

Feast for the senses

How Jestico & Whiles put decoration on the menu

PRIOR STUDY

Jestico & Whiles Interior Design tapped into the creative side for IPC's new HQ

POINT OF VIEW

Jeremy Myerson on how youthful interiors often fail older workers

MASTERCLASS

RFK Architects advises Nick Cross Associates how to get the inside jobs

REVISIT

Boujis nightclub is still the life of the party 18 months on from its refit



On location

That's where you'll find yourself if you visit a Jestico & Whiles interiors project — in a glossy, glamorous alternate reality. And that's where we went to meet three architects from the BD award-winning practice

Lights! Suits! Action! Our cast is three architects from Jestico & Whiles, the set is the lobby bar of the Tower Bridge Hilton, the location is the south-eastern edge of the City. And the air of glamour is courtesy of Jestico & Whiles' interior design, a piece of bold, colourful set-dressing that allows any guest or visitor to act a part a little more bold and colourful than their own. It's the sort of place where you go to the bar to order white wine and find yourself — inexplicably — asking for a cocktail instead.

It's a signature style of the BD Interiors Architect of the Year. Jestico & Whiles' work is about creating experiences and events, using striking

Words Elaine Knutt **Portrait** Suki Dhanda



John Whiles (left), James Dilley and David Perera of Jestico & Whiles in the lobby of the Tower Bridge Hilton.

colours and dramatic lighting to highlight moods and emotions. "There's nothing worse than being mundane. That's one of the key things we start with on any project — how is it going to be special and memorable?" says associate James Dilley, centre.

Nowhere is this more true than its hotels, from Malmaison to One Aldwych to the Manchester Hilton. "A hotel shouldn't be a home from home," says founding partner John Whiles, pausing for dramatic effect. "No! It should be much more exciting!" So the Hilton bar rises on three terraces from entrance to rear, putting everyone on stage in a little piece of theatre, with a saturated red bar as a dramatic backdrop.

Or the Riva Hotel in Hrva, Croatia, which sounds not so much exciting as downright racy. Choose your roommate with care when the headboards display graphics of Hollywood screen sirens, the corridors are lined with sketches of nudes, and the en suites are separated from the rooms only by glazed transparent panels.

For other forms of excitement, there's a chain of 10 multiplex cinemas in India with interiors as melodramatic and colourful as Bollywood, their foyers Gehryesque creations that take drama from the screen to the door. Or closer to home, a new casino in Nottingham, where the mundane problem of getting from ground floor

to first is solved with what the architect calls a "Fred and Ginger" staircase.

Jestico & Whiles' interiors foreground emotions rather than function. In fact, throughout the interview, the trio draws a clear distinction between the "interior architecture" practised by other firms and the "interior design" it embraces. In its definition, the former is about applying disciplined architectural thinking to interiors — programme, space planning, function, density. Interior design, on the other hand, takes its cues from materials, textures and moods.

But above all, it's about embracing decoration. "It's taken a long time for people with an architectural background to accept that decoration is OK," says Dilley. "We're taught in Europe since the twenties and thirties that any type of decoration has to have a reason, a rationale. The brissoleil aren't to make the facade look more interesting, they're to keep the sun out, or that strange funnel-shaped thing in the atrium is all about the ventilation strategy. But we suddenly thought, yes, it's OK to decorate."

'One of the key things we start with on any project is how is it going to be special and memorable?'

For architects used to designing within Building Regulations and budgets, interiors restore an element of freedom and fun. "You're within four walls and there are no controls — suddenly you can have furniture that's not EU standard, but furniture that has a wit. I think that's what we enjoy about ID, it brings wit to a building that can otherwise be quite dry because of its performance requirements."

Some ideas definitely sound as if the ID team was having a laugh that day. In converting a former textile mill in Lodz, Poland, the team is re-using 4m-wide ventilation fans they found on site as colourful screens behind the bars. A chandelier in the same project has crystals in the shape of circus animals. At the Nottingham casino, couples can gamble at one-armed-bandits in "love seats" made for two.

And while they're at it, they'll bring some wit to the interview with the aforementioned Riva hotel generating enough material for a stand-up set. Apparently, guests have included Bill Gates, Sharon Stone and Steven Spielberg. "But not all in the same room," quips Dilley.

