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Clare Gaskin

The London gemologist turned interior designer, whose colour sense echoes her work with luxury jewels

Who is she? Clare Gaskin didn't intend to become an interior designer. She read Art History and Architecture at Manchester University and then joined Sotheby's, where she worked on its valuation counter and qualified as a gemologist by taking evening classes. She subsequently joined the auction house's luxury-jewellery arm Sotheby's Diamonds, which took her to New York and Geneva. It was in this role, she says, that she learned how to work with clients, 'dealing with a huge variety of people and ensuring that they all had a positive experience'; knowledge she put to good use when she eventually pivoted to working on interiors, interning for Allegra Hicks, Todhunter Earle and Helen Green while studying at KLC



Above Clare Gaskin in the study she designed especially for 2023's Wow!House at Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour
Left A rainbow staircase transforms a 1990s home beside the Thames for a fearless couple who trusted Gaskin's vision



Expert advice

Clare Gaskin on the decorating tricks that can transform small or dark spaces

Prioritise clever, functional storage. Maximise what you have by using those funny little areas that often end up without purpose. On a project for a family living in a compact space, we designed storage under the stairs, which included a dedicated shoe zone.

Just because a space is small, doesn't mean that it can't take strong colours. On one project, we transformed a white but dark living room into a cosy navy-blue snug using grasscloth textures and a glossy green-blue ceiling. Colour doesn't always make a space feel smaller – in fact, the opposite is often true.

To create impact, I sometimes use the same shade on woodwork, walls and ceilings. This way, everything reads as one and you avoid the junctions that can make a small room feel blocky.

To enhance the light in a room, try a roller blind – they're underused and can look fantastic in bespoke fabrics. I once designed one in a bold floral for a small room with a huge window. When the blind was up, there was lots of light and a great connection to the outdoors; when it was down, it looked almost like artwork.

WORDS: AWAY BRADFORD PICTURES: NICK SMITH PORTRAIT: MILO BROWN

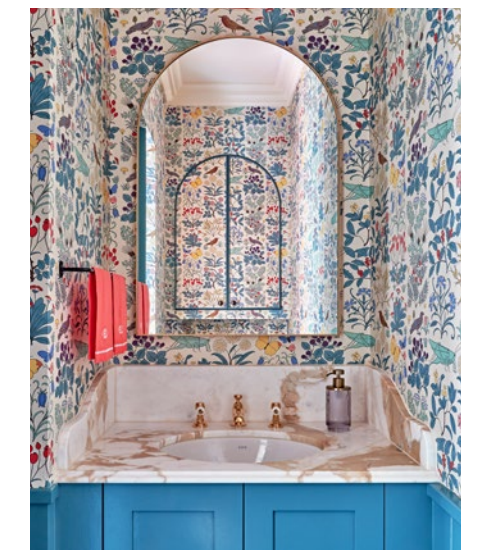
School of Design in Chelsea. 'I enjoyed making my own spaces feel personal, and I think my love of interiors comes from that – mixing styles, not being afraid of colour and never bowing to trends,' she says. While she was at KLC, a contact put Gaskin's name forward for an apartment project in Pimlico. 'Before I knew it, I had five projects around London, each one different. That became my "house style": not having a set look.' It's a philosophy she maintains at her Putney studio, set up in 2009.

'Natural materials are long-standing favourites for their understated luxury and tactile quality'

What are her recent projects? Gaskin excels at transforming bland spaces into homes with character, working with a bold colour sense borrowed from her experience with gemstones. Recently, she designed a new-build riverside home in Kingston upon Thames, elevating its developer finishes into something bright and quirky. 'I kept the central staircase light and simple as a background for the owners' vibrant art collection, adding a custom-made stair runner depicting their cats. Leading off from this was a series of fun, unique rooms, each with its own colour theme.' >



Clockwise from top The generous use of marble in this kitchen in Balham combines the Parisian chic its owners desired with a respect for the property's Victorian bones; full-on pattern transforms the tiny cloakroom in Gaskin's refurbishment of a Grade-II listed property in Marylebone; the paintbox-like quality of the staircase is picked up in this Thameside home's living room, with a multicoloured 'Mah Jong' sofa from Roche Bobois



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In Balham, Gaskin has renovated a family house in a contemporary Parisian style, with plenty of bespoke furniture and contrasts between light and dark shades. 'Colour can totally change the feel of a space, and I love encouraging clients to use it,' she says. 'Layering textures is something we love to do, too. Natural materials such as grasscloth, velvet, wool and linen are long-standing favourites for their understated luxury and tactile quality.'

What is she currently working on? For her studio's latest project, Gaskin was asked to add 'character, depth and interest' to a new-build apartment in Shoreditch, which she achieved with a mid-century-inspired concept. She has also been working on her own home, a period semi-detached house in Putney. 'We're going bold with colour and working with an architect on a design that uses lots of energy-saving and sustainable elements,' she explains.

She says: 'My website has the tagline "telling your story", which is what I want to achieve. I enjoy relating to clients, finding the thing that connects us – understanding who they are and what they love.' claregaskin.com **ED**



From top Navy-blue grasscloth-like wallpaper transforms a snug in this Marylebone project into a pocket of colour; the bathtub placement was key for Gaskin in this Hertfordshire home, whose owners craved Miami-style luxury; an extended headboard provides the perfect canvas for more pattern in this Wimbledon home



The little black book

Every successful project requires access to the experts and artisans who make magic possible

Lighting I work regularly with Porta Romana, and am always impressed by its collections – there seems to be something for every brief. The plaster 'Zande' table lamp is a new favourite, which you can order in custom colours. portaromana.com

Pre-loved furniture Online platform Rehaus sells pre-owned designer furniture – I've found great coffee tables as well as classic upholstered pieces. The biggest bonuses are the absence of lead-time issues and that it's a sustainable solution; clients of mine have sold pieces on here, too. rehaus.co.uk

Accessories Paolo Moschino's designs are rooted in tradition but with a twist, so they work in a variety of homes. My favourites include the 'Cocteau' hand-shaped brass curtain-rail holders, which I used in the study we did for the Wow!House last year. paolomoschino.com

Hardware Mark Lewis Interior Design's store sells great handles and more. They're traditional pieces that add a lovely quality to a room – I often use them in boot and utility rooms, but the brackets have also found their way into living rooms and bedrooms to make a feature of shelving. marklewisinteriordesign.com

PICTURES: NICK SMITH