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DESIGNER PROFILE

MELANIE RADEMACHER

JADE TILLEY SPEAKS TO **MELANIE RADEMACHER** ABOUT HER EARLY DESIGN YEARS AT KELLY HOPPEN AND WHY DESIGN HAS ALWAYS BEEN HER JOURNEY AND HER DESTINATION

MENA INTERIORS LTD WAS ESTABLISHED IN MAY 2003 BY MELANIE RADEMACHER AND HAS RAPIDLY GROWN INTO A DYNAMIC AND SUCCESSFUL INTERIOR DESIGN STUDIO. MELANIE IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE COMPANY, WITH HER PASSION FOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE AT THE CORE OF MENA INTERIORS.

Specialising in high-end residential projects, both new build and refurbishment, MENA Interiors provides a personal and tailor-made service for each client. Supported by a dedicated team of three experienced designers, Melanie oversees all projects personally from design to implementation; ensuring precise care is taken over every detail. No more than six projects are taken on at any one time, to ensure a personalised style and dedicated service is provided to each client.

Melanie's design aesthetic is always inspired by her client's lifestyle and tastes. The success of a project is measured by how it complements the client's everyday life. From a traditional villa in southern Spain to a state of the art bachelor pad in central London, no two projects are ever alike. Her aim is not to impose a style but to create a unique elegant and bespoke home perfect for each client.

Here, Melanie talks about studying in the USA and at Inchbald, clients taking a leap of faith with her and the true nature of travelling whilst working.



WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY OF SOMETHING YOU DESIGNED?

As a young teenager I used to do things with my room. I was lucky as I had free reign to do that, my parents were ok with me trying things out, seeing what would work, re-arranging to incorporate something new and generally having fun with the layout and my creativity. Using my double bed as a central point, I would work on my room extensively. I also remember creating a 'feature wall' out of posters that I used as a 'wallpaper'

WHERE DID YOU TRAIN?

I enrolled at Inchbald in London, and studied Advanced Interior Design. This was a few years ago so my educational experience was a very traditional one. We looked at colour, co-ordinating and other very traditional elements of interior design. My desire to study interior design began at University in the USA – it was a very flexible learning experience and I took Architecture classes, not as a formal degree, but to get an initial feel of design. It was brilliant and I spent most of my time on these courses. I then discovered that Inchbald offered the flexibility to continue these ideas through in formal design study. After my time at Inchbald I was offered a position at Kelly Hoppen and I've

never looked back.

My various locations of study come from my childhood as a boarder at Sevenoaks. I began in England, moved to the US to study at university and then back to London for Inchbald. I love London and its rich tapestry of design talent and knew I always wanted to come back.

HOW HAVE DESIGN SCHOOLS EVOLVED SINCE YOU WERE STUDYING?

I think essentially it's the technology that has moved education on. It's all computer-based now. Old-fashioned sketching is not that 'done' anymore. I myself still sketch with clients when I'm sat working with them. Others prefer to use SketchUp or CAD. It's largely just preference but there is something very liberating about drawing by hand in the initial stages, for me, it really connects the designer with the client and the project. I think that schools are also increasingly becoming practice oriented, offering and formalising the process of work placements. There was no such thing when I was studying but this is certainly a wonderful opportunity for students now. Real life experience you cannot put a value on, and it is great getting to meet the 'new kids on the block' from the perspective of a practice. We see many talented designers this way.

I believe that common sense experience is vital; you have to be able to handle yourself in this industry. The job requires you to stand up, give your thoughts, share ideas but also to be in a process where there are all the factors of design and its constraints to consider. Being able to communicate is essential and work placements really help with this.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PROFESSIONAL DESIGN COMMISSION?

I began my career at Kelly Hoppen and worked there for eight years, after that I started my own company. One of my first design commissions was from a client (someone well known) who hired me on the spot – I hadn't even started my own company at the time so it was a big compliment and a big task. The project was a house in London, I remember it well, every element of it. When I was working with Kelly, I had largely been responsible for costings and creating design boards for clients. This project was all mine. I believe this was a great experience in learning how to communicate with clients. You discover that some clients don't wish to be involved, they like you to take the lead and to see the results. Others want to be there every step of the way. I learned that every client is new and unique, there really is no comparison.

WHO ARE YOUR DESIGN INSPIRATIONS?

I have a really wide range of inspiration. Some comes from the great architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Corbusier, Christian Liaigre. I'm drawn to clean elements, straight lines. It can be busy but with a clear narrative. I'd say I'm a collector of inspiration. I pick and choose as I go along, collecting people who will continue to inspire me and collecting looks that I can fuse into my own work. Sometimes there are buildings that I absolutely adore but other elements of the designer's work that I do not like, so I try to think, not of one person as an inspiration, but my own cherry-picked selection of ideas that inspire me.

HAVE YOU EVER DABBLED IN OTHER FORMS OF DESIGN?

No, I took art at school but I've never committed to another strand of design. I believe that I'm good at what I do. Saying that, if I had more time, I would love to sculpt.

WHERE IS THE MAJORITY OF YOUR WORK BASED?

It really varies from year-to-year but at the moment it is UK based, London and the outskirts.

I've also worked on an Austrian chalet, a house in Spain, San Francisco and many other properties abroad. I think people assume that we have a very glamorous job ahead of us when we get to visit these beautiful places. They are wonderful to visit but largely we plan our work in the off-season, so I'm often visiting ski resorts with no snow! It is still incredibly beautiful though.

HAVE YOU EVER WORKED OR LIVED ANYWHERE ELSE? HOW HAS THIS HELPED TO SHAPE AND INFLUENCE YOUR IDEAS ON DESIGN?

Aside from the US during my university years, I have not lived in too many places. I adore travelling though and of course, work does take me to amazing places. I only tend to see snippets of a country when I'm there and you don't necessarily 'live' the country you're in but it is still a pleasure. When I travel on a personal level I really like to take in the culture. I love visiting museums and art galleries. Last year I visited Fiji – such a vibrant place, the colours and culture was really inspiring. I also repeatedly visit NYC and always find something new there – it is a never-ending city of discovery.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR DESIGN STYLE?

As many designers would attest to, it is hard to define your own style. The base is classic-contemporary, which then allows me to fine tune it to each client. Every project I work on is unique.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST DESIGN COMMISSION TO DATE?

It was a Penthouse in London that had the most staggering view of the whole city. This project was actually a new development and initially we were drafted in to provide the furnishings and fittings. This particular client was really great to work with and allowed us to change a great deal within the space. When I arrived he asked what I would do with it and we took it from there. We were able to transform the space to suit his lifestyle.

IF YOU HADN'T BECOME AN INTERIOR DESIGNER WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

I think this was the only path for me.

www.menainteriors.co.uk

All images by Tom Mannion

