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KEEPING HOMES FASHIONABLE

Miranda Robertson finds that decades of experience in interiors, art and fashion are helping Pewsey designer Sue Dann create some truly opulent homes

Sue Dann started off with a first class honours degree in fashion and textiles and was offered a place at the Royal College of Art before working at the top level of fashion. Some 20 years ago she jumped ship into interiors and has since created a string of beautiful designs – with her USP being that she designs most of the furniture herself, as well as coming up with the overall scheme, including electrical plans.

Sue, who lives in Bath, but has her office in Pewsey, said: “I work all over the place. I have a project in Hampshire at the moment, and one in Surrey, both for long-standing clients. I worked in fashion for 20 years and lived in Paris for four. I worked mainly in Italy and France but also travelled to the Far East, Malta, Portugal and elsewhere, creating

knitwear collections. I worked for a Japanese company for the last 13 years as their European Fashion Consultant. I did fashion forecasting and would organise fashion shows and exhibitions, designing everything from the clothes to the sets, so I was used to working in three dimensions already.

“Then I had my children and suddenly I didn’t want to have to be in Paris or Italy for the twice-yearly launches of new fashions. They always happened in December and June and I’d need to be in Paris instead of watching my children in their nativity play.”

In 1998 Sue did an interior design course at the KLC school of design while living in Buckinghamshire and worked around that area until moving to Bath in 2006. She said: “I design all my own cabinetry and some freestanding furniture and sofas and use specialist companies to make them, some

of which I’ve been using for 15 or 20 years. I have a bespoke joiner, upholsterer and a curtain maker working for me. I hand-draw my scale plans and elevations, which is a hangover from my fashion days – oddly, I’m better at drawing room plans than I was at drawing fashion!”

“I’ve always worked for myself and get most of my work through word of mouth. My most loyal clients found me on the internet as I am a member of The British Institute of Interior Design. They have used me for four projects, including a penthouse in London, apartment in Bath, a chalet in the French Alps and a property in Surrey, which I am currently working on. The Alps property was an amazing project to work on.

“We completely stripped it out to the bare concrete shell before starting again. It was a very high-flying, technical project – they have a

three-metre screen that drops down to create a cinema. It helped that I speak fluent French, so I could communicate with the builders and other tradesmen.”

Sue generally tackles larger projects and they take time, sometimes up to 18 months. She often runs smaller projects at the same time.

She said: “I always tailor my designs to suit the personality of the clients. For instance I recently did a house in Wellow that, although I don’t usually go in for anything flowery, really suited a flowery scheme, with embroidered linen.

“Interiors trends change like fashion but not as frequently. When I started in the 90s everything was terracottas and blues. Then everything became more warm neutrals with cream, then cool neutrals. Now it’s back to dark colours, with the Soho House look ➔



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being very popular. Trends are for more 1950s furniture at the moment, which suits some people but certainly not all.

“I do incorporate some aspects of the current trends in my schemes but I like to come up with a timeless look that will last and be easy to transform in ten years’ time by simply changing the cushions and curtains.”

“We recently updated a kitchen by swapping the black granite worktops for a pale marble like granite, changing a few of the units and painting the units cool neutral but that’s all it has taken to make it look like a whole new kitchen. It’s important rooms are easy to update.”

When tackling a project, Sue will design as much of it as she can.

She said: “I source items from all over, but I do have some favoured suppliers, such as Porta Romana, a luxury lighting company, Tom Faulkner for contemporary tables and The Looking Glass of Bath for mirrors, as they make them to order. I have accounts with all the major fabric houses. I even design the sofas myself I work with several flooring

companies, including stone specialists.”

Sue also enjoys commercial work: “When I started out in Interiors I wanted to work mainly in restaurants and hotels and I did some work in that sector before I moved down to Bath. I’d like to do more in the future,” she says.

Sue is glad she made the leap from fashion: “The fashion industry was starting to change when I left,” she says. “Big companies were sourcing more abroad and the UK textile industry went into decline. The fashion industry was a bit like the music industry, changing all the time with the 60s coming back, then the 70s coming back, then the 80s – it was also quite an ageist industry, where you have your hey-day and that’s it.

“I had a lot of friends working for the major fashion houses in Paris and many of them burned out. I definitely made the right decision.” ①

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