



## What's hot and what's not in luxury interior design

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Richard Angel and Ed O'Donnell, co-founders of the award-winning London-based interior design studio Angel O'Donnell, share insights into the changing tastes of their ultra-high-net-worth clients.

There are few things as personal as the inside of one's own home. Interior design is a projection of intimacies and aspirations that comfort all who live there — and yet they are laid bare for every guest to see.

Of course, tastes change with the times, and that is no less true of the luxury market. "First and foremost, our clients want us to create for them a comfortable home," Richard Angel, CEO, says of the design studio's ultra-high-net-worth clients. "Gone are the days when clients just want a showpiece to impress their friends and neighbours, with comfort as an afterthought. Today, their home — whether it's their main residence or pied-à-terre — has to function as a home."

This is not to say that clients do not want to create a lavish environment for entertaining their guests. "A lot of our clients expect to entertain regularly and need the right space for that," Angel says. "But it's about understated refinement; good taste and quality materials. It's not about being shouty. Still, even though it's liveable and practical, it has to be impressive."

Angel met Ed O'Donnell at an established interior design studio in 2016, and by 2018, they had set up their own shop. O'Donnell, Creative Director, says the agency can work with as many as 150 people on a single project, which begins with a deep assessment of every aspect of a client's lifestyle. "We ask about their favourite hotels, where they holiday, the art they like, the fabrics they're drawn to, and the colours they find appealing," he says. "Then we translate these insights into a design thesis."

# Changing tastes

According to Angel, big brands are out and unique statement pieces are in. “We still work with big brands, of course, but we’re not talking B&B Italia in every room. Instead, we find pieces that will start a conversation about the maker, materials and origins of the design. The aim is to have a guest say to their host, ‘What a beautiful table, where did you find it?’ — and then the conversation begins. There has to be a story, which is why we work with lots of independent artisans.”

For one project, the designers hired a leather worker from south east London to weave the sides of a library ladder. “We wanted to give the apartment something extra, something interesting that was created by a talented craftsperson local to the capital,” Angel says. “A lot of our clients love the idea of working with and supporting local artisans.”

“They want beautiful pieces that bear the mark of their maker; that feel innately one-off; handcrafted, with beautiful imperfections. This serves to give a home the look and feel of the area in which they’re buying — and that’s really important to a lot of our clients right now.”

Angel notes that clients in the “baby boomer” generation born between 1946 and 1964 are “downsizing, shedding possessions, and seeking something fresh”. The millennial generation, born between 1981 and 1996, and Generation X, who sit between the baby boomers and millennials, want something “highly personalised”. Generation Z, born in the late 1990s to early 2010s, have a sharp focus on sustainability: “They want to know everything about supply chains and working conditions.”

Technology in the home is no longer limited to a huge television and expensive sound system. Instead, innovations such as 3D-printed furniture and advanced mood-enhancing lights are gaining traction. Carefully placed LEDs can, for example, be used to enhance low light coming through a window, Angel says.

There is also a growing trend for zoning large rooms with furniture rather than putting up dividers, to maximise open space. Some clients also want a single room to serve two purposes. This could mean creating a bespoke chest of drawers that can hide a television when needed, quickly turning a bedroom from TV room to a calm oasis for sleep.

“We’re also seeing demand for creative colouring, like ceiling murals,” Angel adds. “We did one recently that captures the vibrant colours of the sunrises and sunsets that can be seen from the apartment.”

## Attending to every detail

Some clients want their interior designers to take care of each and every detail, so they can arrive at the doorstep of their newly-finished home with little more than a suitcase of clothes. With this full-service turnkey approach, the client might want their drinks cabinet stocked, their art collection bought and hung, their cookware supplied, their bed linen sourced from their favourite hotel, and their bookshelves filled with their best-loved genres.

For a recent project, Angel O'Donnell worked with an art curator, gallerist and several auction houses to source famous works by Gilbert & George, Grayson Perry and Keith Haring among others. They then collaborated with book specialists to find rarities their client would love – from a 1940s illustrated edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* to a UK first edition of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

“One client was particularly keen on a portrait by Michael Craig-Martin,” O'Donnell remembers. “The artist hadn't intended to part with it but we managed to convince him to sell — even though he nearly changed his mind at the last minute!”

Another of the studio's clients, who had recently lost her husband, bought a riverside apartment in London's South Bank and wanted to fill it with art that celebrated the couple's life together. “She grew up in Brixton and described herself as a ‘Brixton girl made good’, so as a surprise, we sourced artworks that paid tribute to her old neighbourhood,” O'Donnell says.

While changing tastes and trends are important, the best results are borne from clients who are at their most open with the designers — and that requires a special bond, says Angel.

“Creating beautiful, bespoke spaces means getting deep inside the minds of our clients. For that to happen, there needs to be the deepest level of trust. We are party to very private details about our clients’ lives. But we need this level of intimacy, because then we can turn a blank canvas into something special.”