



Inspired by Staffan Tollgård

Kingston Mansion. Photo Daniela Cesarei



Algarve Villa. Photo Vasco Celio

A PRICELESS ART COLLECTION WAS THE catalyst for redesigning an imposing mansion in the heart of Knightsbridge, one of London's grandest, most traditional districts.

The ingredients of the project were a designer's dream commission: adventurous clients who wanted to breathe new life into an architecturally impressive seven-storey house in Knightsbridge, with five bedrooms, three reception rooms and a formal dining room. Only one small problem: the house had to be ready to move into just six weeks later. Designer Staffan Tollgård set to work with suppliers who could be trusted to deliver a mansion's worth of furniture within a month.

Always respectful of the architectural setting, Staffan Tollgård Design Group creates bold, contemporary interiors with function at the heart of how they re-imagine a space. Functional sculpture takes the form of light and furniture. Their exacting interior design brings together the best of modern design through a sophisticated, thoughtful layering of furniture, art and furnishings.

"Looking back at my childhood I can see that interior design was my true calling. But it just took me twenty years to realise it," Staffan recalls. He trained in engineering but realised he needed to pursue a creative career and studied Architectural Interior Design at the Inchbald. "Function and aesthetics were important to me from a very early age. Inchbald taught me the language of design."

He joined renowned designer Rabih Hage's studio after leaving Inchbald and spent six months there before setting up his own design practice.

Before discovering his vocation in interior design, Staffan went to film school in England and was a producer for feature films, where he met his wife, Monique, a television documentary producer. Monique studied interior decoration at Inchbald and joined Staffan in the design business. Staffan is the creative director of the company and works on the concept design of all the projects. Monique deals with business development.

"Our backgrounds in film and literature gave us a love of storytelling. Interior design is like film making in the sense that you are unfolding a narrative. Who is this person? What are their passions? How do they live? You are also directing the view of visitors to the house.

"'Röda tråden' is a Scandinavian expression meaning 'red thread'. It's a powerful metaphor to describe the guiding principle of creative work, the returning refrain or motif in a piece of music, the recurring theme in a novel. It is the string that binds the work together into a coherent narrative. I try to find this thread in every project I work on. It can be a piece of art, a period in design, a colour. It is personal to every client and allows us to translate their life story into the language of design. I hold up every design decision against it; is it telling part of the story we want to tell?"

Both images Notting Hill Residence. Photos Richard Gooding



In the Knightsbridge house, the thread was the owner's collection of modern masterpieces. With the concept of the Knightsbridge property as a gallery space, contemporary interiors lit by thought-provoking modern masterpieces breathe new life into this grande dame of a period home.

Each object or aspect of design became an opportunity for a functional sculpture; even the lighting is sculptural design. Pendants hung throughout the house are a journey through the best in contemporary lighting design. From the simple LED clad lines of the Moooi Raimond, to the Flos Nebula trumpeting guests' arrival in the entrance hall, design speaks as lighting. In the globes of hand-blown glass of Bocci's 28 series, gently glowing over the dining table, and the 3D printed ceramic leaves of the Artichoke chandelier by Freedom of Creation, the traditional chandelier was deconstructed and re-imagined as a unique sculptural solution to lighting a room.

"We have a number of lighting suppliers we really enjoy working with. Flos has a range of architectural fittings called soft architecture that challenges our perception of architectural light fittings, their form and their function. The way Bocci plays with light and colour brings joy into a home. Contardi's use of metals, fabric and glass consistently adds a touch of contemporary elegance into a scheme. One of the collaborations I am most excited about is a light I have designed for them that we will launch at the opening of our Design Store. Called 'Belle' it is a simple yet very elegant design that I am already specifying for my projects."

Both images Knightsbridge House. Photos Daniella Cesarei





A further challenge was how to display a priceless collection of Chinese Foo dog statues. Each statue weighed 500 kilos and needed to be properly mounted and lit to do their terrible beauty justice. Their setting in the main reception room on the first floor of the mansion adds drama to this stunning room together with a modern, more functional sculpture in the form of Giorgetti's Ino revolving metal bar.

In a new-build family home in Kingston, the design thread was inspired by the principles of Arts and Crafts architecture. "We designed a contemporary decorative motif to run subtly through various aspects of the house interior, from architectural detailing and built-in joinery to soft furnishings and artwork."

Calming natural materials of stone and wood were used consistently, displayed in a simple form to reveal the materials' natural beauty.

Staffan takes a primarily functional approach to design; architectural aspects of the structure – a glass staircase, a skylight above a pool, a lit walkway – become sculptural statements in the aesthetic. "I think this is where my Swedish roots anchor my work. A perfectly functioning interior is often a beautiful one."



Knightsbridge House

Extensive refurbishment of a Belgravia home was guided by the client's desire for a modern, masculine design. The lines of the house were modernised by extending the house out onto a minimalist garden and specifying bespoke joinery. A bold geometry of form in the furniture was softened with a pared down palette of brown leather and dark wood with cream furnishings.

"The design and making of furniture is increasingly important: the story of the piece resonates with our clients. There is a strong sense of responsibility to the environment that can be summed up in the maxim: 'Think twice and buy once'. Our feeling is that investing in heirloom furniture is a way of living with beautiful, well-made pieces that should last a lifetime. This is part of the post-crash lifestyle, but also a nod to the environment: throwing things away before the end of their life cycle is irresponsible and cynical.

