

DESIGNING IN LISTED BUILDINGS

BY JO AYSLEY AND GEORGINA FRASER

Jeffreys Interiors

Reflecting the tastes, lifestyle and character of their clients, the versatile team of twelve at Jeffreys Interiors, led by Jo Aynsley and Georgina Fraser, create functional, livable, and comfortable spaces. Seamlessly executed and always beautifully finished, the independent design company specialise in a unique use of colour, pattern, scale and proportion. Offering imaginative solutions and off the wall thinking, each client receives a bespoke, tailor-made and thoroughly enjoyable experience in both the design process and finished scheme.

Based in a Georgian townhouse in the centre of Edinburgh, we feel perfectly at home in historic surroundings. We appreciate the exquisite architecture and historical value of a listed building but are also excited by the prospect of developing such a place into a home. Simultaneously sympathetic to its period, but more suited to 21st century life.

When designing for listed properties, we drill down into the client's expectations and establish how they intend to use the property. Do they envisage a period replication; or do they crave modernity and change? Following this, we need to think about what is possible within the bounds of the listing grade and the budget, before getting into the aesthetics.

In the UK, a challenge that we meet with listed buildings, especially in larger country houses or stately homes, is aligning the traditional



Above: Yester House - Salon Chandelier



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usage and layout with the desires of contemporary living.

As modern house building has developed over the years to promote open plan living, listed buildings can suddenly feel too grand and impractical. Historically, kitchens would have been in the basement level and staffed by servants, but now we see clients craving the kitchen as a central point in the home. This is a significant move that requires proper planning and sensitive design.

To facilitate such a change, we must respect planning and heritage building regulations. It is critical that all permissions are granted before work can commence. We work hand in hand with architects early in the design process to submit planning requests on our behalf. By using an architect familiar with the area in which you are working, you can benefit from their existing relationship with the planning department, and the fact that they will have prior knowledge of precedent in the surrounding

area. This is invaluable when preparing your case.

Proportion also requires special consideration when it comes to the scale of some historic buildings. Standard furniture can be swamped and look too small in the space so often we turn to bespoke pieces. The silver lining of this means we can design exactly what the space calls for, creating unique, handcrafted pieces that add to the story of the home, hopefully becoming heirlooms of the future. Beyond the nuts and bolts, the



Above: Yester Kitchen, photography by ZAC and ZAC



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layering of history and stories held in the walls of older properties is incredibly endearing and exciting. During the restoration of panels by decorative painter William Delacour, we found colourful feathers caught up in the paint, and watermarks high on the walls. We discovered the previous owners' parrot had free rein of the ballroom, and the watermarks were likely caused by sprays of Champagne. History emerges as you peel back the layers and enhances the intended design.

In another bedroom, decorating preparations uncovered original Zuber hand-painted wallpaper. It was too beautiful to remove. This pleasant surprise completely changed the design direction, resulting in one of our favourite spaces in the home. Finds like this are thrilling and help to contribute to the integrated development of a listed building – our designs merge with the existing details and become part of the story.

On the converse, occasionally we can come across a listed building which has not been treated as well and original features have either been replaced or removed without the appropriate permissions. We are currently replacing cornicing in a principal room and have enjoyed working with local artisans to establish the precise style required. The research and discovery during this process is enough reward, however seeing it up had us doing a happy dance – the room feels like itself again.

As challenging as they can be, working on Georgian and Victorian era homes is incredibly rewarding. When it comes to inspiration we're spoiled for choice and feel incredibly privileged to have such rich heritage here on our doorstep in Edinburgh – Italian Palladian and Neo-classical design heavily influenced Scottish architects back in the 1600's. For design inspiration in the field, we look towards David Hicks, Kelly

Wearstler, Nicky Haslam, and William Yeoward as people who we admire, but nobody influences us more than our clients, whose stories and experiences are greatly drawn on throughout the design process. Their expectations continue to push our creativity and drive innovation. With information and imagery so accessible via social media and magazines, the bar is already set very high. As a business, we embrace this through continued learning and development. So, what does a perfect space look like to us? We believe a space is there to be used and enjoyed, it shouldn't feel staged or like a museum, but something which feels like it has always existed. A space that is genuine and authentic and with a good dose of fun.

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