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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



BRIEF ENCOUNTERS OF THE WEIRD KIND

The white barrister's wig perches alone amid a riot of colour – a purple-shaded lamp by Viola Lanari, window frames in 'Pigi's Piggy Pink' from Francesca's Paints and purple skirting boards

Anyone visiting this London barrister's chambers might be forgiven for being shocked. For where's the Georgian panelling, the Wernicke bookcases, the tooled-leather tomes? And what's with that purple carpet and those funny green poles? Facing Ellen Mara de Wachter's cross-examination, the criminally imaginative designer Jermaine Gallacher now takes the stand. Photography: Oskar Proctor ▷



Above: punchy hues fight it out in the space, from the flame of Dan Friedman's *Orangeade* screen to the mineral purple of the bas-relief Axminster carpet, with its raised sections of pile. Below left: Gallacher devised his aluminium relief panels via trial and error, starting with handmade cardboard templates. The end product hides the doors of a stationery cupboard. Below right: the designer also dreamed up the two-tone leather cover for his client's office chair.



The two columns were acquired by the client from Didier Jean Anicet Courbot's A1043 gallery in Paris. For the ceiling, faux-finish and trompe-l'oeil experts Tilly Power and Mary Wintour of Maxted Murals rendered the clouded pink in a scumble glaze.



CONCEALED WITHIN the vast legal complex of London's Gray's Inn is a highly unusual chamber. Like the mise-en-scène for a Greek tragedy recast with an extravagant Postmodern twist, the room was devised by the furniture designer and dealer Jermaine Gallacher (*Wol* Oct 2020) for a barrister with a bold eye and a hankering to work among some of the museum-grade pieces in his collection of late 20th-century furniture. Gallacher sank the competition thanks to his combination of expertise and audacity. As he recalls: 'Other candidates for the job wanted to please, but I was like, "No, that will look crap!"' The result is, as Gallacher puts it, 'off the chart', staging a radical culture clash between the brilliant colours and eccentric silhouettes indoors and the highly ordered view from the window into the historic gardens and buildings beyond.

From a young age, Gallacher honed his savvy in extraordinary furniture and interiors, religiously attending weekly car boots in Brighton, where he grew up, and rooting out unique items to resell. After studying drawing at Camberwell College of Arts, he had a succession of shops, including a stall at Old Spitalfields Market and the short-lived but memorable boutique Legs, a collaboration with Isosceles lingerie/swimwear creator Cicely Travers and shoemaker Rose Choules, located in what was a sex shop in Soho's Walker's Court. Now his airy showroom is a 19th-century former cork factory in Borough, where he curates exhibitions by artists and designers including Miranda Keyes, who created green resin bowl-like shades for the wall sconces at Gray's Inn, and Viola Lanari (*Wol* Oct 2019), whose plaster lamp sits on the barrister's desk. He also hosts a bar twice weekly, serving wine from his friends at Lant Street Wine.

The Gray's Inn revamp took around a year; elements were introduced one at a time. Some, such as the new aluminium wall coverings, are the result of Gallacher's experimentation with new materi-

als. The silver reliefs reimagine the chamber's traditional, but replica, Georgian wood panelling, which was the first thing to be torn out. Each new panel features a border of sharp triangles evoking the toothy jaws of a cartoon bear trap. The negative space between these sharp points repeats on the floor in an area of double-height pile on the amethyst-coloured carpet custom made by Axminster, purveyors of carpets to royal palaces. Such camp luxury conjures up colourful scenes; Gallacher fantasised that the room was like a lawyer's office, 'if Amanda Lear was the lawyer and John Waters the client'.

Triangles are something of a signature shape for Gallacher, prominent in his 'Zigzag' collection of steel candelabras, shelf brackets, chairs and tables, seemingly abuzz with electricity. At Gray's Inn, the triangles on the wall are echoed in Tuscan-style columns, one crowned with a jagged red cock's comb, the other with a golden mane, created in 1983 by French designer Olivier Gagnère for friend Benjamin Baltimore, both of whom worked in the film industry. Gagnère's veneration of Ettore Sottsass often took him to Milan, where the Memphis master offered him advice, redrew his sketches and once even dumped his purportedly sub-par drawings in the bin, but this spurred Gagnère to create his own design language.

The star of the show is the *Orangeade* screen by Dan Friedman, first exhibited as part of a 1984 installation, before entering the personal collection of close friend and collaborator Keith Haring. Born in 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio, Friedman studied design in the USA, Switzerland and Germany before teaching at Yale and the Cooper Union in New York. A key contributor to the evolution of Postmodern design, he also created corporate identities for clients including Citibank. His concept of 'radical modernism' helped define the spirit of the late 1980s and early 90s, as designers journeyed from classical Modernism to the zero-gravity environment of Postmodernism via New Wave and Pop art. He encouraged students to think deeply about their designs in relation to human experience, spirituality and ecology, and to value humour, fantasy and inclusivity.

With its wobbly sprayed lines and headdress of discarded soda cans and feathers, *Orangeade* has a low-fi aesthetic matching the 'Nobody's Perfect' table and chairs by Italian designer Gaetano Pesce, affectionately known as the 'pope of gloop'. The table's tubular legs are topped with a resin 'tablecloth' that looks like an experiment in homemade boiled sweets; its soft edges testament to Pesce's love of uncertainty and variability. According to Pesce, each of the chairs has its own personality: they are 'little creature[s], sweet, intriguing and changing from chair to chair'. In this chamber, illuminated by the afternoon sun, their eyes seem not so much sweet as inflamed with an otherworldly glare.

The odd one out in this unconventional family is the barrister's stolid, mid-century desk. While its hulking presence suggests reliability and functionality, it is devoid of fun. Gallacher's approach to this misfit was to render the desk as unobtrusive as possible. He lacquered the top and, taking a leaf out of Belgian fashion designer Martin Margiela's philosophy of white (that white emulsion lends coherence and invisibility to even the most mismatched furniture), hand-painted the base in matt white. At the helm of the spaceship is the jester's throne, clothed in a two-tone red leather jacket Gallacher made to disguise a 'violently ugly' but no doubt comfy office chair. With tremendous formal and material intelligence, this compact interior invites classical and industrial motifs to riff off one another and wittily contrasts textures and forms. The playful irreverence of great designers reverberates and, while it is a room where negotiations of the utmost seriousness will be conducted, it also reflects Gallacher's view that, at the end of the day, 'you've got to have a laugh' ■
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