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Interview

K&H Designs on the Importance of detail

By **Kerryn Harper-Cuss**



Katie Glaister and Henry Miller-Robinson, co-founders of K&H Designs, are passionate about the finishing touches in interiors. They launched K&H Design, a London based interior design and decorative consultancy, working with private clients, hotel operators and developers, in 2015, and have since worked on a diverse portfolio of properties from new builds to listed buildings, in town and country and overseas. Here, they reveal the critical importance of interior details in every setting.

Q. Details can make or break a room scheme. Please discuss....

A. We feel the design is definitely in the detail... In this modern world where it may appear easy to put together a 'magazine' look from the myriad of choice, in reality it can all too often be soulless and unhomey.

The design of a home should reflect the personality and practicality of everyday life whilst also being enjoyable, inspirational, beautiful and comfortable. This is where the detail comes in... be it the trim on a chair that elevates a more standard fabric, the re-working of treasured and inherited family heirlooms, the fact that all the ironmongery matches and is just the right balance of warm, smart and reassuringly solid but definitely not bling.



Trim detail on a sofa in a scheme by KBH Design. Photography by Simon Brown



A beautiful Georgian inspired pelmet board in a master bedroom by KBH Design. Photography by Simon Brown

Q. What would you say comes under the descriptor 'detail' for an interior. And do you have a favourite detail you like to employ?

A. Detail is actually a really broad term for us – it applies to everything! The point really is that to fully design something, every aspect needs to be considered, eg: Do the screws match the handles they fix to a door (and pointing in the same direction); is the tone of the curtain fabric complimented by the trim; is the curtain hem hand sewn; has the colour of the silk thread in the hand woven curtains been hand died to exactly the right tone for the aspect of the room; do the kitchen handles have a lovely soft curve on the reverse so the handles are ergonomically comfortable when opening?



Curtains in fabric from Chelsea Textiles in a room by KBH Design

Spatial planning, including the housing and storage of personal items, should be done to the nth degree. Does all the furniture serve the right purpose as well as look great? Is the colour of the woodwork unified throughout a project? On one project where every room would have its own story we united the space through the timber flooring..... at another we stripped back the timber flooring to its natural state and stained it and then repeated in other areas.



Natural stained timber flooring in a scheme by K&H Design

Q. Which details do you pay particular attention to and at what point are they planned into a scheme?

A. ALL OF THEM, and throughout the design, development and implementation.

Q. Which details elevate a piece of furniture to something truly special (ie from a specialist finish to bespoke handles)

A. We love hand painted specialist paint effects. This is a very clever way to take quite simple joinery into a completely new league. The subtle dragged finish of the Fulham master bedroom joinery by Henry Van De Vijver is enhanced with vellum, linen and horsehair and minimal antique brass trims. Handles are by Jed Kennett. In the girl's room the driftwood handles were embroidered.



Henry Van De Vijver joinery with vellum, linen and horsehair and minimal antique brass trims specified by K&H Design

Q. Passementerie is enjoying a renaissance and seems to be something you enjoy using in the interiors you create. How and why does trim elevate a room?

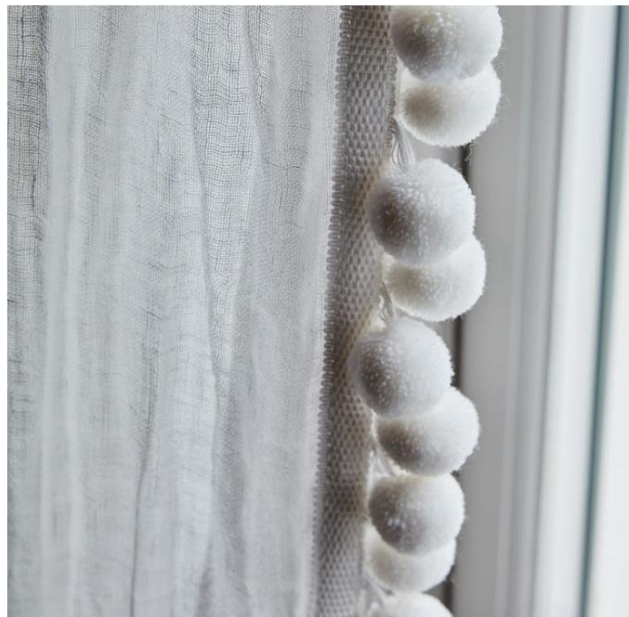
A. Luxury and texture can elevate very simple and inexpensive fabrics to more than the sum of their parts – for instance the Jessica Light trim In the Georgian rectory study image and the Samuel and Sons trim on the master suite curtains; the curtains in the girl’s bedroom and a teenage girl’s bedroom curtain pompom trim by Samuel and Sons. This type of intricate detail is becoming a signature trend for K&H Design.



