KALEIDOSCOPE

Living in
Color & Patterns

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THE COSMOS WITHIN

ON EXPLORING INNER SPACE WITH INTERIOR DESIGN

When Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran of Dimore Studio opened their former Milan home to the public as a gallery of interior design, they left it much the same as it had been when they lived there: inside, the two designers had mined myriad strata of paint to bring eighteenth century ceiling frescoes to light without restoring them to any false brightness. They had painted one room an unplumbable deep-sea color that they had found among the plates of an old book and paired an eighteenth-century Swedish daybed with an art deco rug from China. In the foyer, the hoops of a brass chandelier cascaded from the ceiling nearly to the floor, and the walls, a patchwork of varicolored marble slabs, were actually wallpapered in a pattern by Giò Ponti. Instead of ancient gilt-framed canvases—though you could imagine them hanging those elsewhere—Salci and Moran had clustered interlocking remnants of rugs on the walls as if they were expressionist paintings. These men—having lived amongst objects of their own invention and objects plucked from diverse periods and places—were portraitists who had lived for a time within their own collective self-portrait.

When they opened the gallery, the duo published a slim catalog disclosing their furniture designs —a moodboard manifesto of sorts— showcasing a type of contemporary design that is expressive and personal. In it, the two imagined interiors literally outside the box, clipping images of their furniture in out of ordinary settings and gluing each piece into photographs of pedestrian locations: a ceiling lamp in a pet shop, a table or two in a public restroom, a daybed placed (not abandoned) in the middle of a street. In the 3D world, too, Moran and Salci take objects and furnishings out of their original contexts and tuck them into alien compositions where they assume unanticipated identities, form fresh tribes, and fall into conversation with one another, reconciled to their own novel diversity. There is no submission to symmetry or hierarchy: luxurious/cheap, art/craft, aristocratic/accessible—contradiction is as valuable as affinity.

This brand of interior design is a collage of materials and atmospheres, of finding and making, culled into coherence from an overwhelming multiplicity of influences—a location, an old book, a child's toy, fashion collections, art exhibitions, television drama, a fabric sample, or film. The approach requires skill in curation, collection, craftsmanship, inventorying, scenography, a fascination with obscure historical details, and a purposeful confusion of art and design. If the chamber of curiosities was once a place where one studied the nature of the cosmos out there, then these unique interiors have become places to study the nature of the even greater cosmos within ourselves.

Feeding expressive, personal interiors is the continuing popularity of imaginative surface design. The Parisian studio A+A Cooren used products from Bien Fait's wallcoverings shop as ornaments to envelope its new showroom with whimsy and wonder. Milan studio Carnovsky's *RGB* project is an ongoing exploration of "surface depth" and the interaction between printed color and color made of light. Engravings found in books from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries are printed in red, blue, and yellow layers on wallcoverings, turning figurative illustrations into abstractions, yielding a tangle of images barely legible under ordinary white light. As one exposes that tangle to a colored light or filter, however, a single layer emerges: under red light the figure of a man becomes visible; a blue light strips that figure down to his anatomical musculature; under green light, all that remains is a skeleton.

Beyond pattern and color, both the soft and sheltering surface—cushions, quilts, drapes—and the handcrafted object remain in high demand. A craft revival movement has begun to tap the manual genius of weavers, metalworkers, and other artisans to create products that synthesize traditional techniques with modern markets. Meanwhile, designers use all these tools with greater intensity. Dimore's materials vary wildly: from garrulously clashing patterned fabrics cut from bolts and draped over

anonymous furnishings to classic velvet with piping, from metals that can be tarnished or patinated, to rough ceramics imprisoned under liquid glazes, heightened by fluorescent strip lighting. Some designers use modest materials lavishly; others use sumptuous materials sumptuously. Jacques Garcia modeled his project Maison Souquet in Paris around carnal houses of the late nineteenth century, swathing each guest room in 2,000 meters of 120 different fabrics.

To create such confections, designers must also be collectors, and not only of couture objects; high and lowbrow items may live together, the mass-manufactured with the handmade, the patrician with the paltry. A *chaise* bought at Sotheby's in Hong Kong may be paired with a plastic Ming vase found in the basement of a junk shop in Michigan. London-based designer Hubert Zandberg considers himself a collector before all else. He began collecting as a child when he found stones, ostrich eggs, gourds, and shells on the veld in South Africa, where he was born. Free and found in nature, they remain prized possessions: "I still use these objects," he says, "juxtaposing them with, and therefore highlighting, other more 'precious' and so-called 'sophisticated' artworks and artifacts." The humble sets off the haute, luxury frames the laid-back, and wherever a collector goes, objects and artworks present themselves. From Portobello Market to Porte de Clignancourt, from Berlin's Tiergarten and August Strasse in Mitte to Cape Town, Moscow, Miami, Rio, and Tangiers, very few holidays or business trips do not include detours to an antiques street, flea market, workshop, or art studio.

