



FILLING THE VOID

LOUISE BRADLEY

The lady behind the luxurious interiors of Princess Square's sumptuous homes talks palaces, princes and palettes

Words: Fiona Collins

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I've not had the pleasure of meeting Louise Bradley in person, but we have chatted by phone and exchanged emails. Despite the limited contact, my overwhelming impression is of a considered, softly-spoken and calm persona. Bradley's words are well-

chosen, and her answers composed and modest - almost to the point of refuting her success - but equally she will not be pushed into answering questions just for the sake of finding something to say.

Although those closest to Bradley may challenge this impression, it certainly seems that my sense of her personality matches her design style. Simple, elegant, tranquil, and favouring a largely neutral palette, Bradley's rooms contain nothing obviously gaudy or jarring, and yet they manage to be individually distinct

and perfectly balanced, and entirely understanding of the message they are trying to convey; that of quiet, stylish, sophistication. Add in a few perfectly chosen one-off antiques, and a smattering of the designer's own luxury bespoke furniture line, and there you have Louise Bradley.

This definite, and sometimes understated style, which has taken London by storm for almost two decades, has been variously described as "beautiful, sleek and elegant", "subtly glamorous" and "epitomising the classic contemporary look." Yet, for the designer herself, it is not the sophistication or palette that is foremost in her mind when asked about her style, but rather the gratification that her work gives her clients.

"I think an interior should be a space that you feel very comfortable in," Bradley says after thought. "The design should last and be quite timeless, but also it's a





Main image: The plush interior of Louise Bradley's Kimbolton Showroom
Inset: Louise Bradley, the face behind the name

Images from top: Bradley's classic contemporary style is epitomised in the dining room (above) and sitting room (below) of this stunning Cumberland Place property in London's Regent's Park



fashion too. Interior design has moved on vastly since it was all chintzy and Colefax and Fowler, and everything has become much sleeker. But what's most important, above everything, is that you want to feel that it's 'home' and that it reflects a client's personality.'

Despite her standing as one of London's most prolific interior designers (she opened her flagship store in Kimbolton Court, in lofty Kensington, last year, despite the recession), Bradley's success is the result of organic growth and a love of her craft, rather than a slavish devotion to formal training and apprenticeships.

"Since I was a child, I've always been passionate about the home, and how it was not simply a space to fill, but somewhere that you could reflect your personality and sense of style. I am essentially self-taught and my business just developed really.

be talking of the redesign of a suburban semi in Wolverhampton, as the overhaul of a Royal Palace in the Middle East.

"We work all over the world really," Bradley begins quietly when I ask her to elaborate on some of her more glamorous assignments. "We've worked for the Crown Prince of Jordan, and that was a really beautiful project to do. And we've worked out in the Middle East many times, where we've done some amazing projects. But you know, they're all homes, and they're all for somebody to love at the end of the day, so every project, however big or however small, is exciting to work on, and to work on with a client who appreciates a beautiful home.

"I mean, we're doing a tiny garden flat at the moment, in Stanhope Mews, and it's a little Grade II listed garden flat, but that's been really quite exciting to do because it's on a smaller scale, and every tiny little bit of

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"I opened Walton Street [the first of Bradley's three showrooms in London] about 19 years ago. I used to source antiques from all over the world and put together lots of different things, and suddenly I needed a space to show all the pieces.

"Having opened Walton Street, my client-base grew dramatically, because people would come into the showroom and love the pieces that I'd bought, and the design side really just grew from there."

It wasn't long before Bradley's distinct taste attracted some major international interest, and she was personally commissioned to redesign the interiors of the homes of some of the world's wealthiest and most influential figures. In typical Bradley fashion though, she is so calm and casual when she talks of these jaw-dropping, once-in-a-lifetime projects, that she might equally

space has to be well thought of. And the smaller projects probably need to be really thought about because there is so much that people want today, and when you pack that into a little tiny space it really has to work, whereas with bigger projects sometimes it is a bit easier."

Bradley pauses, perhaps reflecting on her apparent claim that a flat in Stanhope Mews is harder to design than a palace for the Crown Prince of Jordan. She laughs and then continues: "But then saying that, we have huge projects and then the clients want absolutely everything in there too, so you've still got the challenge!"

And making rooms both functional and fabulous, are, it seems, key when it comes to Bradley's ethos.

"I think one of the biggest design mistakes that we come across in our business is →

something that's not thought out, and it's not thought out right at the early stages, in terms of... well obviously layout is a big one, but really in terms of the sizes of furniture going into a space, and obviously in terms of everything knitting together. A very well-planned project is an exciting thing at the end, because everything should fit like a glove."

Despite her hectic schedule of designing for private clients, and overseeing the running of her three London stores -where she showcases her bespoke furniture range, together with antiques and individual accessories for the home - Bradley has also dedicated considerable time to her relationship with Royalton, and to the schemes which she has been asked to designed for the sumptuous interiors of their properties at Princess Square.

"Royalton were always clients of ours. We used to supply pieces of furniture and accessories to them from the showroom," says Bradley. "Eventually I was asked to do the interior design for the owner's personal house, and we did that and he was thrilled with the outcome, and we loved working with him; it was just a really great collaboration.

"I think with any Royalton project, they really do look at the detail and the quality of absolutely everything as we do too, so it works really well. It's like two people speaking the same language. Whereas sometimes we'll tell clients that it is important to install a certain piece of furniture or a certain structural feature and they really don't understand why, so the relationship [with Royalton] works very well."

While Bradley and her team have given the complete interior design service to Princess Square's three show homes, the remainder of the properties remain blank canvasses as far as the furniture, papers and paints, and fixtures and fittings are concerned.

"Clearly we specified the kitchens, and bathrooms and floor finishes to form a neutral base, but beyond this the palettes can be interpreted in whatever way one wants, in terms of the interiors and with the final soft furnishings."

Bradley and her team will be on hand to help the new owners at Princess Square, should they require her expertise, but if a full interior design service sounds like a step too far, Bradley is keen to point out that it

doesn't have to be all or nothing.

"Obviously we have the showrooms which clients can visit to take advantage of our consultation service. Alternatively they can simply walk around the showrooms and we will assist them in selecting just the odd piece of furniture or accessories to complement their interior:

My time with Bradley is almost up, but I have one final (if perhaps a little crass) enquiry as to Bradley's most memorable design experience. I half expect a gushing soliloquy about Arabic palaces, or a vivid recollection of decking out Belgravia mansions for London's high society. Not so Bradley. She laughs quietly, almost nervously, before taking time to think. She says eventually: "They're all memorable. Honestly." She pauses again, and I think that the interview is over. "The most exciting time of all is obviously the installation; you work on a project for maybe two years, and then when you actually install it and accessorise the whole project, well that is..." the sentence remains unfinished, but I sense the emphasis of the silence. "So every project is really memorable. Honestly, I can remember every single one!"

Below: The interior of Louise Bradley's Kimbolton Showroom where clients can browse exclusive furniture lines and consult with designers on their proposed interior schemes.

