

Opulent chic sans ostentation

Interior designer RIENTS BRUINSMA speaks to *MEI* about his projects and inspirations



Bruinsma: Interior design has been his passion from an early age

Rients Bruinsma, a designer with an ever increasing international portfolio including magnificent apartments and palazzo conversions, has an infallible sense of understated elegance.

He founded his London (UK) design practice in 2003, after studying at the Academy of Visual Arts in Maastricht, Netherlands, and working with top designers in Paris (France), New York (US) and London (UK).

From the start he has been involved with grand projects like the Presidential Suite of the Four Seasons Hotel in New York with Peter Marino, the conversion of the ministry of finance into the left wing of the Louvre with Jean Michel Wilmotte, and in London he joined John Stefanidis, doyen of interior designers trusted by generations of English Dukes and the US 'first' families.

Bruinsma explains that interior design has been a passion from a very early age. When he was three he was building miniature interiors with sofas moulded in cotton wool taken from his mother's dressing table. Later he drew endless floor plans. These days he travels the world and is inspired by palaces, castles and museums.

"At spare moments I devour magazines and real estate catalogues, and seek out movies with spectacular set design. The Spanish cult director Almodovar is my favourite," he said.

PROJECTS

His most challenging but rewarding project is a third floor apartment in One Hyde Park for a private client. Flats in One Hyde Park, designed by Richard Rogers, architect of the Pompidou centre in Paris and Lloyd's of London, sell for record breaking prices.

"I had to follow strict rules in such an important construction, hence the challenge and the final satisfaction," Bruinsma commented.

"I was inspired by Paris-born Jean Michel Frank, the most influential interior designer of the 30s and 40s, scion of a multi-national banking family and an autocratic original who designed houses for Rockefellers and French aristocrats. He used rare materials and textures, ethnic artefacts, went beyond the '6000 shades of beige,' but became celebrated for his restraint, often called minimalist restraint."

In One Hyde Park, Bruinsma has created dramatic wall effects with polished plaster, silver leaf and marble. A bedroom wall is upholstered in velvet, silk curtains are made in three colours like an haute



couture evening gown. He has designed furniture and lamps as well as selected pieces by Herve van der Straaten, Du Plantier, Mangiarotti – artist-craftsmen known to the cognoscenti.

ARTWORK

The success of this apartment led the same client to recommend Rients for a lobby area in central London, completed two months ago, a space gleaming with onyx, polished stone, mahogany and the master stroke: a geometric satin brass screen in front of the reception desk, almost an artwork.

Wimpole Street, a 19th century terrace of family mansions, remains an imposing, dignified address, but for corporate headquarters, exclusive shops and hotels. This lobby, entirely 21st century deluxe, makes a stunning first impression.

Rients is also adept at achieving maximum chic in a minimum space. He transformed 40 sq m in a mass produced 1950s public building to create an atmosphere of cosmopolitan elegance.

"The most imaginative idea was to line the walls in natural teak, and great care was taken while selecting the art deco furniture."

He has also introduced funky touches such as a cowhide headboard and Mexican floor painting found in New York on one of his many trawling expeditions.

He is far from being an autocrat and worked on the architecture of one Pimlico apartment in collaboration with a client who made the decorating decisions.

Bruinsma's company offers, both a full architectural and design service, as well as bespoke furniture

In One Hyde Park, he has created dramatic wall effects with polished plaster, silver leaf and marble. A bedroom wall is upholstered in velvet, silk curtains are made in three colours like a haute couture evening gown

and custom made soft furnishings.

Currently he is working on a fascinating range of new projects, including the renovation of a 200-sq-m-apartment in a prestigious block in Knightsbridge, near Harrods, the oligarch's neighbourhood store, the conversion of an artist's studio in Chelsea with a basement swimming pool, built-in spa and roof garden, a 300-sq-m-apartment in Trieste, where the historic ceiling frescoes are still intact, and another conversion in the old quarter of Lisbon in Portugal.

Challenging project: An apartment in One Hyde Park; Wimpole Street (top) and Notting Hill (facing page)