In the process of not just specifying but collecting, designers rely on a litany of experts who are themselves "hunter-gatherers": auction house specialists, gallerists, and itinerant vendors like Owen Hargreaves and Jasmine Dahl, who can be found in Portobello Market on Saturday mornings, collecting, selling, and trading African artifacts. London designer Danielle Moudaber takes time to cultivate trusted sources and then nurtures them. Her greatest affection is reserved for Samir Hadchiti who, with a background in archaeology and painting, builds entire collections of fine and decorative arts and crafts for his clients. He finds special pieces for Moudaber, like a century-old ceramic chandelier and sconces rescued from a French bank during the Second World War.

Scorning reproductions, Moudaber also turns to artisans and artists to fabricate her own designs, which supplement her estate sale, auction house, art fair, and flea market finds. She works with makers like Brazilian upholsterer Evandro Kuhn or metal artists Mark Brazier-Jones and Jean-Francois Buisson, who have made her occasional tables and sculptures, princess chairs, and lighting. For ten years she has relied on Ciprian Zama, an artist specializing in wood and metal, who built the staircase and a multipurpose three-tier bar-desk-coffee table for her home.

Although the expressive interior mixes and matches stem from a bewildering array of sources—from showroom to maker—it is the bespoke objects that are the keystones of individuality, tailoring environments to their inhabitants. The design-build architect and designer-maker have become burgeoning phenomena in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where creatives have been clustering close to fabricators in spaces that can double as offices and workshops. For the interiors of a Brooklyn townhouse, Elizabeth Roberts of Ensemble Architecture relied on some well-known names (Urban Archaeology, Anthropologie, Mitchell Gold) to combine mass-made pieces with objects from boutique manufacturers like lighting label Roll & Hill from New York and Pennsylvania-based BDDW shop owner Tyler Hays, who s upplied one-off retro-modern furnishings and lighting for the project.

Occasionally, however, the client is the maker. Over the course of ten years, farmer Kurt Timmermeister rebuilt a 135-year-old house on an island off Seattle. He preserved the Douglas fir timber plank walls, but built everything inside with salvaged woods and a sense of humor, like bedside tables made from upside-down bedside tables, or a lamp with three hooves. He also made the cabin a gallery of friends' artwork that he had collected over the years; even a miniature landscape painting found a home on a shelf among the teacups and saucers.

Once the imagined pieces are made real and beloved objects inventoried, the mysterious process of composition begins. Hubert Zandberg uses the word

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ensemblier to describe what he does: not only placing objects together, but making them meaningful through their arrangement. "Pieces often 'speak' to you, not about themselves, but about their future connection with other pieces or ensembles," Zandberg explains. "It is about seeing, in your mind's eye, the potential assemblage that makes a particular object interesting, rather than seeing only its beauty." Ultimately, all the beautiful objects—art toys and Adnet chairs, art by South African Nicholas Hlobo, a bronze vase by Rick Owens—must work in service of a larger narrative. Particular objects juxtaposed in particular ways turn individual objects into an ensemble the way a writer turns individual letters into words and individual words into a novel.

That ensemble tells a story: a fragment of a memory, a mood, or an homage. In Rue Balzac, amidst Oriental prints and taxidermy, Zandberg flamboyantly celebrated the life of actor and real-life character Tony Duquette. Danielle Moudaber designed her own house as the backdrop to a love affair. Then there are stories about place. In Seattle, Nicole Hollis designed the Palladian Hotel to honor the region's entrepreneurial history: the successful timber trade, the gold rush, and the city's all-important ports echoe in details like reclaimed wood headboards, the gilded frames of seemingly historical paintings made by contemporary local artists, and antique maritime maps. Marie-Anne Oudejans' Bar Palladio in the belvedere of a historical Indian palace marries checkered floors, embroidered bolsters, and bistro mirrors to cusped Indian arches, Mughal motifs, jungle murals, and a royal blue that no one in the West has used since the colonies were liberated. Everything in the bar was made by hand in local workshops and ateliers by glass-cutters, brass-workers, block printers, marble specialists, and painters: Oudejans lets Jaipur tell the tale of Jaipur.

