



ts designer, Isabella Worsley; Nicola

larding; one of her rooms at The Mitre

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to hand-painted lampshades. But Nicola thinks it's less

about gender and more about a desire to embrace colour,

drama and storytelling. 'There's a move in hotels towards something warmer, nurturing and more meaningful, perhaps qualities that have traditionally been associated with femininity, but hopefully now are celebrated across all genders,' she says. 'We're at a point in history where society is looking for more diversity than there has ever been, and this applies to every aspect of life, interior design included.'

A sense of inclusion is something that Isabella Worsley assimilated when she worked with grande dame of hotel design Kit Kemp, known for her colourful, textured schemes across a host of hotels from Ham Yard to The Soho Hotel. 'It's about gathering as many ideas and influences as possible,' she thinks. 'Kit taught me to weave stories through colour and pattern. She also encouraged scaling up.' That emphasis on storytelling can be seem in the woodland cabins that Isabella has recently designed at Callow Hall, which she describes as having a 'homespun narrative', with stencilling around doors and windows by Sussex-based decorative artist Tess Newall.

For Kit herself, there's a strong correlation between home and hotel design in terms of welcome. 'Prior to launching Dorset Square Hotel in the 1980s, I never liked staying in hotels,' she says. 'They were either of the corporate or the soggy bathroom carpet variety. We wanted to create something entirely different; spaces that you'd be curious to explore. Anouska Hempel had done it with Blakes but there were few other females in the industry. When we designed the Charlotte Street Hotel for example, I was inspired by



its Bloomsbury setting and the artistry of Vanessa Bell.'

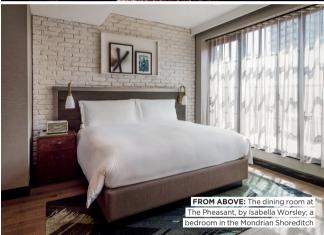
That colourful, off-the-cuff feel is still the benchmark for enticing hotel design. It's something that designer Susie Atkinson embraces, whether creating the whimsical forest lodges at Lime Wood or punchy interiors for Soho House, both in the UK and abroad. 'For me, it's about guests being able to open the door to a room and take in the look, scent, feel and sound,' she says. 'I enjoy sometimes taking feminine design cues to the extreme. For example, at Soho House Berlin I used a Jean Monro floral print on a black background on chairs for an almost 1940s still life look. It felt the opposite of "twee" yet it provided a softening counterpoint to a utilitarian, ex-department store space.'

More recently, hotel design has pushed the envelope even further with interiors that riff on the natural world, appeal to our sense of wellbeing or play with clashing colours, bold silhouettes and dramatic scale. The Other House, a London residents' club opening this spring, plays with all of those motifs and more. 'The spirit of English eccentricity was our starting point,' says its designer Marie Soliman. 'We were inspired by beguiling gardens, interesting architecture and arches. So it all feels fantastical and flamboyant, yet relaxing and comforting too.' Dotted with full-height faux orchid lights crafted from glass and brass, this is a space which playfully references the abundance of flora and fauna.

Post pandemic, connection to the natural world has become a must. At The Grosvenor in Stockbridge,







Lottie Keith has thoughtfully redesigned the interiors and the garden to exist in harmony. 'Sitting in the shade of an apple tree and listening to water running – that's a moment of serenity and an instant moodbooster,' she says. 'Nature actually has a very vibrant colour palette and so our interiors reflect that too, with their oranges, blues and greens.'

Rewriting the rule book is evident in several other female-designed hotels, from the warm, fluid lines seen at The Henrietta, thanks to French designer Dorothée Meilichzon ('I'm often told that my interiors are feminine – probably because I use a lot of round shapes and enjoy maximalist décor') to the playfully clashing fabrics at Olga Polizzi's country inn, The Star in Alfriston.

With this new, vibrant sensibility comes a feeling that hotel interiors, though experimental, should also stand the test of time, gently evolving with the needs of their guests. Jo Littlefair, the design eye behind newly opened Mondrian Shoreditch, believes that the best improve over time. 'Tracking changes in the behaviour of society as a whole is key to designing appropriately for the present and the future,' she reflects. 'Women understand nuances in emerging behaviour that ultimately affect the position of a plug socket, the depth of an armchair and the light around a dressing table. I know I am inclined to soften spaces using warm textures, curved edges and materials that I can't resist touching. I consider the spaces I create with an eye on the emotion I want to elicit.' Of course, that delicate balance between emotion and practicality is never confined to the mind of any one gender, but where there's warmth, there's hospitality. 'It all comes down to that,' agrees Dorothée Meilichzon. 'I always go back to how my mother and my grandmother made people feel welcome. That's still something I love and try to replicate.'

FIVE OF OUR FAVOURITE FEMALE-DESIGNED HOTELS



THE STAR
A low-key but beautifully conceived jewel in the South Downs, transformed by mother and daughter duo Olga and Alex Polizzi. The medieval building has entered a new era thanks to an artful blend of contemporary furniture and local antiques, plus English wallpapers and fabrics by Richard Smith. Tim Kensett, formerly of The River Café, helms the kitchen. thepolizzicallection.com



BEAVERBROOK
TOWN HOUSE
Occupying two
revamped London
townhouses, the sister
hotel of Surrey's Beaverbrook
riffs on the city's artistic
scene thanks to Nicola
Harding, with 14 bedrooms
named after famed theatres,
from The Royal Court to The
Old Vic. Head to the bar for
a delightfully intimate, Great
Gatsby-esque, Art Deco vibe.
beaverbrooktownbuse co.uk



THE SOHO HOTEL
Kit Kemp's boundless
imagination is easy
to spot here in Soho,
with 96 rooms and a
selection of public spaces that
combine bold print, colour,
drama and scale via artwork,
sculpture, bespoke furniture
and lighting, all in the heart of
one of the city's most creative
districts. A prime example
of the notable designer
doing what she does best.
firmdalehotels.com



THE HENRIETTA
Defined by soft,
circular silhouettes,
playful pattern clashes
and an Italian-inspired
exuberance, this bolthole
was created by Dorothée
Meilichzon for French-born
hospitality brand Experimental
Group. The designer's eye for
scale and shape has resulted
in a chic retro feel, warmed
by plush velvets and aged
brass accents. Delicious.
henriettahotel.com



A melting pot for some of the most exciting interior designers and architects in the country, this New Forest hideaway has been treated to a sophisticated elegance in the hands of designer Susie Atkinson, who has reworked the drawing room and a number of bedrooms and Pavilion hideaways. Expect frond-laden wallpaper and a blend of own-design and antique pieces. Iimewoodhotel.co.uk