

Petra Arko
Founder & Creative Director, Bergman & Mar



FURNITURE DESIGN

BY PETRA ARKO

FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BERGMAN & MAR

Bergman & Mar is a multidisciplinary interior design studio based in London, working on residential and commercial projects in Britain and abroad. Bergman & Mar's vision is informed by staging and storytelling. Their immersive approach to sculpting private residences is realised through the creation of abundant elements – from joinery to individual furnishing pieces – to craft truly inimitable solutions that cohesively connect all interior aspects. Daring palettes, organic shapes and unexpected textural pairings elicit experiential outcomes with lasting impact.

I grew up in a small alpine town in socialist Yugoslavia, now Slovenia, foreign imports were prohibited, and I indulged and dreamt of furniture that existed beyond our borders as we lived with a huge lack of variety in our homes. That said, craftsmen and makers were part of the community, and furniture was incredibly well made. The early scarcity fuelled my endless drive to create unique and different interiors, and the importance of makers, craftsmanship and original design remained. That may be why my passion for retaining knowledge about furniture is intense. Nothing gives me greater joy than uncovering an emerging talented designer or artist with a unique and well-thought-out product with depth and meaning. For example, we worked with JTRE, a developer, on an apartment



Above: Illuminated Sculpture, Murano Glass Brass Mobile Pendant light made by Italian maker Silvio Piattelli Sas. Photography by Helen Stroud

next to Tate Modern. Budgets and timeliness are usual challenges, but I was absolutely determined to find the perfect focal point piece without compromising our core values. A truly unique, handmade pendant with Murano glass and brass that feels very modernist and resembles a Calder mobile was a magnificent fit for the scheme. The pandemic made us re-evaluate the quality of life and shifted how we live and work. Working from home and creating a better work-life balance is one of the most welcomed changes. Now that we spend more time in our homes, we notice an increased desire to improve our homes, make them more expressive of our character, and want our homes to be more comfortable and practical. Homes are our sanctuaries now. In addition, we want to be connected

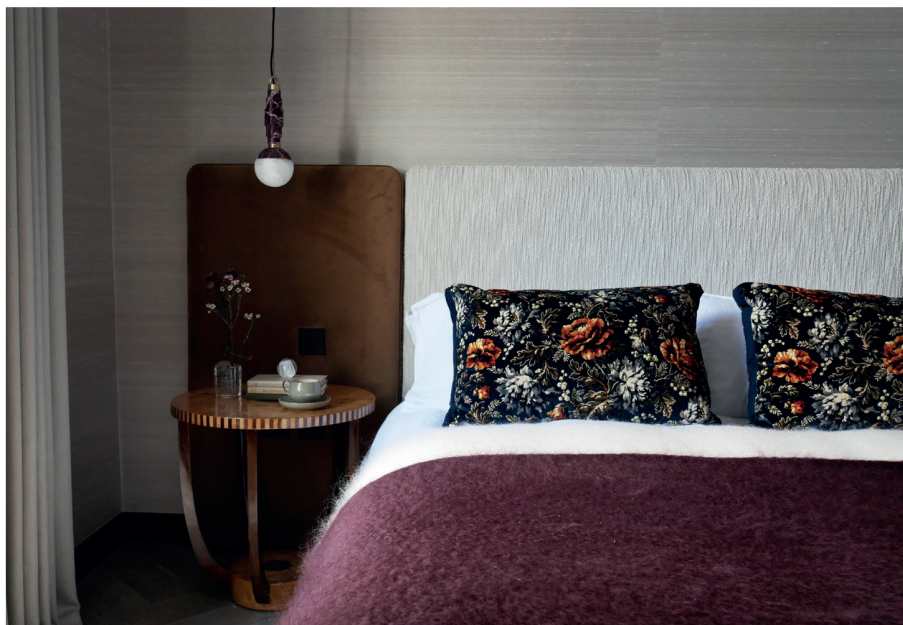
to nature more. If we have a large terrace or garden, suddenly, we place greater importance on this part of our homes. If not, we can fill the interior with plants that bring our homes to life. The design sector is growing significantly, opening many doors and enabling us to explore new attributes, all contributing to how 'design savvy' our consumers are. Consumers look for a unique interior that is designed just for them. We pay extra attention to ensure we use a diverse range of suppliers, manufacturers and makers to ensure the client's interiors feel unseen before and are specially designed to suit their new home. Something magical happens when you find a beautiful workshop making genuinely unique quality handmade products; the makers are modest, down-to-earth

