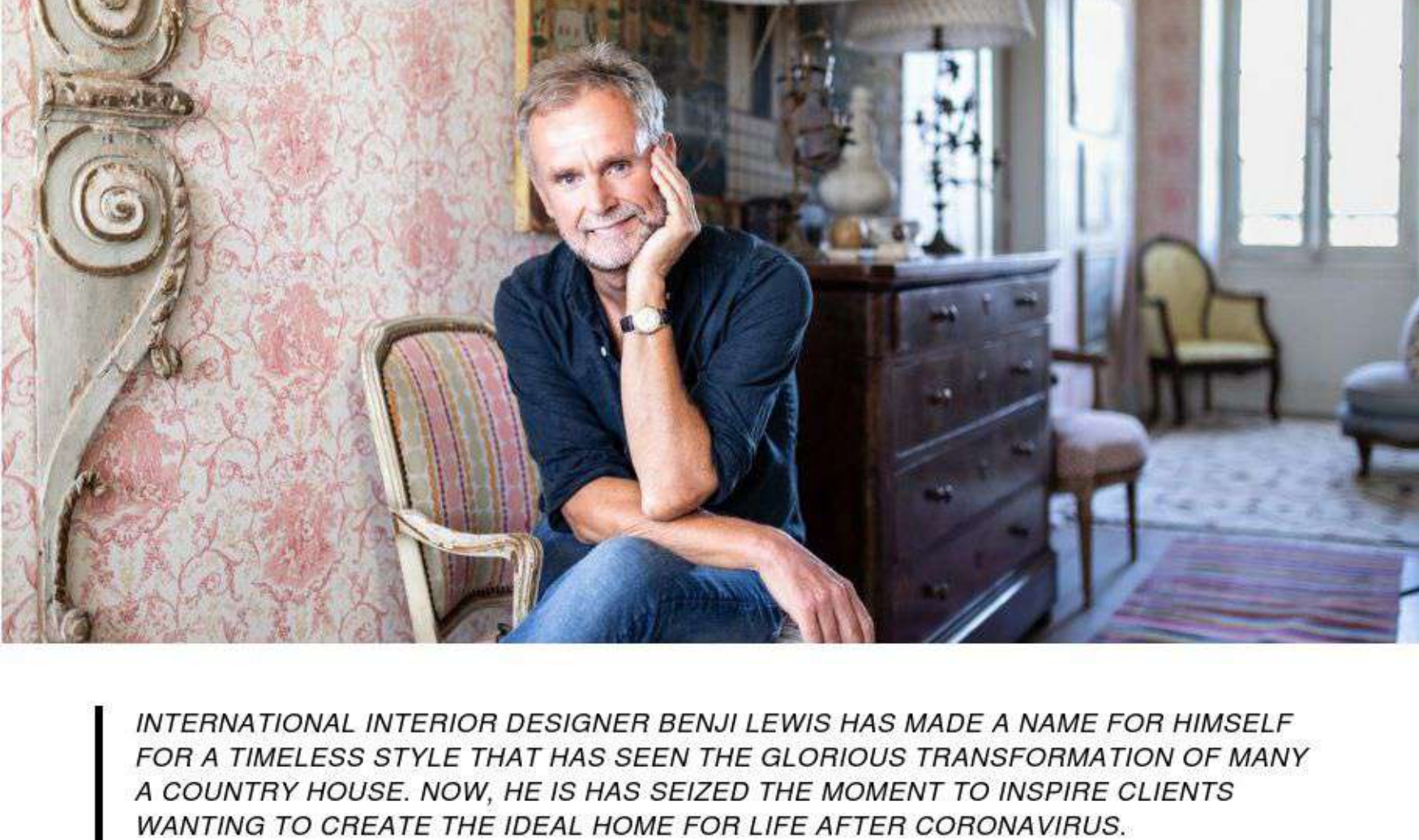


ZOOMING IN ON A CHANGED WORLD

Posted by Anna Marie-Casas | Aug 5, 2020 | #design



**INTERNATIONAL INTERIOR DESIGNER BENJI LEWIS HAS MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF FOR A TIMELESS STYLE THAT HAS SEEN THE GLORIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF MANY A COUNTRY HOUSE. NOW, HE IS HAS SEIZED THE MOMENT TO INSPIRE CLIENTS WANTING TO CREATE THE IDEAL HOME FOR LIFE AFTER CORONAVIRUS.**