Like these place-spaces, stage sets use objects to tell a finite and foregone narrative. In general, interior design is scenography with a broader mandate: Paris designer Rodolphe Parente was asked to create an apartment evoking David Lynch's eerie 1990s television drama *Twin Peaks*, which explored the gap between people's public faces and their interior darkness. Parente's *Concrete Gem* flat contains nothing literal in its 35 square meters, but light alters the mood of the space constantly as it moves over its coarse concrete surfaces and, along with a wooden marquetry floor submerged beneath a deep-red polyurethane gloss, unites Lynch's surreal world with the economy and material richness of, say, Le Cabanon. A designer of more theatrical expression is London's Luke Edward Hall, who studied menswear and ran online antiques shop Fox & Flyte. Today his distinctive interior styling is much in demand, a fusion of the Greco-Roman, the high-desert glamour of Palm Springs, and the crumbling, ivy-bound English manor. The more tastefully eccentric the client, the better.

If some interiors are dramatic stagings or portraits of places, there are those rare spaces that, like Carlo Mollino's eponymous *Casa Mollino*, are complex works of autobiography. Over the course of the 1960s, Mollino synthesized the cumulative experiences of a hungrily lived life into these Turin rooms which, after his death, were emptied. Thirty years on, two devoted curators meticulously recreated the interiors—and with them, the man—by referring to personal letters and a scrupulously detailed floor plan, and by interviewing colleagues, lovers, and craftsmen. Today, it looks as if Mollino has stepped off-stage momentarily, leaving voids filled with himself where erotica faces butterflies, rice paper lamps face gilded mirrors, and an insatiable creative life faced death: in the bedroom, ancient Egyptian symbols of the afterlife take form in a eighteenth century bed built in the shape of a small boat, floating over a blue carpet under a constellation of his own erotic photography.

Mollino's rooms stand apart from the world while teeming with intimate knowledge of it. He left behind him a microcosm of himself—interiors that were once contained *within* him much more than they ever contained him. To some degree, this is true of all unique interiors. At once both explicit and enigmatic, they are truly worlds unto themselves.

With barely four years of age, the first career choice interior designer Hubert Zandberg made was to become a collector. "Collecting is a condition and you can choose to live it or fight it," the South Africa-born designer says, using the French word *ensemblier* to describe his line of work. The word refers to a person who, in addition to being able to place objects together, can, through envisioning their arrangement, make the effect greater than the sum of their parts. The simplicity of this definition, however, is belied by the mostly instinctual choices that go into juxtaposing diverse objects and furnishings to create space that is garrulous or sonorous with personality.

In his own Parisian pied-a-terre, which the London-based designer uses for client meetings, trips to the galleries, and *marchés aux puces*, he gathers a myriad of objects in a small space: tables from Matego, Adnet chairs, Italian lighting by Sarfatti, a bronze vase by Rick Owens, ceramics, art toys, and contemporary art by Nicholas Hlobo, the Chapman brothers, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Dawn Mellor. And then there are unusual objects.

In another home that he aptly describes as a "cabinet of curiosities," he introduces objects as if they were to become friends (and even frenemies) and then layers the space with these juxtapositions to make it personal. This plethora, especially in the basement, deftly draws together historical periods and geographies, nature and craft, and disposable culture, high design, and art. The interiors of the four-story house were not shaped by design, that problem-solving practice; instead, the objects, furnishings, and artworks establish the function and character of each space.

"Pieces often speak to you, not about themselves, but rather about their future connection with other pieces or ensembles," Zandberg explains. "The [more obscure] instruments play important roles in the symphony, but they are rarely allowed to play a solo. It is the idea of seeing, in your mind's eye, the potential assemblage that makes a particular object interesting, rather than only its own beauty." Like cooks in the kitchen, too many star objects in an interior may prove disastrous. The apartment in Rue Balzac—paying homage to a stage actor—demanded

THE COLLECTOR'S DILEMMA

HUBERT ZANDBERG — PARIS [FRANCE]

a flamboyant scenography: an amalgam of the ornamental and the contemporary, Oriental prints with flowers and taxidermy. "This sumptuous nature allowed all the objects, patterns, and colors to emphasize each other," he says, "and to complete the overtly dramatic effect."

Zandberg came down with his collector's "illness" early on, making his earliest finds on the veld in South Africa: stones, ostrich eggs, gourds, and shells. It is these "free objects" from nature that remain some of his most prized possessions. "I still use these objects to juxtapose with, and therefore highlight, other more precious and so-called sophisticated artworks and artifacts," he says.

