

FEATURE

# SUPERIOR INTERIORS



Salmon-skin upholstery  
and plenty of platinum  
leaf – the bespoke secrets  
of London's leading  
design consultants

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By Oliver Bennett



In 2011, £1.4 billion of international equity flowed into London's prime property market – and as you'd imagine, designers play a vital role in luring the top-end buyers who are investing here. They have to sell major properties, and looks matter.

So what works? "There are companies that provide furnishing packages which are soulless and corporate," says interior designer Suzy Dallas, who thinks that blandness is counterproductive. "You miss the discerning buyers who want imaginative spaces."

The smarter trend is towards what Natalia Miyar, head of design at Helen Green Design, calls "better bespoke". "Clients want a design scheme which is unique, so our furniture is usually purpose-made to fit room proportions, with art and accessories sourced from around the world."

COVER: STAIRCASE BY ARGENT DESIGN.  
RIGHT: AN EXTERIOR BY FINCHATTON





Metallic materials, lacquer, mirroring, lighting, framing and art are all key to creating the desired effect.

Nicola Fontanella of Argent Design notes a contemporary accent on materials. "Accessories are key and finishes are vital," she says. "I currently see a lot of inlays in floors, bronze detailing and plenty of platinum leaf."

ABOVE: TWO ELEGANT INTERIORS BY ARGENT DESIGN  
AND ANOTHER, FAR RIGHT, BY FINCHATTON





International developers Finchatton, which works in prime central London, also works with specialist finishes, including sustainably sourced Arctic salmon skin on upholstery and furniture. “The leather can be dyed and is very supple yet strong,” says a spokeswoman, who cites a “new glamour” in surfaces: resin-backed mirrors, and polished plaster finished with car paint. “Polished plaster has been around for a while, but this particular treatment gives a real sheen.



Suzy Dallas has a formula: “Mix antique finds with designer furniture and investment art,” she says. “For example, a Muralto cushion with a wing armchair from upholsterers James Design, custom-made rugs by Riviere, and a mid-century coffee table from dealer Josephine Ryan Antiques.” And offer texture: linen curtains, velvet sofas, faux fur throws. “They give a room a 3-D feel,” she says.

ABOVE: BEDROOM BY FINCHATTON

Nicola Fontanella identifies trends for jewels and semi-precious stones in furniture, silver basins in bathrooms, white onyx fireplaces, contemporary photography and cashmere as a wall covering: "It works really well in home cinemas." Referencing the house itself is also increasingly popular. "For example, we've taken the original 18th-century plaster architrave in Cornwall Terrace and used the detail on the doors," she explains.

Natalia Miyar commends interior design that references fashion. "At a penthouse in Grosvenor Crescent the entrance hall uses Vivienne Westwood textured wallpaper," she says. Elsewhere traditional fabrics are used with reference to design houses Hermès, Stella McCartney and Marni. "A big challenge is how to make a large floor space feel homely without compromising," she adds. "The skilful placement of oversized accessories and furniture, using textured fabrics, can complement a space without overpowering it." All in all then, it's a question of balance rather than bling.