

By Rana Aytug and Sufian Sawalha

JAMIE DRAKE TO THE TOP

Jamie Drake grew up in Connecticut loving decorating, interior design, antiques and entertaining. Based in New York and with over 30 years of experience, Drake has indulged in his passion professionally, creating exceptional interiors. Well published, Jamie Drake is the creator of some of the country's most glamorous, livable, delightful and inviting spaces. His exquisite rug collections, furniture line, fabrics, bathroom accessories and prolific rooms have ranked him among some of the world's most exceptional and distinguished designers.

Who is Jamie Drake? Can you tell us more about the person behind the creations?

I'm a kid from the suburbs of Connecticut who grew up and moved to New York City. I always loved decorating, interior design, antiques and entertaining. As an adult, I have been able to indulge those passions professionally, creating wonderful interiors for fantastic clients.

Your designs are elegantly vibrant and colorful. How did you develop your use of color in your designs and how did it all start?

I was always intrigued by color. Back in my childhood, I created collages, painted and silkscreened. My mother was an artist and my father was in the printing business. I'm quite convinced that being around mom's palettes of wet oil paints and the vast tubs of printer's inks at dad's factory had a deep influence - those deep, saturated, shiny viscous colors.

What most inspires your designs?

I am very inspired by fashion and the retail world. I love the evolution of clothing as a corollary to our times, and the unique and interesting details that can appear on a blouse or handbag or men's dinner suit. Boutiques and retail stores have to present such a concise and titillating message that I find inspiring.

What is your favorite project, and why? What was the most challenging project for you?



One of my most challenging, but extremely gratifying, projects was reversing the renovation, restoration and redecoration of Gracie Mansion, the official mayoral residence in New York City. I was given this commission immediately after Mayor Michael Bloomberg was elected. I had never done a historic preservation project before, and we had a very short eight-month time frame to complete an enormous project. The finished project received great acclaim, and it was wonderful to be a part of history. A favorite project was in London, creating elegant, soigné interiors in a great 19th century townhouse. I combined fabulous 18th and 19th century antiques with superb modern art including pieces by Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Hans Hoffman and Henry Moore.

What is your favorite room to design?
I love designing all rooms, but I have to say I have a special affection for living rooms that are designed for entertaining. I love a room that has a cozy place for two or three to sit, but is filled with perches and tables that can accommodate 40 for drinks or a buffet dinner. I can close my eyes and conjure up the lights set to a perfect dimmed mood, the candles lit, the music on, the flowers in bloom and the guests about to arrive.

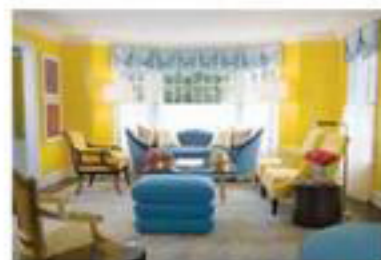
What would you advise for a quick facelift for a room on a budget?
Start with a good cleaning, literally and figuratively. Get rid of the clutter and fluff everything up. A few judicious additions can give a space some fresh spice. Choose a new accent color and add a few new throw pillows, some hold ceramic or glass accessories, recover the seat of a side chair and get new lampshades all in the same color. If you are up to it, paint the ceiling a pale shade of this accent color. A pale aqua

or coral can give a room real lift and bring the eye up.

Can you also tell us a little bit more about the Kips Bay showhouse?
Kips Bay is the original showhouse, just having celebrated its 40th year. This annual event is a fundraiser that supports afterschool programs for 15,000 underprivileged New York City children. It runs four weeks, usually in May, and showcases the work of 25 to 40 designers. A room is assigned to each designer and then their imaginations are set free.

Can you tell us more about your collection with Safavieh rugs?
I can see a lot of nature in the designs. My rug collection for Safavieh includes designs inspired by a Cambodian variation (Temple Garden), natural weaving techniques (Gaze) and neo-classical design (Leaf Stripe). There is even an update of a classic animal skin (Tiger Den). So yes, you are right. A lot of nature!
Who is your favorite artist?

