



# SETTING THE SCENE

*Gabrielle Lane* visits Lewis & Co. in Paddington Street to talk style and successes with local interior designer Luis Hernandez

**L**ike many creative types, interior designer Luis Hernandez has a back-story rooted in academia. Around 15 years ago he was studying psychology and politics in New York, gleaning his artistic fix from design classes at the weekend. Now, he is a fully-fledged Marylebone resident with a portfolio of affluent London clients enlisting him to rework apartments, second homes – and even castles. “I knew [my degree] wasn’t

my calling,” he sighs. “I knew then that this is really what I’d like to do.”

We are mulling over the intervening years at his homeware boutique and business hub – Lewis & Co. in Paddington Street, surrounded by furniture and accessories he has sourced on his travels. There is a lacquered black oak table with a cracked tabletop (Hernandez’s favourite), a smart console with a cage-like base, abstract art, sculpted lamps, candles – and





➤ colourful cushions which he shuffles off a deep-set, bespoke sofa without a second thought so I can sit down. He will tell me later that a home must be both practical and aesthetically beautiful.

“I met [designer] Tim Clarke in California and he was my mentor,” he explains. “I started working with him and within six months I was project manager. Then he opened a showroom, the same concept I have here. I started getting my own clients, and then I realised it was time to set up alone; California, Hollywood, Los Angeles, it was high-end with celebrities here and there.” His Puerto-Rican, American drawl makes it all sound very easy, very natural.

The Lewis & Co. style – “modern with a twist” – is one that has translated effortlessly well to this side of the pond, thanks in part to growing disillusionment with the clinical white spaces of the early noughties, when it seems everything became chrome-wrapped and spot-lit. “Too modern can get too cold,” says Hernandez. “I like to put my modern touches with an old, traditional piece and mix it up. I like to create that warm feeling which is home – and inviting. Some modern styles aren’t really that comfortable: ultimately it’s your [the client’s] home, so choose something you’re comfortable with. I want to make sure that you love every piece.”

In smaller properties, the key is proportion, and with a black book of contacts, Hernandez could turn around made-to-measure furniture commissions in three or four weeks. His other tip is to keep things simple: “Just because you have the space doesn’t mean you have to fill it. Try to be more minimal. Just get what is necessary – and if you have a lot of light, you can get away with any kind of colour. I love earthy tones.”

The skill in how Hernandez works lies in his ability to create an eclecticism which is often stripped from other design schemes. When I ask where he sources furnishings I am confronted with a list of craft fairs and showcases in Milan and Paris – Maison et Objet and the like. He also forages in the antiques shops on his doorstep for inspiration.

“I like antiques and vintage finds, a mix-and-match collection. When you design a room, everything is a domino-effect; when you change one main piece, it will affect everything around it. It’s about the overall picture.”

With this in mind he opened the boutique last November to share pieces he’d discovered which he couldn’t use in current projects. It’s a concept that has served him well. “A lot of people walk in and are attracted to what I have. Then they say, ‘Hey I’ve just bought a new flat,’ and we get talking. Clients often say they don’t know what they want, but they usually know what they don’t want!” The treasures from Hernandez’s searches will also become available through an online shop on the company’s website later this year.

The process of adding to a room’s decor is also an inherent part of Hernandez’s design work; he keeps in touch with his clients and regularly sources additional details on request, months later. Take the aforementioned castle for example; Hernandez has been reworking the 18th century country house since his arrival in the UK, having been enlisted to keep its décor “fresh and interesting” by a client he first met in the States. It’s a project that is particularly unique, and one he loves: “When everything we have discussed is completed, I am satisfied that the main part is done. However, there’s always room to try new things, as you keep going you see more things around the room. I say, ‘I love this, but we could do this...’ A project is never completely finished, phase one – yes – but after that...”

So, with business booming, Hernandez’s plan going forward is to potentially extend the Lewis & Co. shop and broaden its offering. “I would like to extend the store, make it bigger,” he smiles. “I have access to the garden and what I would like to do is go into outdoor furnishing. I know we live in London and summer is unpredictable but a lot of people in this neighbourhood have second homes and they come in looking for outdoor furnishing. It makes a big difference when you have a street presence. I love this location.” ■

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