

CROSSlines

Clockwise from left: Custom leather-upholstered chairs in the customer services lounge at London's Selfridges & Co. The lounge's floor of Italian marble. A chandelier by Bec Brittain above a custom wool-covered sofa.



How would you define your signature style?

Strong on color and texture. And most of our furniture and joinery is made in the studio, right down to the screw heads. If we buy any furniture, we usually reupholster it.

Is there any part of a project you don't do?

We take care of everything. We like to say "from the pipes in your walls to the piping on a cushion." And we can do it on a commercial or residential scale. There's no architect fighting the interior designer. Rather, we adopt the Renaissance approach, going from macro to micro all under one roof.

The Selfridges lounge looks a bit tropical. Why is that?

Selfridges showed us old photos of the store's Palm Court Restaurant, which was destroyed during World War II. We became inspired by the idea of travel, and we looked into the craze for exoticism from the turn of the last century, when Selfridges was originally built. We also looked at paintings by Paul Gauguin and Henri Rousseau.

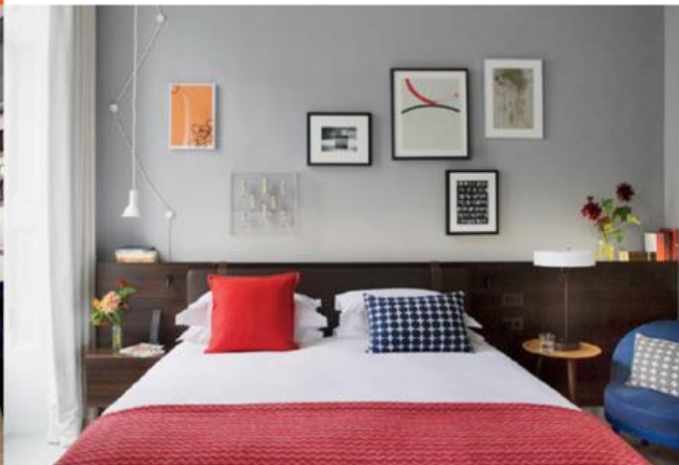
Art plays a prominent role at Fortnum & Mason, too.

Fortnum's has a history of commissioning illustration. We particularly liked an illustration for a 1950's Valentine's Day advertisement, so we rescaled it to paint on the back of a glass screen, still allowing light through.

What's your London boutique for Smythson like?

We designed it to recall a grand town house from





Clockwise from top left: The London flagship of Smythson. A guest room at the Laslett, a nearby hotel. Smythson's storefront in a granite-clad 1980's tower in New York. The Selfridges personal shopping lounge. A custom brass-framed mirror at Fortnum & Mason.

the 1920's or '30's. It's simple and elegant in gray and Smythson's signature blue, synonymous with the brand since its 1887 inception.

Is the Smythson in Manhattan similar?

It also has a neutral palette—I look to the products to provide the color. The bright leather agendas are displayed in cubbies covering a wall. Since the agendas never change format, luckily, we didn't need to build flexible shelving.

Why the herringbone pattern for the marble floor in both projects?

For the London store's town-house feeling, we looked at traditional herringbone parquet, then changed the scale and the material. For New York, we took advantage of the pattern's directional quality, literally pointing toward the famous agenda wall.

Any notable challenges with that project?

The 23-foot-high window. We tempered its

height with brass detailing that references the gilt edges of Smythson notebooks.

What's next for your firm?

We're designing a second Smythson shop in New York, this time in the Oculus of the World Trade Center. Back in the U.K., we're putting some of our custom furniture pieces into production. I can't tell you how many dressing tables and vanity mirrors we have been asked to make.

How did the landmark status of the Laslett hotel's five town houses influence your design?

After a lot of back and forth with the conservation officer, we opted for a suite of "living rooms" rather than one large lobby.

How do you balance history with today?

My education at the Bartlett School of Architecture, no relation, ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF THE LASLETT; SMYTHSON; FORTNUM & MASON; SELFRIDGES



From top: A crystal chandelier at New York's Smythson. Its sycamore cubbies for leather-covered agendas.

was contemporary and thrusting. But my first job after graduation was on a landmarked house badly damaged in a fire, so I learned how to restore traditional detailing.

I like the dichotomy between looking to the past and staying in this century. Objects with history say something about us. Putting them in a context

that's new and beautiful can elevate them. If chairs passed down from your granny don't quite fit, you should still keep them. We need to hang onto things that have resonance, irrespective of whether they match. Sometimes "mistakes" can be good.

—Emma O'Kelly

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SKYLER SMITH