



DESIGN

DRAKE'S PROGRESS

His namesake Sir Francis is famous for his voyages to the New World, but the A-list New York designer Jamie Drake has crossed the pond in the other direction. He met Charlotte Metcalf in London to talk about boldness, bling and British reticence

jacket teamed with cream and grey Vivienne Westwood lace-up shoes and an outsize, chunky gold chain bracelet and statement watch. He looks sensible and wild at the same time, classic but verging on bling. Above all, he looks expensive.

I pick up Drake on his notion that we Brits are incapable of passion and ask if he's really saying we're design dullards. 'There's an ingrained terror of bling in the British psyche. Yet you only have to go back to the great mansions like Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace or Spencer House to see embellished rooms and an obvious love of giant jewellery. Historically boldness and elegant razzmatazz aren't unknown here — they've just been forgotten.'

According to Drake, what we most urgently need is 'more colour in a contemporary way, less fussiness and zero reference to grandma's interiors, except for a sentimental nod'. Of course, that's where he can help: 'My signature work is always a highly sophisticated mixture of pieces from various cultures, creating a true global piquancy. I bring a broad international attitude combined with affection for and knowledge of French, Italian and posh European interior design, filtered through a bold, assertive American eye. I bring a sense of levity and sophistication to life through my use of colour and passionate eclecticism.' He brings confidence, too.

Drake's undisputed talent — the way he identifies and plays upon the insecurities of the new rich — is manipulative in an almost Dickensian way. After all, who would not want to display a cultured, sophisticated,

amusing persona through their surroundings? Drake makes us feel that we are trapped within our timid, genteel, outdated, lacklustre confines until we find salvation through his brave, global, colourful, contemporary vision.

Certainly his stand at Masterpiece displayed his bravura. He placed two stunning David LaChapelle photographs above marble-topped buffets displaying Sèvres porcelain and across the room from a 1760 painting by Cignaroli. 'There's nothing more aesthetically provocative than juxtaposing a great piece of 19th-century furniture with a staggering piece of 20th-century art,' he says, as if it's a provocation he alone has recently discovered.

In a tactical nod to British design, he also incorporated a Fracture Table by Deptford firm Based Upon. He admits that he admires contemporary British designers and the artisans represented by the David Gill Gallery. Enthusiastically he grabs his BlackBerry to show me Mattia Bonetti's cast bronze, glass-topped 'Chewing Gum' table with multiple legs in a limited edition of twenty. It looks delicate, organic, alien and opulent all at the same time. For a drinks table it's certainly exotic, as is its price tag of £39,000. I note the designer is, in this case, Swiss.

Drake cites the late Alberto Pinto, New York architect Peter Marino and Jacques Grange as the interior designers he admires most.

'If you go to one of Jacques Grange's apartments you'd immediately know everything about its inhabitant — their passions and idiosyncrasies. I love that. Brits need to come out of hiding and I'm here to support the visionary achieve the "wow" effect,' he says. Wow. /

Photographs © Drake Design Associates

Jamie Drake talks about London's interior design scene like a man not out to win friends: 'With a few exceptions, what I see here is tentativeness, hesitation, faux politeness and leftovers from old-school social mores.'

While Drake may have achieved semi-celebrity status in New York, he is not exactly a household name here. He seems blithely impervious, however, to the fact he is calmly implying that British taste, compared with his own, is dingy and parochial. 'I like interiors that pulsate, rock you, grab you by the heart and hug you rather than those that shake your hand from a distance. Where's the passion here?'

But that's why Drake is turning his sights on London: 'London started changing dramatically about five years ago when it experienced an influx of new wealth from Russia, India and the Middle East,' he says. 'Being a New Yorker, I'm used to a city that's constantly mutating and growing. I love cities that aren't stagnant and I'm so enjoying being here when London's on the cusp of change.'

Drake's presence in London is evidence of that cusp. New York's leading interior designer, having waxed Madonna's floors and helped Michael Bloomberg convert his billions into bolsters and balustrades, Drake was in London in June, showcasing his talents at Masterpiece, the art, antiques and luxury lifestyle fair in Chelsea's Royal Hospital, and he has already been back for meetings with potential clients.

He has been operating in London for some time, under the radar, but only cherry-picking the most prestigious of projects: an important residence in Eaton Square here, a triplex in a listed house there. Drake does not name names, but suffice it to say that the apartment he designed just over

a decade ago was given a seven-page feature by *Christie's Magazine*. Though the owner remained anonymous, we were told he was a well-known American art collector, whose 19th-century Knightsbridge pied-à-terre was transformed by Drake into a dazzling, sophisticated showcase for his collection, which included Warhol, Henry Moore and Jasper Johns.

Meet Drake at a discreet, sleekly modern hotel in Belgravia. He orders a double espresso to perk him up for the evening ahead: he's dining at Le Caprice and going on to Loulou's, Robin Birley's club at 5 Hertford Street. It's indicative of Drake's style that he would choose an old restaurant with an impeccable, long-standing reputation for excellence alongside one of the newest nightclubs in town, inaccessible to all but invited A-listers. Drake embraces the contrast, which underpins the way he designs and even the way he dresses. Blade-thin, he wears dark jeans with a white shirt and black



Opposite: Jamie Drake, no shrinking violet. Clockwise from above: Drake's designs are popular in New York with those who can afford him, from the Flatiron District to the Upper West Side and Kips Bay