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Homes & gardens



Alexandra de Pfyffer



Defining A New Elegance:

A look at the style of Geneva interior designer

by Beth Houston Teja

Alexandra de Pfyffer

"Before moving to our present space, the AIWC clubrooms were in a building on the boulevard Helvétique, which we didn't really pay any attention to as we took the elevator up, nor did we notice who the other tenants were. One day, as I was leaving the club, the door across the hallway was open, revealing a wonderful new world of quiet elegance and muted luxury that I felt drawn into," recalls Neptune Ingwersen. "It turned out to be the showroom of AdP Décoration, owned by one of Geneva's leading interior designers, Alexandra de Pfyffer, who took the time to show me around. I even discovered, during our conversation, that her mother, Claude Honann von Herinberg, had been one of our longtime members."

Unlike many of Geneva's interior designers whose street level showrooms offer a glimpse of their decorative style, Alexandra de Pfyffer prefers the more private setting of her present showroom and offices, whose look is transformed every two years. "Someone who would come here is very much interested in our interiors," says this designer, who has not only worked in Geneva and elsewhere in Switzerland but also in Paris and Megève, and as far away as Southampton, NY, where she designed a summer home.

Rich, bronze-toned, hand-printed wallpaper in the entrance hallway of the AdP showroom creates a warm and elegant backdrop for an eclectic selection of artwork and furnishings, wonderfully juxtaposed, including a dramatic image of an Indonesian Buddha painted by artist Patricia McCarphy, reflected in the contemporary mirrored sculpture on the facing wall.

It is in the main showroom that a visitor gets a sense of Alexandra de Pfyffer's original style, which manages to be both luxurious and laid-back at the same time, elegant and unpretentious – a masterful mix of contrasting textures, shapes, styles, periods and cultures. Anchored by major furniture pieces in soothing, natural tones of beige, taupe, charcoal and obsidian, with small accents of hot brights, this showcase for AdP offers elements of the unexpected to delight a visitor's eye.

"It's what I love best about interior design, creating a fabulous mix. I like to start with a special piece around which I can build a room for my clients," says Alexandra de Pfyffer, who works predominantly on residential interiors but is also known for contract installations, such as the Restaurant du Parc des Eaux-Vives. Among those she credits as being major influences on her style and the way she approaches design are Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Jean-Michel Frank and Eileen Gray, not to forget Madeleine Castaing and Sister Parish.

Her favorite project? "A contemporary chalet with large windows in the mountains, where a big surprise is the garage with black flooring and recessed downlights, dominated by a powerfully scaled color photo image by Kimberly DuRoss."

Her most challenging? "A house with a stunning view in Montreux that we are currently working on with an architect. It will have a four-story glass elevator; the details will include macassar ebony door frames and silver door handles."

She offers a fascinating insight into the fact that interior design is about much more than putting together the decorative aspects of a project. "As a matter of fact, one of my professors at the New York School of Interior Design, where I trained after my university studies in the US, would tell us, "if you are lucky as a designer, you will spend 10 percent of your time on creativity and 90 percent on administration." What has been a tremendous asset to her business, which she opened in 1993, acknowledges Alexandra de Pfyffer, was experience she gained in the early part of her career, spent in finance, when she first returned to Geneva.

It should be very interesting to watch the style of this original and talented designer evolve. ●