There has been much pondering of late over whether lockdown isolation may have prompted the greatest period of creativity in history.

For London-based interior designer Benji Lewis, the coronavirus pandemic has certainly provided the perfect opportunity to hasten turning a great idea into reality.

Lewis has launched Zoom that Room, a virtual interior design service tapping into the world's increased interest in the home environment as a result of lockdown and providing clients with access to the designer and his timeless style via bespoke video communications consultations.



With a career spanning both residential and commercial projects, Lewis's fascination with period furniture and furnishings was triggered while working for Bonhams auctioneers after training at the KLC School of Interior Design.

He set up on his own in 2004 after a spell with a major London interiors house. A fluent French speaker, Lewis has worked prolifically in southwest France, an area that holds a special place in his heart.

We catch up with him as his virtual concept takes off...



**You seem to have been pretty busy during lockdown – tell us how Zoom that Room came about.**

I've thought for a while that there was a gap in the market for bespoke online interior design advice, after having worked on a couple of projects where the clients were reluctant to pay for me to travel to site. Lockdown came along and I thought, wow, this is the time for a service like this!

**How do you think the pandemic will affect the world of interior design?**

I think it's going to be dramatic; people are already becoming increasingly sensitised to their domestic surroundings – don't forget this could go on a while longer and bounce back, so creating feelings of comfort and safety within the home, quite aside from aesthetics, has never been more important.

**When did you first realise you wanted to be an interior designer?**

From a very young age, probably starting when I was eight or nine, I experimented with room layout and decoration; whilst clearly it'd be a little curious to suggest that I've been an interior designer in the career sense of the term since that time, I have unquestionably practised at it since then.

Strange as it might sound, it's something that I still practise at today – all of us have to do that – and I can't imagine ever stopping that. Interior design and decoration are hardwired into my DNA and I couldn't actually ever have done anything else.

**How would you describe your style?**

Instinctive and timeless. I always read what the magazines and forums are proposing as trends and fashions and, whilst I love dipping into these, I would never let them dominate my thought processes.

I absolutely hold onto the mantra that in order for an interior to be exciting and retain interest, you need to blend periods, styles, patterns, textures and colours whilst concentrating also on scale to create a room that's timeless.

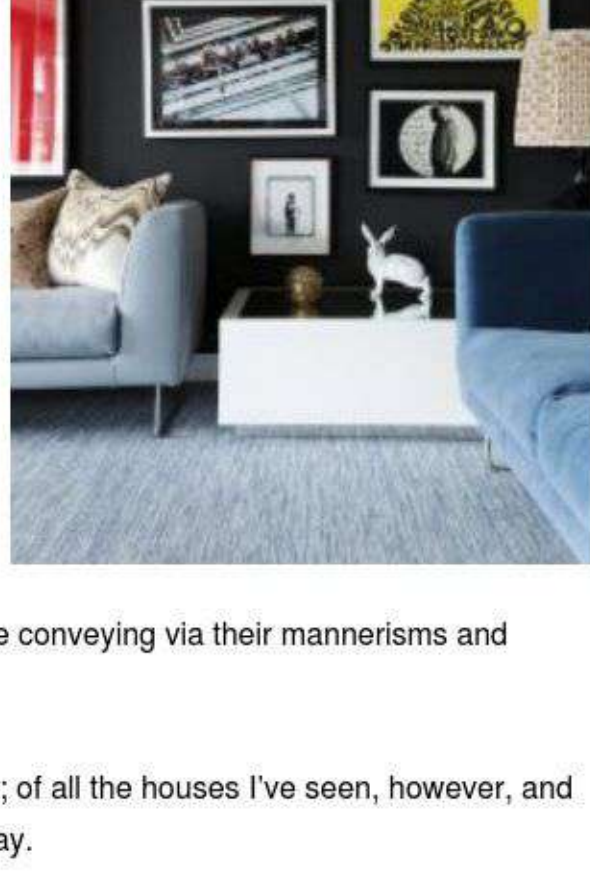
I think it must be exhausting to be someone who has to always have the latest fad or trend; by all means dip into these but don't be dominated by them. Go for timeless not trendy. Trendy is tiring.