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I love art too much to have a favorite. I love so many things; I couldn't have a favorite color, food or world destination either. Artists I do adore range from Botticelli to Warhol, Ingres to Thomas Ruff. Other inspiring artists would include Chuck Close, Bridget Riley, Cindy Sherman, Anish Kapoor, Jeff Koons, Monet, Gilot and Picasso.

If you had a chance to have dinner with any living person, who would you choose and why?
Hmm...so many I would love to explore. I would choose Zaha Hadid, the Iraqi-born British architect. Her work constantly amazes me and she has a fabulously fierce personal style and sense of self. Strong and brilliant, larger than life.

I have personally fallen in love with your collection for THG; tell us more about where that came from.
My collaboration with THG was a brilliant bit of matchmaking. They wanted a larger

US and global presence and my brand was a perfect fit. The quality of these French-made bath fittings is superb. My favorite design for them is Profil, a super-sleek contemporary series inspired by Swedish silver and Italian futurist furniture of the 1950s. But it feels totally 21st century.

What is next for Jamie Drake, and where do you see yourself in ten years?
Right now, we are working on some of our best projects ever, including a large Long Island estate, some vast NYC lofts and a townhouse in London. I still hope to do a hotel someday. Ten years? That's a long way away!

If you could collaborate on a project with any architect or designer, who would you select and what project would you design together?
Frank Gehry is an inspirational architect. His work pushes boundaries and collaborating would make me think outside of the box. I would love to design a

boutique hotel; I imagine my love of color and his talent with shape and form would be quite the marriage.

What does the D&D Designer of Distinction award signify for you?
The Designer of Distinction award represents design professionals who have demonstrated exceptional quality of work in interior design. Any designer would be honored to receive the award!

What do you remember about your first project and how has your style evolved since then?
Technically, my first project would be my backyard fort as a boy. It housed antiques and accessories just as my designs include today; however, I would say my style has become bolder and the quality of goods has gone up dramatically.

You say that an interior needs to be tailored and fitted to a client's needs.

Have you ever had a situation where a client didn't know what they needed?
It is my job to learn about the clients and their lifestyles. I get a sense of who they are and then functionally design a space that reflects their personalities.

Inspired by fashion and the retail world, if asked would you ever entertain the idea of being a fashion designer and how might you describe your fashion line?
I love every type of design and fashion, and they are of great inspiration to me. If I were to design a fashion line it would be energetic and unexpected! Colors, patterns and textures, oh my!

You say the design of a living room needs to be cozy, for two or three people to sit, and yet can be filled with perches and tables to accommodate even a buffet dinner. How do you go about striking the

balance between space, scale and proportion?
The key to designing a space for any amount of people is to create multiple seating groups that share a common thread that cohesively ties them together, whether that is a color carried around the room or a repeated pattern.

What can you tell us about the concept and design of the medical facility in Florida? What does it share in terms of style with your other residential and office type projects?
The First Coast Oncology Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, is one of my favorite projects! It was something new for me and I learned a great deal working on it. The style is sleek, bold and functional, all of which can all be found in my residential spaces as well.

If you could give your younger self some advice, what would it be?

A designer should never forget that it is ultimately all about the client's preferences. Design, just like fashion, has evolved over time. There are no rules anymore so don't be afraid to take risks!

What are some common decorating mistakes many homeowners make and how can they be avoided?
Create a space that reflects who you are. Surround yourself with the things you love, and most of all, have fun! Don't take yourself too seriously.

How would you describe the design of your own home?
When designing, it is important to have both personality plus design. Personality plus design is about injecting a sense of personality into every room. It's about mixing high and low, using bold color and not being afraid to combine different periods, shapes and forms. Therefore, I would describe the design of my home as me! ■