Trim on the leading edges of curtains in a scheme by K&H Design

Q. Do you have favourite types of passementerie and how can it be used in a way that feels current?

A. When we get the opportunity, we love to commission British makers to create bespoke passementerie – it is a dying art in the UK. We kept the curtains in the Georgian rectory more tonal to create a contemporary look, so very different to how it was used historically where it was more froufrou and palatial.



Dolce pom pom fringe from Samuel & Sons in a room by K&H Design

Q. When design budgets are more constrained, is it possible to find cost-conscious details that still work hard, and can you give an example of several such alternatives?

A. This hallway cupboard with its bespoke painted design results in simple and practical MDF becoming a family heirloom.



Bespoke painted hall cupboard in a scheme by K&H Design

For kitchens we suggest picking very plain cupboard doors and cabinetry but then celebrate with some extraordinary handles.

Use plain linen blinds (much less fabric than curtains) and add a simple trim. Even if it's just a line or two of vintage petersham ribbon, the fact that thought has been given to develop something individual with detail will help it to stand out.

Bathroom budgets can be kept down with painted or mirrored walls rather than tiling but go big with a reclaimed piece of stone for the vanity top. Applying marble to one wall and then using mirror to reflect the look is another great solution.



Bathroom by K&H Design

Q. Can you share a few favourite makers/brands of 'details' – for example, a range of trims that is particularly strong or door knobs that are off-the-peg but look of the highest quality?

A. Samuel and Sons' Petersham ribbon is very affordable
Cloth Shop Portobello Road offers cheap linen in lots of colours
Dowsing and Reynolds for door handles

Q. What 'details' – apart from additions to furniture – are wisely considered?

A. Take time to consider and, where the design dictates, either perfectly match ironmongery finishes or be confident about mixing metals. We are addicted to the charming dolly switches that have made a resurgence in lots of finishes. Door thresholds are also often overlooked – a simple brass trim between hard floor finishes makes such a difference.



Attention to detail on choice of handle in a bathroom setting by K&N Design

Q. Can you give examples of details that impact on functionality or appeal to the touch as opposed to adding purely visual benefits.

A. The introduction of a low level PIR (motion sensor lighting) in bathrooms is an easy win.
Making sure the right fabric is specified for the job, eg performance, rub tests etc. Ever increasing ranges of outdoor fabrics now look much better than years ago and, as they are very durable, they're a great solution for high traffic areas inside the family home.
Thinking about the senses you experience as you live in your home. Stepping out of bed bare foot onto a natural sisal flooring can feel quite rough so you may prefer to add a lovely soft sheepskin rug.



Sofa in a master bedroom by K&H Design. Photography Simon Brown

Q. Finally – what are your golden rules for using details for a sophisticated result, so that they sit within rather than shout from the finished scheme.

A. Don't over embellish, keep the palette small and tonal rather than trying too hard. Put the contrast into textures rather than colour.

Colour matching detail – consider everything as a whole. As tempting as it is to go off-piste with special offers (that sale sofa that is 'almost' the right shade!) or what you originally wanted, stick to your gut instinct or it will inevitably annoy you. Much better to save up for the items you really want!

Be authentic – remain true to the homeowner and the space.

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