"Although we consider ourselves to be a very contemporary design practice, we find ourselves working with timeless materials," adds Staffan. "Every project I have worked on contains wood as an important element. Perhaps it is my Scandinavian upbringing – I grew up on 'Oak' island – Ekero – outside Stockholm. Perhaps the deep connection I feel with Japan, where wood and paper are ubiquitous architectural materials.

"One of the best ways of introducing texture into a project is by use of materials. I use metal, wood, stone, ceramic, glass, fabric, occasionally leather, to introduce change at various points in a design."

All photos by Daniella Cesarei



Kingston Mansion



Kingston Mansion



Amid the resolutely neutrals backdrop of the Kingston home, the walls behind the bed were papered in Vescom silk to add subtle textural interest to the simplicity of the rooms. The resulting sense of space, light and quiet grandeur is in keeping with this impressive period gem.

Clean simple lines of the low modern beds by Flexform increase the feeling of space. Cleverly designed storage enables a clear uncluttered sweep. "People would not necessarily enjoy their homes if we managed to cram every single piece of their collected lives into it; we need to help them edit and prioritise."

Bedrooms were fitted with bespoke joinery to maximise the available space and keep the rooms minimal but warm. Walnut frames were used for the wardrobe doors, lightened with linen panels, and a finishing touch of leather and aluminium handles.

Carefully sourced works of art, including sculpture and photography, weave the final strand through this cohesive design scheme. Photographic artwork by Stephane Gripari in the master bedroom adds a splash of pink to an otherwise masculine monochromous colour scheme.

"Every project starts with understanding how our clients live, and how they should use their home. Before the concept, there is function. How do we help them use the space, the house in the most pleasing way? We believe our function is to help our clients enjoy their homes," Staffan explains.

The dining room of the Belgravia home looks out onto a modern garden without grass. Staffan Tollgard used art in the interior to enhance the garden concept. A large landscape photograph by Terry Taylor and a photograph of a reflection of trees in water, by Alex Schneideman, are framed with simple white lines that direct attention to the images rather than their surrounds.

"I think our clients see us as quite bold and contemporary. Where we surprise our clients is possibly how personal the process of getting to know them can be. We are often presented with dream lives: an idyll or ideal of how our clients wish they lived their lives. It is our role to point out the reality as we see it, any inconsistencies, to give them a house that works for them at the end of the journey."

The Belgravia client wanted to be able to seat eight for dinner parties or the occasional Sunday lunch. Staffan chose a Zanotta oval table that would use the space most effectively. Its white glass top reflects the inside of the intricately carved Sky Garden ceiling pendant by Flos and the white gloss kitchen. The thyme green rug beneath the dining table is a whimsy – suggesting a small patch of grass for déjeuner sur l'herbe.

Brilliant white in the modern kitchen is softened with curved edges. The stunning white sideboard, called Riga by Porada, keeps the room from feeling overcrowded while providing storage for all of the dining room's crockery.

Both images Belgravia Residence. Photos Richard Gooding





Quinta Villa. Photo Vasco Célio

Strong colour is not at the top of list of requests. “In this day and age of developing to sell, there has been a formula where the common denominator of non-offensiveness results in beige. Many design luxury apartments feel a little like a 5-star hotel room: quite elegant, quite nice, a bit dull.” Staffan fights for individuality, by commissioning one-offs and interesting pieces. “Recycled materials and antiques will always add personality and flair.”

A rare opportunity for colour came in a Portuguese ultra-contemporary villa where use of colour is inspired by the Rocio Moreno artwork in the hallway through into the main rooms of the house, while a muted, underwater palette flows into the bedrooms.

The huge silk hanging in this glass heart took the idea of the intersecting lines, softening and colouring them. Six bold stripes of colour dominate this glass space, extending colour into each wing and floor of the house. In the Portuguese villa, the thread was a motif that the architect had carved into the huge windows that formed the glass heart of the house. This motif reappears in various materials in the house.

“We encourage our clients to consider colour in their art, soft furnishings and furniture. We tend to be more restrained with colour in restful rooms: bedrooms tend to be more muted versions of a colour scheme used elsewhere in the house.

Known for their dynamic residential interiors, Staffan Tollgård Design Group has been featured twice in the prestigious Andrew Martin’s International Interior Design Review, named as one of House & Garden’s 100 Leading Designers, and listed as one of the Leading 30 Design Practices in the UK by the Sunday Times.

Tollgård Design Group has come a long way since Staffan set up in a studio with his dog. Rosalind Calow, a fellow Inchbald graduate, has been with them from the start. “Over the last ten years I have moved from detail to bigger picture,” Staffan explains. “With a company of 14 designers, I personally need to work on concept and overall design rather than on details. It is something I have come to enjoy more and more, but it is also something of a necessity. “The designers in the company have an amazing ability to see both. Rosalind Calow, head of residential design, is a meticulous designer, and is able to run a few large projects at a time, without losing sight of the all-important details.

“It is probably a surprise to clients how detailed and thorough the entire process can be. We are an architectural interior design firm, so we take a strong vested interest in the spatial planning and specification of a project. We also care deeply about each piece of furniture, every curtain, every robe hook. These are the details that determine a great project – if we have managed to think of everything. Even things our clients have not even dreamed of.”

Tollgård have just opened a showroom at Grosvenor Waterside, off Chelsea Bridge Road, showcasing own-brand designs and pieces from major brands.

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