

# A FEAST FOR THE EYES

Doyenne of American fashion Diana Vreeland nailed the notion of glamor when she coined the word “pizzazz.” Meaning flamboyance, and the delight of the new, even when she did simple, she did it to excess. Vreeland had an eye for color, pattern, and achingly high style. As demonstrated in her all red Park Avenue living room decorated in the 1950s by interior designer Billy Baldwin, she wasn’t one to conform. Using a Persian-inspired scarlet floral chintz from Colefax&Fowler to envelop the entire space, the scheme was to suggest a garden—but a garden in hell. Baldwin observed that the apartment was “the most definitive personal statement” that he had ever seen in all his years of decorating. Vreeland knew that being brave makes you stand out from the crowd. Fearless, charismatic, and far from boring, welcome to the House of Glam.

“A GLAMOROUS INTERIOR REFERENCES THE PAST, WHEN PEOPLE WERE GREAT AT LIVING BIG.”

4

Imagine sipping cocktails within bombshell architecture such as the John Lautner-designed “spaceship” house as the sun goes down over the Hollywood Hills. Or lounging in white silk pajamas looking up at the mirrored ceiling of a 1930s bedroom designed by American society decorator George Stacey. Or partying within a stacked, overtly decorated townhouse exploding with joie de vivre. Here, traditional techniques such as *verre églomisé* and silk-embroidered walls are paired with sculptural furniture, brass accents, and bespoke handwoven rugs. This diverse architectural landscape is a feast for the eyes, where expressive colors, textures, unusual forms, and exotic materials combine to create a contemporary interpretation of an art deco or classic 1950s Hollywood film set interior. It’s fun. After all, designers are innate history buffs and there is a wealth of history in architecture, decorative arts, fashion, and film through the ages to cherry pick and play with. These homes dream big.

“A glamorous interior is rich with color, material, and texture, and more often than not, it references the past, when people were great at living big,” explains Paris-based property developer and designer Ashley Maddox of Studio Maddox. She firmly believes that glamorous interiors are layered over time and often feature traditional elements such as hand-painted wallpaper, blown-glass chandeliers, marble chimneys, velvet, brass, thick carpets, and the like. But more than that, decoration is an extension of a personality. Think of a glamorous interior and the homeowner, too, is often next level. In the glimmer of the elite hanging out in a nineteenth-century French or Italian salon, glamor is not only to do with lavish good looks but also a building’s recreational purpose. These interiors were designed not solely for aristocratic taste but equally for the visiting guest. Like the most exclusive member’s clubs today, every well-dressed living room is a fizzing mix of personality, lifestyle, and fierce design. ▶





► This is a sentiment shared by LA-based interior designer Caroline Legrand, who is known for her inviting and show-stopping schemes. “I am obsessed with John Lautner’s buildings,” she enthuses. “The fact that these houses are still so relevant today and the materials used have survived up to five decades is truly admirable.” Her favorite Lautner masterpiece is the Sheats-Goldstein house in Beverly Crest, LA—adored for all it’s made-to-measure furniture that’s been preserved fabulously by the owner since 1963. It’s the experimental shapes, proportions, and angles all set against the wild Californian landscape that make these modernist buildings in California an architect’s dream. What makes them relevant today is the use of materials: abundant glass, concrete, wood, and stone. Built by hand, bespoke, and triple-height, with a medley of marble or veneered chevron floors, when it comes to pattern and patina these materials never get old.

## MODERN-DAY DESIGNERS CREATE INTERIORS WITH A COOL EDGE THAT STRIKE A POSE.

7

Today, we’re reinterpreting these same elements but with a contemporary sophistication and polish. Modern-day designers are adept at weaving together historic styles, from art nouveau and art deco to elegant mid-century and the postmodernism of the 1970s and 1980s, but with a cool, modern edge. They create interiors that strike a pose. In the words of fictional intelligence agent Eve Polastri in BBC America’s *Killing Eve*, the Parisian apartment of assassin Villanelle is “chic as shit”—and like Villanelle’s multilayered character, the style is broader than you think.

On one side, it’s the camp theme of the 2019 gala at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art; on the other, it’s Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy in the 1990s wearing a black Calvin Klein gown. In fashion, it’s contemporary British designer Molly Goddard serving up visions of color and frills; in modern interiors, it’s the grand salons and bold mixes by hip Milan-based Dimore Studio. Here, pieces by Carlo Scarpa and Gio Ponti are juxtaposed with sumptuous gold fringing and bespoke leather-and-brass chandeliers. Whatever the context, the look is retro and fresh at the same time.

“We create spaces that have a sense of history, without being recreations of history,” say Dimore Studio founders Britt Moran and Emiliano Salci. “We like to give a design roots that people can identify with, whilst making the space contemporary and up-to-date through the use of colors and materials that reflect today. Our aesthetic is current, contemporary. It’s a mix of different eras, styles, and ideas. The arts, fashion, even food—all these concepts come together. Our design process starts from a thought and mood to which we have been drawn—it can be an opera, a movie, a fashion show, or an exhibition—that we develop and make ours by adding new things to it and new ideas. The initial concept could be the sanatorium by Alvar Aalto, for example, or the pantry of the Villa Necchi Campiglio in Milan. It’s like having a magnet to which different ideas are drawn to create the final project.” Like Surrealist artists, their work looks back to a range of influences, which they interpret in their own unique way.