personalities that live and breathe their designs. We support ethical and sustainable furniture made by inspirational people with meaningful stories. We aim to specify pieces our clients can keep for life and pass them down to the next generation. Design that is within reach and yet beautiful, long-lasting and iconic. One of the most requested and successful pieces is the dining table we designed with Martelo & Mo, London-based husband and wife makers. Their passion is for designing and creating functional, well-made furniture from sustainably sourced materials. Their attention to detail is impeccable, using brass butterfly joints to keep the timber plan together. We love their approach to creating handcrafted pieces of furniture with their minds and hands that

respect the integrity of materials while considering how they feel and look. The live edge dining table used at our recent 101 Cleveland project is one of our favourite pieces. As you walk into the space, your eyes cannot help but be drawn to the walnut slab's visual textures and organic edge, giving a unique feel to the area. As designers, we are problem solvers. We need to help someone create a home they have envisaged, finding a way to realise their dreams. We first have to start by finding out more about them, how they live their life, what is unique about their personality, what is not working for them now, and what the perfect solution looks like? Clients are people, they need empathy, and they need help navigating what feels quite like an overwhelming task ahead. Understanding their needs and helping them find words to express them is essential for the project's success.

It can be challenging to work with existing pieces clients own, but it's important to respect their needs and the sentimental value these items may hold. I enjoy the additional challenge. You really have to work hard to find ways to cleverly and aesthetically incorporate some pieces. Yet the reward you feel after seeing that the entire house contents haven't ended up in the skip and furniture got a new lease of life feels really good. We should encourage clients to retain as much as possible and instead invest the budget in areas that really need it. When designing 101 on Cleveland, the most important attribute we wanted to incorporate into the design was the eclectic character of the neighbourhood. Fitzrovia has a rich history, from Charles Dickens

Below: Project Dukelease, 101 on Cleveland by Bergman & Mar. Photography by Helen Stroud



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and Chippendale; our interiors draw inspiration from the Victorian era, its revival of style and eclecticism mixed with Middle East and Asian influences. The period was known for dark jewel tones and dark hues, such as deep reds, blues, and greens, layered with mahogany, walnut, and gold. The interiors proposed are a subtle modern continuation of Chippendale's appreciation of craftsmanship and eclecticism, introducing these values using contemporary pieces of furniture made by British and global finest artisans and furniture designers. Our studio's ethos is sculpting interiors through an immersive approach whilst drawing inspiration through a well-composed puzzle of the world's

view today and in the past. Above all, the studio aims to create unique, aesthetic, practical and functional interiors. Interior design is very personal. Well-designed space evokes an emotional connection to aesthetics and gives you a sense of pleasure and joy. This point should be added to Dieter Ram's iconic design principles. Placing the human at the centre of each design, the functionality and practicality of space are just as necessary. We advise our clients to invest in quality statement pieces and to prioritise comfort. Key upholstery pieces, such as sofas or armchairs, must be ergonomic and durable. Joinery must be creatively designed to suit the user's lifestyle. Attention to detail and

PETRA ARKO

quality materials is worth spending an additional budget on.

It is worth investing in original iconic pieces that have stood the test of time. You will get guaranteed quality and timeless design. Choose something that reminds you of something you have seen before, perhaps in your grandparent's house or on your travels; you will give your home a more profound meaning through your choices of furniture or lighting. However, tempting, but replicas are simply not the same as the original. That is the money wasted!

Try to keep the design simple. Life is complicated, and your home should give you a well-balanced positive atmosphere. Overfilled homes with too many focal points can feel cluttered and exhausting to relax. When our eyes are drawn to too many beautiful areas, they have nowhere to rest. My advice to our clients is to be bold and leave some

empty areas and walls empty.

We advise using authentic designs and solid-quality materials. Long-lasting pieces that we love rather than feel that they are in vogue. Bringing nature into the home. Avoid buying fast furniture if at all possible. Invest in iconic pieces and mix them with little finds special to you or your family. I'm not too fond of shortcuts; it will take more time, but finding a piece that is unique, not overpriced, and supports the correct values is hugely rewarding. Design is fluid and continuously evolves, and past designs inform new ones. Our studio is passionate about juxtaposing the interior with new and old iconic pieces. We spend a lot of time researching and understanding the background of the building or area we work in and the era or any past stories that inspire designs. It's vital to get the balance right and ensure the design is fresh with well-chosen nods to