Jestico & Whiles, well regarded in housing, offices and education, discovered the fun and drama of interior design around 11 years ago. Set up by Tom Jestico and John Whiles in 1977, the practice had taken on its fair share of interiors projects in its first 20 years. "We'd done interiors before — we knew the Herman Millers, the striking wall, the corporate image, the working environment," says Whiles, ticking off items on ►

◀ the checklist of interior-design-by-numbers.

But whereas those commissions were bolt-ons to base builds, interior design as a separate function — often with another architect, always with a separate fee — started by accident. The client for London's One Aldwych hotel appointed the practice as architect, asking it to interview other practices for the interiors commission — but ended up appointing it instead.

Since then, it has interior designed seven Malmaison hotels, the Manchester and Canary Wharf Hiltons, and introduced the concept of the budget boutique hotel to eastern Europe with a chain for Andels. Many projects involve updating historic buildings, where its approach is to embed new interventions in the language of the old. The practice is currently designing a new restaurant and bar for the Royal Albert Hall, and is converting a former fire brigade headquarters in Manchester to a mixed-use leisure venue.

Projects are directed by either Whiles, Dilley or fellow associate David Perera, and delivered by a core interior design staff of around 15. This is supplemented with architects who have experience and interest in interior design projects.

"We have regular requests from architects who want a secondment to ID. Last month, we changed the teams and brought in two architects," says Perera.

Just as people cross from architecture to ID, ideas flow in the other direction. The Tower Bridge Hilton is a case in point, where the brown patina to the exterior copper cladding was chosen ahead of green because the ID team foresaw how the same material could be folded into the lobby bar as the rich, dramatic base note to colourful highlights in red and taupe.

A similar DNA fusion happened on a Kent care home. Whiles describes a meeting on the elevation: "Suddenly the interior designer said, 'I'm sitting in my bed, I want to look down on the garden, and I'm not getting the views to the garden from the window you've given me.' So immediately, the sills were dropped." He adds: "We used to have a very pure architectural approach, now our designs are more integrated."

As a business, the firm finds that ID has shifted perceptions of the practice and has attracted a younger generation of clients. "I think the impact is higher than the financial, [which] I wouldn't say is vast," says Whiles. "We're getting such a reputation, we're being asked to work more internationally."

The three architects talk about how the ID department has enriched the working environment. "It brings a lot of energy to the practice and our building. The atmosphere encourages the architects to experiment," says Dilley. It sounds as if all those fabric samples and vivid, juicy colours somehow leach through from interior design into the rigid, rigorous world of architecture — to the benefit of both sides.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT JESTICO & WHILES



1 In the mood

A mood board showing some of the team's latest finds: a weave made from aluminium wire by a Danish artist, a rubber panel made of recycled bicycle tyres, etched tiles by Architectural Ceramics, etched glass by Omnidecor, and richly patterned fabrics by Fadini Borghi.

2 Industry samples

Swatches and samples in the ID office, sourced by keeping in regular touch with suppliers and attending events and exhibitions such as 100% Design.

3 One we prepared earlier

The interior design department sits on the ground floor, where desks are cluttered with enough material samples, cards and glue to rival Blue Peter circa 1977.

4 First floor studio

The firm's office is a former railway building, which Jestico & Whiles converted into its own offices plus private flats around a decade ago. The main studio is on the first floor, where an air of controlled calm prevails.

5 Down the pub

The Exmouth Arms pub is just yards from Jestico & Whiles's Euston office, seen in the background. The proximity evidently makes working late at the office on summer evenings something of a non-option.



Five up

Interior design staff describe five inspirational interiors

Aja Teelock

Architectural assistant



On a study trip to the Jean Nouvel extension to the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, I really enjoyed the restaurant and café/bar. It had a very sculptural feel, with an organic red, glossy form for the back wall that curved around to form the ceiling. The tables and counters were hard, sharp white wings. The contrast worked really well.