Classical traditions of art and architecture as well as innovative, decorative values have always been a cornerstone of Italian design. When asked to define the elements that make up the House of Glam mood, curator Nina Yashar of Nilufar Gallery in Milan suggests combining furniture from historic Italian design (twentieth century) with handmade, one-of-a-kind designs. Art and textiles are equally important for the sophisticated narrative: her dream interiors would be stitched together with paintings by Francis Picabia, contemporary rugs by Martino Gamper, and fabrics made by Tessitura Luigi Bevilacqua in Venice. For Yashar, these apartments contrast ancient frescoes with gleaming contemporary design. It is haute couture reimagined for the home.

Creatives from further afield are also taking the “haute home” route, not influenced or restrained by preconceived notions of Western interior design. The artistic expertise of Moscow designer Ksenia Breivo layers color and pattern to breathtaking effect. ►



► Her experimental and timeless interiors pack a visual punch with their cool, edgy designs that utilize artisanal techniques. Creating one-off objects in shapely forms that echo a legacy of 1940s France, in her hands, interiors take on a glow.

Casa Perfect by name, Casa Perfect by nature, the recent project by curator David Alhadeff of influential design gallery The Future Perfect delivers contemporary design credentials to a West Village brownstone in New York City. Elevating retail to new heights, the project showcases contemporary design talent within nineteenth-century surrounds. “I am looking for work that is well crafted, well considered, proportioned, and carries the signature style of the designer who created it,” says Alhadeff on the criteria he looks for in a standout piece of furniture. “Although The Future Perfect is a contemporary design gallery, I do also like historical work. Ultimately, I am looking for work that carries the hand of the maker. Whether that’s Gabriella Crespi or Chris Wolston, that’s a thread that runs through my critical selection.”

It could be the artist’s use of bold colors or figurative technique, or simply the use of beautiful materials that draws Alhadeff’s eye. “In the end, in all instances it’s in the details,” ►



► he explains. “If the details are well considered, the experience is heightened. I think that is one of the crucial differences of work that’s okay and work that’s great. Did the designer/maker/artist laboriously consider the details or did they cut a corner? It makes a huge difference for me.” On the question of what has marked a cultural shift toward a style that is more sophisticated and glamorous, Alhadeff says: “I think the pendulum swings one way and it swings back the other. Right now, there is certainly a lot of room for eclecticism and for people to express their individual taste through their art and objects. But it could easily be in the coming years that we return to a fondness for the spare minimalism of the mid-century.”

Maybe the draw is a small act of rebellion against the simplicity of Scandinavian-inspired minimalism and mid-century good taste. Perhaps it’s in reaction to an uncertain socio-economic and political climate that we have begun to crave whimsical patterns and tactile designs that feel reassuring, and an intense, saturated palette. Or maybe the aesthetic is born as a response to mass production and an increased design savvy, where the culture of Ikea-style identikit homes has left us wanting to express ourselves more individually, so we seek out artisanal pieces handmade by skilled craftspeople.

## EVERY ROOM TELLS A STORY. HOW YOU CHOOSE TO DECORATE IT IS PART OF THE PICTURE.

11

“I think we need to be really careful when we talk about what has been and will be, that we don’t reduce time into a history of neat categorizations and understand that at any one point there has always been and will always be different styles and aesthetics at play,” interior designer Martin Brudnizki adds to the fray. “You hear a lot about trends in maximalism as a reaction to the minimalism of the 1990s. But as Foucault says, we need to ‘question those ready-made syntheses.’ In the 1990s you still had designers like Mario Buatta creating beautiful work. However, if there has been one objective that has remained constant over the last century, it is a desire for glamor. When you look throughout the twentieth century, you see during every evolution of the modern movement that society had a counterpoint.”

Brudnizki notes that during the 1930s, when much of art deco became mainstream, you had the likes of John Fowler or Elsie de Wolfe creating very colorful interiors. During the mid-century, you had designers like Sister Parish or Madeleine Castaigne. During the 1980s, it was Renzo Mongiardino—to name but a handful of many talented designers. Nowadays, many people have their own idea of what glamor is and it can be found equally in a gleaming, streamlined experience and in an opulent interior composed of many layers. For Brudnizki, it’s not about modern versus classical, but about the romantic and creating your own elegant world.

Every room tells a story. How you choose to decorate it is part of the picture. How you use the space completes it. What connects the dots of these uber interiors is that they play host to a virtual party, dizzying in their unapologetic exuberance, daring, sophistication, and modernity. Anything but basic in their architecture, landscape, interior application, select choice of furniture, art, or the drama of the person, these homes push design boundaries in their desire for transformation.

For instance, why not have a pool inside your Parisian 1970s bachelor pad? Or instead float around in a black tadelakt pool carved into the Andalusian hills? Choose curved furniture with chrome details and arrange it to relish cinematic views. Commission ceiling art with frescoes applied directly to oversized concrete panels—every inch of which is hand smoothed. Whether it’s a rekindling of the Versailles kind or a 1960s-meets-futuristic design medley, assured taste and passionate autocracy sets these homes apart. Imagination is the chief factor, plus the evident delight of the people that put them together. What unites these homes is their sense of escape. ♦