Whether for business or pleasure, his travels rarely exclude visits to an antiques street, flea market, or artist's studio, from the Portobello Market to his own Parisian neighborhood, or Porte de Clignancourt to the Tiergarten in Berlin. Through visits to the latter he has augmented his collection of dice and kitschy bar accessories. Other haunts include the galleries around August Strasse in Berlin-Mitte, shops and galleries in Cape Town where he has roots, as well as Moscow, Miami, Rio, Istanbul, and Tangiers, where he doesn't. Sometimes, Zandberg will visit a market with a list in hand of objects to find for various projects—and then find items he loves too much to let go: "That is one of the less healthy side effects of the collector's illness," he admits. "I recently found a retro globe on a stand that I secretly asked the shipper not to ship to a client abroad, but to hide in the storeroom for me."

To find his best "finds," he explains, requires the aid and expertise of hundreds of dealers, finders, artists, and craftspeople, who swell the rolls of what he, perhaps affectionately, calls "the band of hunters." Here, he mentions Owen Hargreaves and Jasmine Dahl, who used to trade in African beads and artifacts in London's Portobello Market and various pop-up events and fairs. He credits each with not only having a wonderful eye but with understanding the aesthetics of their various clients, which allows them to cater to individual needs. "Saturday mornings in London would not be the same without a visit to their stall where news and spiritual advice are exchanged and mad laughter ensues," he says. "This virtually tribal gathering has a meaning far beyond simply negotiating a price and buying an object. The fruits of their African expeditions are littered far and wide across my projects."

At times, the pieces he finds influence the aesthetic of the interior he is working on, but whatever the case, there is always a bigger story in mind. "It is important to be able to associate your finds with a larger narrative," he says, "which also, of course, means that one must become an expert in storing and inventorying." In the Notting Hill townhouse that he designed for a close friend—a fashion designer with whom he has spent years grazing through flea markets and galleries—that larger narrative was their friendship. He told their story through a range of aesthetics, restoring elements of architectural heritage, integrating her existing furniture, and bringing in modern art, "curiosities," and glamorous old pieces.

Once the object objects have collected, there is a certain *je ne sais quoi* in how he composes. He sees the process of putting objects together as instinctive with a little practice-makes-perfect thrown in. "It is the small choices that give you the thrill when you see the energy that suddenly exists between newly associated objects," Zandberg says. "Therein lies the pleasure and the satisfaction."

"PIECES OFTEN SPEAK TO YOU, NOT ABOUT THEMSELVES, BUT RATHER ABOUT THEIR FUTURE CONNECTION WITH OTHER PIECES OR ENSEMBLES."

THE COLLECTOR'S DILEMMA

CHELSEA APARTMENT

HUBERT ZANDBERG — LONDON [UNITED KINGDOM]

When browsing through shops, auction houses, or markets, Zandberg comes into unique interaction with objects when they entice him with tales of how they might enrich a certain space or how they might be enriched when placed in proximity with other objects. In this Chelsea flat, Zandberg composed a scene of objects collected far and wide in a process that involved both intuition and experience. Taking cues from 1940s France and synthesizing objects from the eighteenth century through today, flea market finds tell a different tale among the custom-built, while anonymous pieces assume new character among sanitary ware by Lefroy Brooks. Architectural models and geometric wooden figures adorning walls and shelves stem from different corners of the world: vintage Italian dining chairs from Paris, glass sculptures from Brussel and a screen from Monte Carlo. “Low glamour” is embraced in the form of semi-precious crafted and natural materials: *verre églomisé*, lacquer, rock crystal, natural onyx, and stone, as with the bathroom’s lush, monolithic coat of black St. Laurent marble.

VINTAGE ITALIAN DINING CHAIRS FROM PARIS AND GLASS SCULPTURES FROM CAPE TOWN CO-EXIST WITH BESPOKE UPHOLSTERY FROM MONTE CARLO.

A WINTER'S TALE

HUBERT ZANDBERG — LONDON [UNITED KINGDOM]

Collector as much as designer, Zandberg began early, discovering shells and gourds on the veld in South Africa. Today his favorite pastime is hunting and gathering, and he still prizes the humble majesty of nature's *objets d'art*. In this family home, Zandberg reimagined the 1920s as both traditional and contemporary, combining cues from a New York gentleman's club and a glamorous ocean liner—and then adding classic bronzes in African patterns and allusions to "Cubist Deco." He also introduced treasures from the natural world: pheasant feathers, pine cones, dried fruit, and autumn leaves that emphasize a masculine context. These unique items are layered within layers of time and place: a chrome trolley found in Paris, Christmas ornaments from Berlin and Brussels, vintage decanters of unknown authorship that are renewed beside a silver tray by Ralph Lauren, and motley boxes from dealers on Church Street and Pimlico Road. Here, the bespoke lives cheek by jowl with the mass-produced, celebrity lives beside anonymity, and the antiqued beside the organic.

WHEN ARTFUL PIECES COME TOGETHER THE HOME OFTEN BECOMES THE ART ITSELF.