Ben Tilston

Architectural assistant



The Maison de Verre in Paris, a private house designed in the 1930s by Pierre Chareau and Bernard Bijvoet. It's quite a mechanical building, designed entirely around the client family, and has a doctor's surgery on the ground floor. The space is incredibly flexible, and it's got fantastic details for a house of that age. Chareau also designed all the furniture.

Meet the designers

Sureeporn Chuatirarak and Charlotta Eriksson,
interior designers

How are ID projects run within the practice?

CE: We lead a team each. We each have designers and one member of staff specialising in sourcing materials and products. But there's no line. If one of us has an idea we think might suit Sureeporn's project, we'll let her know.

SC: A lot of architects get quite inspired by us. If they're doing a school, it might have a chill-out area, and they'll ask for our opinion on colours. Often, the budget will be low, but you can do something.

Coming from Thailand and Sweden, how does working in London compare?

CE: The best thing is the variety of projects, and the fact that from here you can work all over the world — I've worked in Croatia, Berlin, Prague and Abu Dhabi.

SC: It's a centre where you can find any kind of material. And the pound is quite strong, so things become affordable.

What are the keynotes of a Jestico & Whiles interior?

CE: We try to use recycled materials a lot, and also found objects. For instance in converting an old textile mill in Lodz to a hotel, we found four or five huge fans.

SC: In Berlin, we're converting an abandoned Aldo Rossi building into a hotel. There's a lot of spray paint graffiti in the area, so that's inspired some of the pattern in the interior.



Inspiring architects.

What's your favourite project?

CE: The casino in Nottingham. The brief was to be ground-breaking, and it's got some fun features — the doors to the toilets look like a bank vault, then you go through into a black tunnel. Often those are the ideas that get knocked out as the design progresses, but here we managed to build them.

Do you do much field research?

SC: We like to go to events, shows and exhibitions. About once a month we'll go to a bar or hotel just to see what the designer's done. The Milan Fair was inspirational, we tried to squeeze in as much as we could. We liked the Dolce and Gabbana gold restaurant, it was incredibly glittery.

Teams get a chance to meet and mix

At Jestico & Whiles, the interior designers and architects all take half a day off each month to explore extra-curricular activities. Staff are divided into groups of around 12 that cut across their usual working teams, giving everyone a chance to meet and mix. The sessions are divided between activities in the office and trips to interesting buildings or sites in London — but always end with a communal lunch.

Facilitating creativity

Office-based activities vary between providing training and skills for the day job, and facilitating staff's creativity. Groups study one art form — a piece of music or a poem — and use it as the inspirational launch pad for their own models or sculpture.

Beyond NW1, staff have visited the contrasting areas of glossy More London and gritty Kingsland Road, Hackney. The ID team also invited colleagues to the design centre at London's Chelsea Harbour, a cross between a product showroom and a social club for air-kissing interior design types. "Architects would never normally go there!" laughs Charlotta Eriksson. "But I think they had quite a good time."

City breaks

Staff also explore further afield with visits to European cities, combining study tours of local buildings with placements at local practices. ID staff have visited Paris-based designers Christian Liaigre and Andre Puttman.

For longer trips of up to a month — destinations have included Australia and the US — staff put together a proposal and funding request. But for shorter breaks, the practice loves to spring a surprise on unsuspecting staff. "We swear wives and partners to secrecy!" says John Whiles.



Millie Warner

Interior designer



The MO Bar in the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong, by Tihany Design of New York. I went with friends and our trip was really hectic — then we had a drink in this lovely oasis. They'd based the bar on the concept of water, with a pool-like design on the front of the bar. Most of all, the lighting was really effective, they could change the whole mood from day to night.

Portia Dunmore

Interior designer



I've seen lots of photos of Calvin Tsao's private residence in California — he's half of interior design firm Tsao & McKown. He uses a lot of stone and timber, and mixes the modern and traditional, and raw forms, with beautiful details and lovely antiques, such as decorative panels of Oriental fabrics with tones of gold. It looks striking against the stone floor.

Stefano Manuelli

Architect



I found the Puerto America hotel in Madrid really inspiring, you could experience so many different spaces in one building, and there was no budget to speak of. I stayed in the Foster room: he uses slick materials like marble and leather, but the detailing is quite simple. I also liked Marc Newson's bar, he created some great organic shapes.