

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

The essence of design

Imagine the perfect home then let interior designer Tracy Leach create it for you

THREE years ago Tracy Leach was in Tokyo, gazing out over the skyscrapers of this frantic city while working as a foreign exchange dealer for the powerful American bank of J P Morgan.

Then with the terrible events of September 11 her whole world changed.

"I'd been thinking of a career change anyway but that precipitated it," she says. "People had died in appalling circumstances – some had thrown themselves from towers similar to the one I was working in – and while the money markets had been drastically affected the people working in them were still driven by the dollar. I suddenly lost all enthusiasm."

Within six months of that September Tracy was back in England and had enrolled at the JJA Academy in Clapham studying the world of interior design.

"Ever since my teens I had been fascinated by things Oriental and particularly by Japan," she says. "Once I'd begun to earn a living I would buy Japanese furniture for my flat in London and of course when I was posted to Tokyo I had a field day. Their design is exquisite and their craftsmanship painstakingly detailed. Now I saw a way of utilising my interest in Eastern design."

Tracy had spent 12 years in banking – a life that is regulated and systematic. Now she never knows where she will be from one day to the next.

"Just a few weeks ago I was in the depths of Somerset in a beautiful Georgian house helping with a photographic shoot," she says. "I'd helped the owner – a banker – with its ultra-contemporary interior and a magazine was interested. But a short time before that I designed a very smart town house in the London Docklands and before that I helped a girlfriend convert a pub in Derbyshire into a rambling but cosy cottage. As she then went on to build three houses in what had been the beer garden I stayed on to help design them too."

She is passionate about ambient lighting, and loves to 'paint' walls with light, and layer different types of lighting to give a room atmosphere and mood. Tracy is also fervent about using cutting edge technology in her design schemes.

"I love integrating high tech audio-visual equipment into a beautiful home, and offer this as part of my design service. This is usually the part when the male clients are interested!"

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Above and below: Tracy Leach is passionate about using cutting edge technology in her design schemes, "We are only limited by our imagination."

"We are only limited by our imagination when it comes to making technology work for us. Just imagine walking into your home, pressing one button on a keypad, the lights dim to a soft glow, the underfloor heating is at a perfect temperature, and your favourite movie is playing on your plasma screen – now that is a smart home!"

Soon after finishing her college course, Tracy persuaded her husband Warren to move down to a Hampshire village, where they bought first a detached house and secondly, Rufus, a springer spaniel. "And I don't know which has caused me the most trouble," she smiles.

Because the house was new, and therefore on the bland side, Tracy furnished it with her favourite Japanese and Chinese furniture to give it some character. Now she works from home in a specially designed office dealing with calls from all over the country.

But, just as she did in banking world, she still has to get up at six in morning – but this is to

make sure Rufus has his walk before she sets off across the country to meet her latest clients.

"I understand many people may be nervous about employing an interior designer, but I am convinced that the essence of good design is when a client looks comfortable in his or her environment. By providing a bespoke service, I ensure my clients get exactly what they want – they just don't necessarily know that they want it at the beginning".

This is where Tracy's input is invaluable, as she shows what is available without restricting her clients to one store (as opposed to a store-linked interior designer), saving time and money, whilst still offering prices that are often below the retail price. This dispels the other myth that interior designers are expensive.

"Quite often, any upfront design fee can be recouped by the client because of the great prices I can negotiate with my suppliers".

"I'm still rushed, still busy," she smiles. "But it's all a very far cry from Tokyo."

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