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New girl in town

Celebrating Irina Townsend's luxury interiors showroom

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New in town

Judith Wilson meets designer of the moment, Iina Townsend

Earlier this summer, the husband and wife interior design team Kirk Townsend Barre opens the doors to their new, modernist hotel restaurant in South Kensington, a hotel fine dining work from The Conrad Group. It is decorated with a striking array of varied textures, lighting and accessories, and is already a screaming success. "It's a space we have worked for a while, in collaboration from nearby clients, all designed to have a 'local interior design,'" says Iina Townsend.

Restaurant entrepreneurs will already know of Kirk Townsend, as they were the design team behind the Merle restaurant, located in late 2011. With its gothic-themed "diner" of open stone kitchens, tables and tables through dining rooms, and a subtle lounge bar, the project has been the perfect showcase for Kirk Townsend's skills. Within the restaurant Barre is used light to help and create

exciting textures, including a translucent concrete and glass composite bar front. "And the table area has a highly advanced lighting programme to adjust down to dark settings, and even moonlight," she says.

Designer Townsend and her childhood sweetie husband, Stuart Kirk, launched Kirk Barre interior design practice in 2003 in the middle of the recession, but still the three are tight like thieves. "We had separately worked for commercial design firms," Townsend says. "But we were doing projects for friends and had developed a strong residential skillset." Now they have a shooting lounge design team, and work from a chic studio located for the moment in Spring. The road is now a deliberate move during its early days. "We are like a lot of kids and have wanted to start work," explains Townsend. "We wanted to highlight exactly what we can do."

"Inevitably as a husband and wife team we talk about work, but we love what we do, so it's never a chore"

The Kirk Townsend approach is both holistic when working on commercial projects. For example, they can do everything from floor grating inserts to rebranding. Right now, in addition to private commissions, they are working on the concept for a retail fashion restaurant, plus a hotel and spa in Hawaii. "We are committed to creating unique living environments," she says. The prime client that means a home that is an inspiring space and a talking point, but also one that is exciting.

Kirk Townsend's Kirk is clean, contemporary with a strong industrial-like. That's no surprise, as his education brings a global viewpoint to his design work. He graduated the world with his diploma program, then studied Fine Art in Britain and worked design in South Africa. The search frequently in Europe to work on new designs, often working closely with clients. The showroom clients work for the Townsend design team is Paris, Montreal, which is both beautiful and great inspiration, a water and art gallery with sculptural metal legs, and created wood cabinets. "We have created some beautiful statement pieces," she says. "We wanted the art and function to speak all new ideas." As well as modernist interior tables, which combine particle stone sculptures, there is also modernist lighting and wood flooring with stone tiles.

Iina and Stuart clearly believe in another's skills. Townsend admits that they have a designer's personality, because they can often both talk to both artists and creative design work.

Sometimes there is a particularly heated moment between their separate disciplines. "Sometimes an interior design idea, and will come up with different or simple solutions," she says. As an architect in practice, their trademark is to use experimental and unusual finishes, and clients to the showroom should expect to see velvet glass, fabric laminated in glass and curved wood panels. "We're concerned for the studio and the showroom," Townsend explains that they have always been based on the European model. "We have always the shop and need to have another studio across the street," she says. The couple have a 10-year-old son, as even if there are long work meetings, it is hard for them. "It's possible to eventually integrate a healthy work-life balance," Townsend says. "We're not too far from work, but we're not too far from home." "We're not too far from work, but we're not too far from home." "We're not too far from work, but we're not too far from home."



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