

DESIGNED BY

DESIGNED BY OLIVER BURNS

Words by Carolyn Burdet

If anywhere in the world is synonymous with "Beau" Brummell's definition of good taste, it's the golden mile of Jermyn Street and Savile Row, in London's St James and Mayfair, a million miles away from the madding crowd of Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Street, where a gentleman can expect to find impeccable taste in his furnishings and outfitting.

Beau Brummell was an arbiter of good taste in Regency times, credited with introducing the tailored suit and neck tie that has been the established code for smart gentlemen's wear ever since he bade the butler show the fashion for knee-brooches, stockings and garters the door. Despite the self-restraint he urged on the flamboyant dandy of the era, it is said that he took five hours a day to get dressed and he recommended that a gentleman's boots be polished with champagne.

A statue of George Brummell stands in Jermyn Street. His dedication to immaculate presentation influenced the extravagant luxury applied in furnishing the apartments at Beau House, a residential development in Jermyn Street, clad in dark herringbone patterned floors, pinstripe walls, and woven Oxford broadcloth — a fancy dress shirt fabric covering the headboard in the master bedroom.

The allusion to gentlemen's tailoring in the interior design palette is deliberate, a witty flourish by Joe Burns, the designer and managing director of the interior design firm Oliver Burns, a company that collaborates with property developers on architectural developments in Mayfair.

Handcrafted cabinetry in walnut burr, elaborate crystal chandeliers and lusciously tactile upholstery pair with bespoke extravagance. Joe Burns then applies Coco Chanel's advisory caution of toning down the look before it appears too overdressed.

It seems Joe Burns has got the luxury design for new developments down to a fine art. His previous development, The Walpole in Mayfair, achieved the highest value per square foot of any property. He is aware that is a balance of quality and quantity. "Sometimes less is more."



Beau House penthouse

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For Apartment 2 at The Walpole Alexander McQueen designed a black rug with gold dragon, there is a Julian Chichester occasional table with gold legs, and Versace tableware. To describe it in that way, it sounds precariously close to being ostentatious, yet somehow Oliver Burns reeled it back from the brink. "You want to have Versace in there, you want to have Miró artwork on the wall," says Joe Burns. "All the details feel relaxed and at home, there is nothing garish."

"We use a lot of marble, but we avoid using it in large quantities, there are times where you don't have to do the whole bathroom in it. Brown Emperor marble is a beautiful, beautiful marble but we would not use it on floors and walls of a bathroom — it would be too much. We would use a neutral cream throughout and just put Emperor in the back of the shower for warmth. You have to appreciate the luxury and beauty of it, rather than think, this is way too much for me."

One of the signatures of Oliver Burns is in the symmetry and elegance. Amongst the studded Aiveen Daly upholstered chairs, a pair of crystal vases on a table lends a quiet clarity.



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The Walpole, living space

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To create a cohesive core to the scheme the team at Oliver Burns tries to imagine how it will be lived in and imagines the client as someone who has commissioned the design. "Minute levels of detail go into the homes we create for people. All the dressing items, the flowers, the vases, the tableware, are carefully thought out, adding the finishing touches to the room design. This thoughtfulness gives it the wow factor," says Joe. Thought also goes into the more prosaic aspects of lighting and audio-visual controls. "They don't want a big bank of dimming lights on walls or a whole lot of remote controls. It's a home not a hotel where you can't work the light switch and where someone always has to pluck up courage to phone down to reception to say "How do I turn the lights on?". It should never be that complicated! People want lighting at the touch of a button, but they don't want to be faced with a bank of computerised switches."

A Mayfair apartment calls for different design from a country house. Oliver Burns will consider the lifestyle of a client or the person who may live there and may design two kitchens for a country home, a working kitchen and utility room where the dogs bound in from a walk with muddy paws, children raid the fridge for snacks and the dishwasher is loaded out of sight; and a show kitchen for entertaining guests at home, cooking at a central island while guests chat to the host.

In The Walpole, Oliver Burns chose Sub Zero & Wolf ovens, fridge-freezers and wine coolers, where you can set different temperatures in zones within the fridge. In Beau House, aesthetically pleasing Gaggenau appliances with warming drawers, combi-steam ovens for baking and wine coolers are perfect for entertaining. The Miele dishwashers can be programmed to come on in six days' time and hand-wash silk garments, almost as good as having a robot home help. "We bear in mind that we are designing homes for people. It is not a hotel room, it is a home somebody will live in. Storage solutions even in the biggest properties are high on list of things to take care of."



"We go to Maison et Objet every year; inspiration comes from worldwide, we spend a lot of time travelling in Asia and we pick up products when we are there. We work a lot with Italy. We have suppliers in Milan, and even for London developments we use our Italian suppliers."

The Beau penthouse has a lit stairwell that adjusts the lighting as the light alters from day into evening, and a roof terrace that is an outside room with under/floor heating and furniture thought out for weather-durability as well as indoor levels of comfort.

A lot of effort goes into the architectural design of the home. For a private client in Italy, an older building was completely restored, adding in architectural features in keeping with a historic Italian villa. It would have had architraves, moulding, coricing, and ornate door details in a 1780 Italian villa. Counterbalance to the high ceilings, Oliver Burns added a subterranean floor in a modern contemporary Italian design.

Working on interiors projects for a private client, Oliver Burns will take a different approach from modern development. "We will use antiques, we'll find old pieces. A private client may have favourite furniture or old pieces that have been in the family for years, and if the sofas are old we can have them reupholstered or they'll go out to the French polishers for restoration."

Joe Burns came to new-build developments from a background in antiques. "My favourite pieces are Georgian furniture – the Georgian craftsmen would carve a piece of wood with dovetail joints inside, it was all done by hand. The level of detail in the handwork was incredible, and the level of detail and texture in the wood itself too, the burr of walnut.

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"In a new penthouse we'll tend to use modern pieces. We design the furniture for our projects and the creative designs are made bespoke for the apartment." The furniture exudes a sense of enduring quality in a wealth of bespoke joinery, some inset with a line of adornment, an Art Deco graphic around a doorframe or a Deco mirror. "Richwood joinery creates bespoke pieces for us. When we deliver these pieces, the person knows they not going to see those items in anybody else's home.

"In the joinery we are taking the best quality materials that nature can provide, like a marble or a precious wood veneer. We use dark timbers with an intrinsic quality; in Macassar ebony you see veins through the wood. We are adding our stamp of design to it and we are asking artisans to make it into truly exceptional pieces of furniture.

"Most furniture today is production line, most furniture is made not to last a lifetime. It's lifestyle furniture. The furniture we are making is built to last by the artisans who make it for us. We are designing pieces that will be around for years. We are designing the antiques of the future. These are the items that are going to be valuable."

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