**What inspires your work and which single piece of design has impacted you most?**

Personalities inspire me, endlessly. Practically everyone I come across, when I first meet them, I absorb the visual information they're conveying via their mannerisms and clothing choices, and I wonder what kind of homes they live in.

Clearly, interiors inspire me also – and the work of clever colleagues; of all the houses I've seen, however, and I've trawled magazines for ever, there's one that stands out to this day.

It was an old Russian townhouse, grand but not imposing, that had retained its architectural integrity – tiled floors, floorboards, fireplaces and plaster mouldings, lovely doors. It was grand and yet slightly rustic, utterly delightful, with simple white walls and a collection of possessions that had been so beautifully curated, including antique furniture and textiles. Grand, as I said, but still just a home.



**Who do you admire?**

Anyone who's able or been able to demonstrate remarkable talent in whatever their specialist field might be. I remember going into Albi Cathedral and seeing the carved stonework for the first time – the workmanship is exquisite, the craftsmen anonymous. Listening to Cecilia Bartoli singing Lascia Ch'io Pianga; I will never tire of hearing her. Anything that's been perfectly executed is joyous to behold, whether it's construction, design, drawing, painting, singing, whatever.



**Which of your projects are you most proud of?**

I've enjoyed all of them – I'm jolly lucky – but I suppose juggling designs for the chairman's offices at Universal Music at the same time as working on a Grade II listed arts and crafts country house was exciting. I'll always thrive on the challenge of adapting styles for different clients. I've never wanted to be a traditional designer or a contemporary designer – as I said before I'm after timeless, not trendy.

