



Interiors

With their own fair hands

Interior designers can dream up the best furniture, says Arabella Youens

INTERIOR designers spend their days working out how to make spaces beautiful, efficient and comfortable, so it's perhaps inevitable that they should create their own fittings. It's nothing new, of course; Sihyl Colefax & John Fowler has been making bespoke pieces of furniture ever since the company was founded in the 1930s.

In an interior-design manifestation of Plato's proverb that necessity is the mother of invention, decorator Rosanna Bossom was inspired to start her own collection when trying to resolve a particular design conundrum. 'Five years ago, I was helping clients re-decorate a large drawing room,' says Rosanna, whose projects have ranged from Nicholas Coleridge's new Quinlan Terry-designed folly to the private members' club 5, Hertford Street, W1. 'It was dominated by a heavy, chintz ottoman that sat as a distancing obstacle between the two sofas, making any conversation across it almost impossible.' To address this problem, she came up with her Nicholas Ottoman, which has its central core cut out and replaced with a hard, flat surface on which to place drinks or books. 'It has transformed the space; people can now comfortably sit on the edge of the ottoman and chat.'

Since designing that piece, Rosanna's collection has expanded to include a daybed with high upholstered head and sideboards—perfect for fitting into studies that double as spare bedrooms in space-starved London apartments—and skirted tables with smart



Left: The new Gloucester bed, £10,850, from Max Rollitt. *Below left:* Fabric-covered table, £930 plus fabric, from Rosanna Bossom

kick-pleats or deep fringes (020-3691 4552; www.rosannabossom.co.uk). 'Skirted tables are definitely on their way back. I love them as a way of introducing fabric and softness to a room. And they provide useful extra storage, with a place to hide things underneath.'

‘You want to know that the piece will not only look great, but will be built to last’

For Susie Atkinson, a new piece is the result of a hunt. 'It tends to happen after an exhaustive search of the antique market to see if there is anything that will fit the bill,' says the designer, who has launched her first collection of furniture of items that she has consistently found difficult to source, such as desks and bedside tables (020-7384 0700; www.susieatkinson.com). 'We see the gaps and then design pieces that are comfortable in both contemporary and traditional interiors.'

Despite being an antique dealer-cum-interior designer, Max Rollitt dreams up furniture that has the versatility to suit both contemporary and traditional schemes (01962 791124; www.maxrollitt.com). His collection

is made up of pieces that are inspired by antiques, but reinterpreted to suit modern tastes with cleaner, more architectural shapes and lines. 'The reason they look fantastic and are so comfortable is that Max uses his deep understanding of traditional methods to inform his collection,' believes Henriette von Stockhausen of Dorset-based VSP Interiors (01305 265892; www.vspinteriors.com). 'This is important because buying bespoke is far from cheap. You want to know that the piece will not only look great, but will be built to last for generations. The only way to ensure that happens is to use traditional construction methods.'

Max has, by his own admission, spent many hours taking antique pieces of furniture apart to wholly understand their construction. 'As an antique dealer, you look at a lot of things and are constantly making judgements about what will work in people's houses today. When I can't find what I need, I'll use an antique as a basis for a new design, but adapted and scaled so that the proportions are right for today.'

Henriette is expanding her furniture collection, which will include several four-poster beds and a dining bench with upholstered back and sides. 'There are a lot >

Facing page: Decorator Rosanna Bossom champions daybeds and skirted tables



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Inspired by antique furniture, but designed for 21st-century living: Sussex chair, £1,740, from Susie Atkinson (above); Murat headboard, from £2,070, from Ensembler (below); Derwent Light by Martin Brudnizki, £594, from Drummonds (right)

of people who copy shape and form, but who don't understand how proper furniture is made. It might look good, but if the upholstery isn't right, it's not comfortable; when you sit on a traditionally upholstered sofa or chair, it should feel like sitting on a cloud.'

It was this sensibility that also encouraged interior architect Martin Brudnizki to establish his product design studio And Objects (020-7427 6059; www.andobjects.com). 'Often, we found off-the-shelf pieces wouldn't quite fit our schemes or they'd feel out of place, so we decided to take matters into our own hands,' explains Martin.

One of the first collaborations was with the bathroom manufacturers Drummonds (020-7376 4499; www.drummonds-uk.com), where he was able to blend an engineer's sense of functionality and an artist's appreciation of form to create a contemporary take on traditional bathware design.

That is a sentiment echoed by decorator Tara Craig of Ensembler, who designs over-scaled headboards alongside beds, chairs and sofas, all of which are made using traditional techniques and

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materials, including horsehair (07841 261220; www.enssemblerlondon.com).

Everything she sketches is first sent to an 80-year-old framemaker (who used to work for the legendary upholsterer Howard), to be templated and approved. 'You've got to be careful out there: some makers will be obsessed with details, but produce cumbersome and uncomfortable pieces.'

There's another reason for the number of decorators turning to design, believes Susie: the opportunity to shine a spotlight on traditional craftsmanship and ensure that these skills are being passed down to the next generation. 'There's a new wave of interest in makers and craftsmanship from clients who are wanting to own pieces of furniture that tell a story. And I think that's exciting,' she adds.

'There's so much emphasis in today's world on young talent—to the detriment, I believe, of all the wisdom that the older makers have, this is our chance to champion those skills.'

