

insider NEWS

LIZ ELLIOT steps out to find the inside stories



DECORATOR PROFILE

Juliette Byrne and Catherine Pawson

It's a delight to meet designers Catherine Pawson and Juliette Byrne. Far from proffering portfolios, they produce glasses of blood-orange juice and show off Catherine's wisteria. And when they do talk design, it's with quiet, measured passion, spiced with laughter. 'We like our houses to show restraint and polish,' says Catherine. 'But we have fun designing together.' Once opened, the portfolio reveals surprisingly catholic styles, from streamlined urban modernism to a Hamptons beach house. They make no apology for the mix. 'We don't stamp our mark,' adds Juliette. 'The design is dictated by the client's preferences and the architecture.'

Looking at the pair's design backgrounds, it's easy to see how they can run such broad-ranging projects so confidently. Catherine studied at the V&A and The Inchbald School of Design, before working for Bill Bennette and Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler. Juliette studied interior design at the Chelsea School of Art, then set up her own design business in the late Eighties. 'I cut my teeth working for property developers,' she says. The pair met thirteen years ago (Juliette was a friend of Catherine's husband, architect John Pawson), and almost immediately joined forces. 'I'm happiest project-managing, sorting out the plasterers,' says Juliette, adding that Catherine

prefers soft furnishings and proportion. Modern or eighteenth-century English styles are rolled out with equal aplomb. 'We're facilitators,' says Catherine. 'We help clients realize their own taste.'

As designers they take on just one or two large projects at a time, guaranteeing 'us – not a sidekick'. Some are long term, such as an ongoing Grade II-listed West Sussex manor house, and others are long distance – Catherine is just back from a project in LA. It is a measure of the pair's attention to detail that clients continue to call for advice, long after a project is complete. 'The follow-up service is very important,' says Juliette. They clearly thrive on teamwork, engagingly finishing one another's sentences and sharing ideas. 'We're instinctive about people and places,' says Catherine. 'One meeting, and we'll have practically designed the scheme.'

They will go the extra design mile, and have been known to get paint specially mixed in the States ('to get the right blue'), conceal state-of-the-art technology in traditional panelling, and reface a Seventies concrete house to resemble a shingled Long Island version. 'We also like to get the bones right,' says Catherine. She describes their work modestly – just one factor in the pair's success. **JUDITH WILSON**
Juliette Byrne and Catherine Pawson
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The portfolio of Catherine Pawson (top left) and Juliette Byrne (top right) reveals 'surprisingly catholic styles', including urban modernism (above)