**Your business comes via word of mouth or repeat clients. What's the key to your success?**

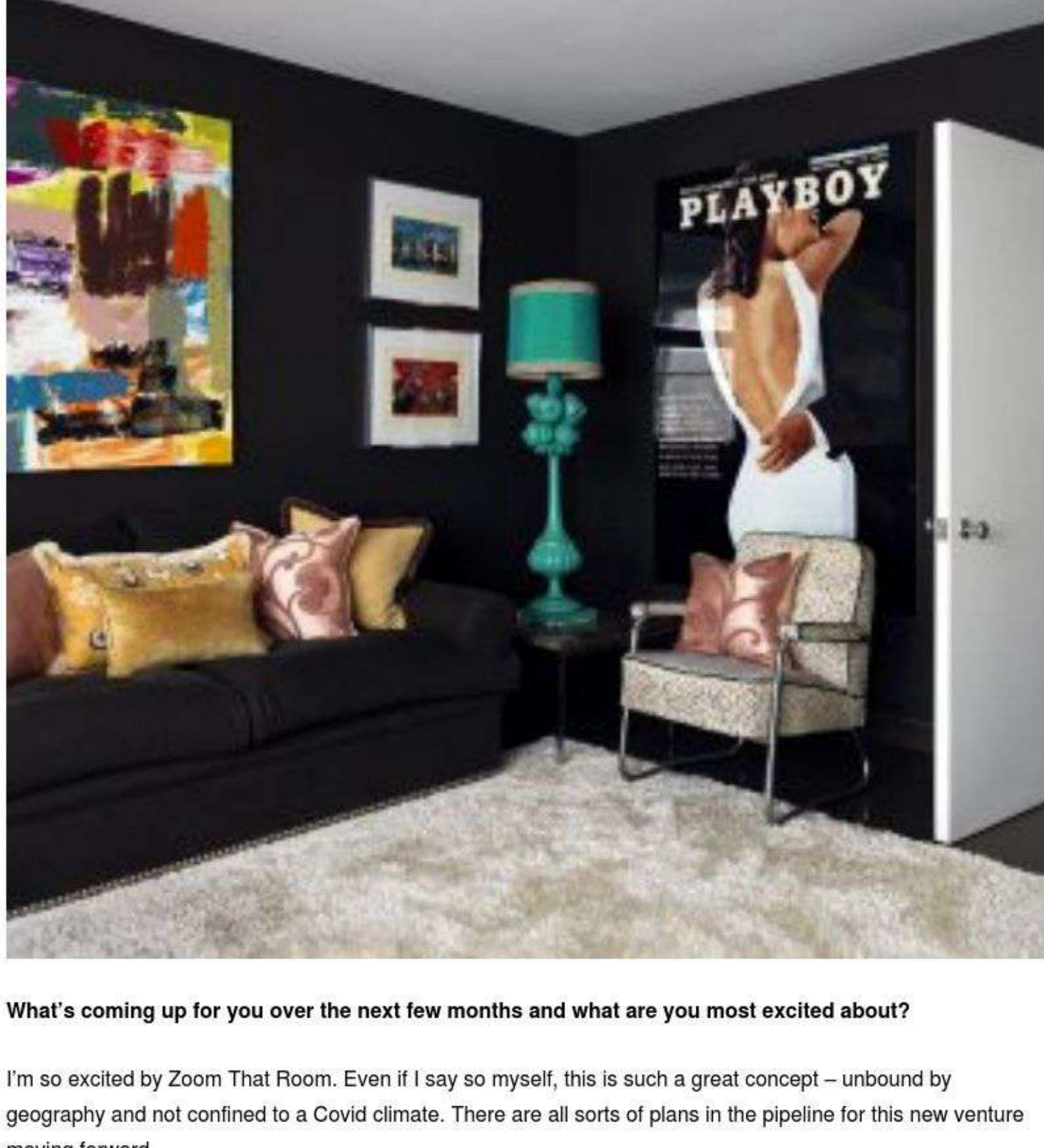
I work very hard to ensure that I engage with my clients on a personality level. After all, we have to get to know one another well and frankly like being with one another. I strive to understand what makes people tick. Interior design cannot be a one formula fits all, so I always adapt thought processes and approaches for the person with whom I'm engaged at the time.

Customer service is also a really big deal for me – this job is about managing expectations – so I guess people recommend me, not just because I can design, but also because I deliver.

**Where do you think interior design is heading and what do you predict will be the next major shift in what clients are looking for?**

The residential market is going to be huge; the world has taken such a big knock and we've all had to wise up to the reality that working from home with online interaction might become the norm.

Loving your home has never been more important – feelings of mediocrity can't suffice. A great interior isn't just about what things look like, it's about what you feel like when you're in that interior, that's the important thing. Space planning is key to a successful interior; these rooms of ours have to multitask like never before.



**What's coming up for you over the next few months and what are you most excited about?**

I'm so excited by Zoom That Room. Even if I say so myself, this is such a great concept – unbound by geography and not confined to a Covid climate. There are all sorts of plans in the pipeline for this new venture moving forward.

I'm working on designs for a chateau in southwest France and have signed up for work – all on the back of Zoom That Room – in Paris, South Kensington and Cornwall. Fingers crossed, I'm being earmarked for a couple of jobs in the US before too long, but with a queue of ZTR meetings in the pipeline I might be off to Timbuktu next!



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