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SHOWROOM SHOWCASE

INTERIOR DESIGN TODAY IS TAKING A LOOK THROUGH THE DOORS OF SOME OF THE UK'S BEST SHOWROOMS, OFFERING AN INSIGHT INTO THE COLLECTIONS CURATED AND CREATED BY THE DESIGNERS WHO RUN THEM. **by Jade Tilley**

Just a short walk from Gloucester Road tube station, where the road meets Old Brompton, I found myself on a gloriously sunny day in London, walking towards the Keir Townsend showroom for my latest showroom visit. Keir Townsend had been on my radar for a while and I was encouraged to go along and take a look at the shop first hand.

On my approach I was disturbed from my reverie by the high-octane sounds of a Ferrari, roaring to life, along with several other of the brand's luxury sports vehicles, gliding across the road in a careful and yet exhilarating majesty. Keir Townsend sits, poised on the corner opposite the Ferrari showroom, a bright, glossy shop window to the car of many a dreamer's dream. Keir Townsend in contrast, exudes a serenity and

luxury, and so it is no wonder that the showroom has the occasional visit from certain celebrities, hopping over the road from cars to interiors. Irina Townsend, the Co-founder of Keir Townsend, is there to greet me. Warm and inviting Irina greets me with the charm and grace that makes it easy to see why so many of her clients come to her and never leave. Irina is accommodating and enthusiastic about the



journey of the brand and the place they currently stand in the interiors industry.

Irina, along with her husband Alistair Keir, a chartered surveyor, are business partners. They launched the practice in the middle of the recession in 2010. Irina said at the time, "We had separately worked for commercial design firms...but we were doing projects for friends and had developed a strong residential sideline". The company now has a six strong team, which is run from the studio beneath the showroom. I will get to that part later.

The first thing that hits you as you enter the showroom space is the intoxicating smell. Irina has worked with her few carefully selected scent specialists to create a heady mix of unusual and tempting smells that sit harmoniously with the pieces featured within the showroom. CULTI room diffusers sit along the side tables and cabinets, emitting a glorious scent that goes hand in hand with the style of the space. I can't quite say why, but it just all works together in serene harmony and sets the dark natural materials off to a tee.

Bringing myself back to the room, Irina is keen to talk about everything that this showroom has to offer. One thing that is certain is that Irina has

had more than a hand in every single item that the showroom has to offer. She refers to her many collaborators as artisans of their craft, conjured from around the world – literally. On the back wall there are beautiful circular wall art, an unusual technique, which I discover is crafted using the simple material of plaster, decorated in sumptuous blues and mixed with earthy tones. An Italian designer was commissioned for these particular items. Keir Townsend in many ways seems very connected to its earth. The colours and the textures all trace back to nature and Irina enthuses over the ways in which they have used and reused to preserve and recreate for a new generation. The recycled glass surfaces are just one example. They look like marble, particularly the white surface. It glistens and shimmers with a very natural quality. When you get up close you can see the detail of the shards, making it even more beautiful. There is also a three-dimensional quality to the material that only such crafting and recycling could achieve with such elegance.

The connection to earth and nature continues throughout, whether it is the table tops, reminiscent of fossils found deep in the earth or the smooth and seductive 'marble' pebble

sculptures that act as low level tables and seating. When I say 'marble' I am in fact surprised and delighted to see Irina gracefully lift one of the pebbles with little effort. It is again, an illusion, but no less of the quality and skill of creating a solid marble seat has gone into it. These concepts and designs have all been so carefully considered and thought through and it is a testament to Irina's knowledge and skill that they have all worked so flawlessly.

Other items that caught my eye included the lighting installations in the centre of the room, dangling above the large central table. When I asked who made those I discovered that the actually glass pendants were originally alone, it was Irina and her team who added the curtain tassels to transform them into something new, something altogether more exotic.

Continuing my search for lighting pieces, I focused in on the ornate lamps that sat atop the white recycled glass surface. Like a picture taken in an art deco era, these angelic emitters of light consisted of crisp white cut glass in various angles and facets. It reconfirms how well the retail showroom flows from earthy and textured to sleek and composed and back again. As Irina talks me through the various collaborations from



Spain, Italy and further afield, we stop by a copper clad cabinet. It is in fact wood on the inside but the face of the piece is clad in a stunning myriad of copper panels, all reflecting different tones. It is clever, contained design that plays with the senses and exudes luxury in an understated fashion.

Once I have absorbed as much product information as I can, we begin talking about the company as a studio and business. It transpires that the offices were originally situated across the road, above said Ferarri showroom, but the growth of the company and Irina's desire to expand and create in a larger workshop meant that when this corner spot came available, they had to take it up. The transformation is stunning. The retail showroom serves as a window in the Keir Townsend world. Below deck is a spotlessly appointed studio and workshop, with a cavernous archive of fabrics, materials, samples and paints that would simply have never fit into the previous space. I was lucky enough to get a mini tour of the space, where I met Alistair and some of the other designers, all busily working on their next projects, which I discover, there are many of and in various corners of the world. There are residential projects, hotel/restaurant clients (we can't talk too much about those)

and pieces being created for the showroom upstairs. Irina shows me the workshop, which carries another heady scent, this time of paint (you can literally smell the artisans at work) we don't stay in there too long but just long enough to take a glimpse at the archive of materials and projects and for Irina to present me with one of the signature fragrances they use. CULTI décor, FICHINDIA spray ambiente room spray, a limited edition that has sadly been discontinued. I shall treasure it and fragrance my home in the hope that it transforms itself into a Keir Townsend masterpiece.

Irina, Alistair and the team at Keir Townsend are making strides in the industry and it is easy to see why. The level of craftsmanship and the dedication to working with artisans from around the globe positions them as innovators and creative thinkers and Irina's passion and understanding of what her clients look for in the company is unfaltering. I can only recommend that everyone takes a trip down Old Brompton to see for themselves.

142 Old Brompton Road
London
SW7 4NR
www.keirtownsend.com