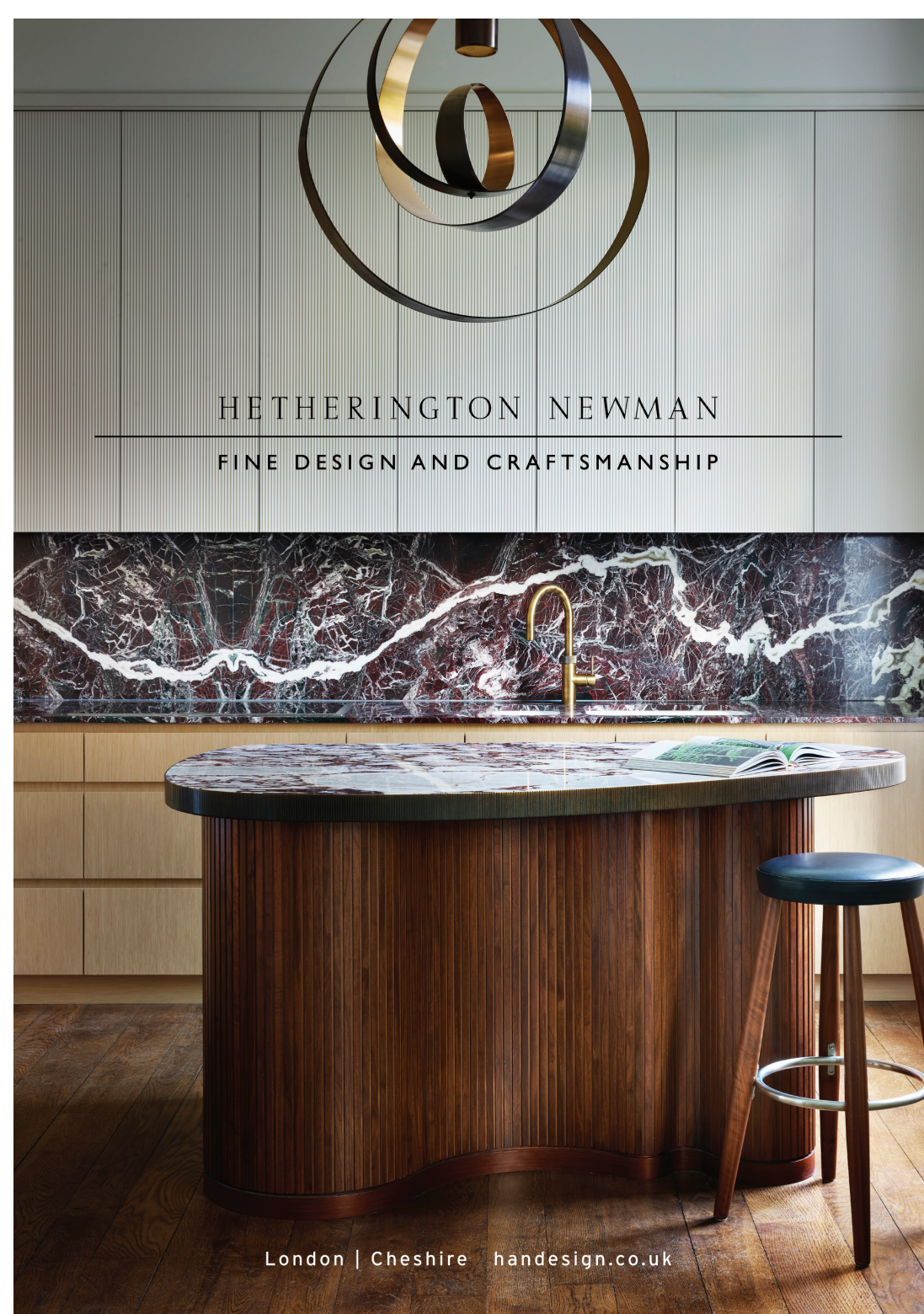
the past. The best way to avoid the design looking tired or dated is to avoid following the design trends. They can certainly guide and inspire you, but they should only partially guide the interior design. Hence the balance between something new and something old is so important. An interior that looks collected rather than purchased all in one year and from the same shop will better stand the test of time.

Going into 2023, we anticipate that Interior Design will have a flow of neutral elements, promoting local makers, artists, uniqueness, longevity, and design for life. The wholeness and wellness no longer belong to the annual spa retreat, and there is a need and possibility we design homes that feel like our dream holiday house.

www.bergmanandmar.com
IG: @bergman.and.mar



Above: Live Edge Walnut Dining Table, Project Dukelease, 101 on Cleveland by Bergman & Mar.
Photography by Taran Wilkhu



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