be an entirely natural transition to make, Catherine Milner is doing little to alter our assumptions. Once a firm favourite with couturiers such as Dior's Marc Bohan, Milner has a great deal of work to show from her 20 years in the fashion world in her modelling portfolio. Now in her ninth year of renovating and designing prestigious properties across London, Milner credits the knowledge gleaned from years spent observing the intricacies of couture dressmaking

with inspiring her penchant for aesthetics today. After repeating Givenchy's philosophy "if you are in style, you are already out of style", the talented designer declares she has never relied on trends, either in the fashion world or at home. We sit down with Catherine to reflect upon her multi-faceted career.

How has living and working in Chelsea inspired your design style?

I love Chelsea and I'm definitely a Chelsea girl! There is so much in the area from which to draw inspiration. I am particularly inspired by historical references near Cheyne Walk, where I live. You have everything from Tudor gardens, such as the Chelsea Physic Garden, to the shimmering beauty of the Albert Bridge; the vibrancy of the King's Road to the sleek Sloane Street end where Harvey Nichols is. I often use fashion images juxtaposed with interior shots on my initial moodboards, whether for the lifestyle it evokes or for the beautiful use of fabric and

colour. Whenever I need an instant bit of inspiration for my heart and soul, I head straight to the V&A. I love wandering through the exhibitions, especially the classical sculpture collection.

What differences and similarities do you see between the tastes and requirements of clients who live in Belgravia, Knightsbridge and Chelsea?

The desire for my discerning clients is always the same: to invest in the most prestigious properties in the world. Such exceptional properties exist in Belgravia, Knightsbridge and Chelsea, areas which offer genuine and desirable lifestyle attractions and therefore are a must-have asset; one that never fails to provide an exceptional return.

My Belgravia-based clients are often looking for the ‘jewel in the crown’ within the most prestigious address of all, which is invariably Eaton Square. This has always attracted the aristocracy and leading

“Creating a couture garment is just as meticulous and exacting as a beautifully defined interior”

professionals as well as celebrities due to its location and rich heritage. Eaton Square also particularly retains its very private air through the grand terraces and high security offered within the impressive facades. Many of the properties which come on to the market still retain their original layout and there is often more scope to re-configure this space, adding further investment value and bringing the property into the 21st century, whilst honouring the elegance of the past.

Knightsbridge clients often express a desire to be in close proximity to some of London’s most renowned restaurants and shops, such as Harrods, Zuma and San Lorenzo. Naturally, I have an affinity with those who like to live in Old Chelsea, which has retained a quintessential village feel and a rich historical heritage near the Thames. This is where I have built the story of my life!

How would you describe your design ethos in five words?
Classic, refined, harmonious, beautiful and intimate.

How do you ensure you deliver a bespoke service for clients without repeating yourself?

Ultimately, a property is a client’s home. Therefore it is vital that I know and understand the individual who will be living in the space. The interiors should reflect the client’s sensibilities on a deeply personal level.

Are there any signature elements across your project portfolio that you deem necessary for every client?

In terms of design elements, there are certain Neo-classical architectural finishes that always elevate a property. These include tall door frames, classically proportioned architraves and skirting, Venetian polished plaster wall finishes and breathtakingly beautiful fireplaces.

What’s the key to being a great interior designer?

The ability to be passionate, creative and practical all at the same time! It is so important to possess an ‘instinctive creativity’ and to be constantly inspired, but you also have to manage the other side of the role which includes working with a building team and managing big budgets.

How has your background in couture fashion influenced where you are today?

My couture fashion background has a huge influence on my work. The bespoke essence of creating a beautiful couture garment is just as meticulous and exacting as creating a beautifully defined interior. Givenchy and Karl Lagerfeld have shown huge style in their taste for architecture and interiors – it is all about art and creativity.

My closest friends are five girls who I met whilst modelling; we truly bonded and it is partly due to our shared memories. In one of my first shows I was so nervous that I actually walked off the end of the catwalk. I was so terrified that I just carried on walking! Ultimately, the advantages of modelling far outweighed the disadvantages. It is certainly a complicated world but I’ll never regret being part of it. I felt at home working with some of the most talented couturiers in London.

Was being an interior designer always the dream?

Interestingly, being an interior designer was always something I instinctively thought I would love to do. When the opportunity arose, I was renovating a prestigious Belgravia property and this project was such a success that I was soon employed by word of mouth for my interior design services.

In terms of contemporary influences, what people, books, films and other creative sources provide you with inspiration?

I love travelling. Being in different countries and surrounded by different cultures can give you a whole new perspective on everything. Sofia Coppala’s recent film on Marie Antoinette was beautifully filmed; the colours, fabrics and architecture were very inspiring. Also Patrick Demarchelier’s book of Dior couture photographs – I am enthralled with the images and the beauty in general. ■

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