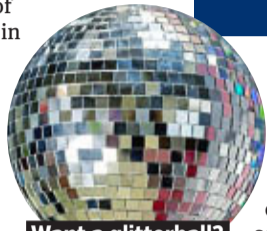


Is lockdown going to change the way we all live?

Lockdown has come in like a tornado and it's torn up the rule book in terms of living. We've all had such a shock - marriages have come apart because couples don't have the space they need. We all need to feel calm and in control more than ever before. Small things can make such a difference. Detail like ambient lighting can affect your mood, so with the possibility of lockdown extending in to darker evenings, just adjusting the lights in your room can give you a much-needed lift.

You responded to lockdown by launching Zoom That Room...
Yes, it's a bespoke



Want a glitterball? Then you shall have a glitterball

TIPS FROM THE TOP

With interior designer **Benji Lewis**

LOCKDOWN BLUES OR DIFFERENT HUES? THIS TOP DESIGNER, 52, INVENTED 'ZOOM THAT ROOM' TO TRANSFORM HOMES AROUND THE WORLD

online interior design advice service, which means I can go into someone's house via Facetime, WhatsApp or Zoom and advise them on colours,

layout and ways to make the changes they've always wanted but don't know how. Before lockdown, I had a client in Cornwall who asked if I could work remotely because of

the travel times and costs. So I used photos and measurements, and plotted what we could do, working on scale drawings and doing furniture layouts. The client was thrilled and it was my inspiration for Zoom That Room. Without it, I think my business would have floundered.

How do people find Zooming their rooms?

It's such a fun way of hiring an interior designer. Sometimes, people can feel awkward if they have a stranger in the house but this way, they really get involved. They send me a floor plan and I have photographs of each wall. As they Zoom, I can pick up the smallest of details. Often, I see just one radiator. I say, 'Are you sure you're warm enough,' and a surprisingly large number say, 'No, I'm freezing.' So I Google local heating engineers and within ten minutes there's a change to the way they live.

What have been your favourite Zoom transformations?

One was a 25-year-old woman from Peckham whose parents offered her and her boyfriend a Zoom That Room session as a housewarming present. They had ideas about what they wanted to do but she wanted to use their new furniture the right way. They had bought a set of shelving with drawers and were going to buy a matching cupboard and put it on another wall. I suggested that instead of putting more storage on a second wall, they should keep it free for another use, like putting a sofa against it. They were also considering an accent wall but I suggested they pick one great colour and use it on all four. It was great fun. Another client, married with three teenage children, has been working from home throughout lockdown and was starting to feel hemmed in. I started talking about quiet rooms, a bit of calm escapism, and she said, 'Stuff that, it's a glitter ball and podium I'm after.' Now, we're working up designs for a room in her unused garage where she can play music and dance too. I loved that!

So what's going to be the big change to interiors due to lockdown?

The next big thing in interiors is space planning because spaces have to multi-task like never before. Priorities won't be trying to work out which shade of purple or violet you like but planning each room, measuring and mapping out your furniture layout.



As a child, were you always redecorating your bedroom?

I remember asking for an accent wall in my bedroom and my dad did me one with Habitat wallpaper, which had green houses. Next, I wanted an orange wall and I was always moving bedside tables and chests of drawers. At school, I was an academic disaster and failed all my exams but even as a young boy, I'd go into a room and have a feeling. I studied interior design in London and went into the retail side of it because I wanted to learn how to deal with clients.

They can be interesting - most are delightful - but my training taught me that if someone calls you, you call them back, you answer emails and you don't ignore them.

How did you make the jump into interior design?

I was helping people create bespoke carpets but I wanted to do sofas and talk about lampshades, too. My chance came at a party when I met a barrister and his wife who had a new-build home in Chiswick but had inherited Edwardian and Georgian furniture and didn't know how it would all work. I went for a mid-century modern feel and the result was featured in House & Garden. From then, through word of mouth, I went from job to job.

Mistakes, you've made a few?

Don't always rely on suppliers. I ordered a large sofa for clients in a country house with access via a gatehouse that had a low arch. I told the supplier repeatedly that a van would be needed for delivery - but on the day, in the driving rain, it was delivered on a pantechicon so huge it could have been used to move four households at the same time. I begged a neighbouring farmer for help and the sofa was duly delivered via a tractor on a trailer with three sheepdogs in the back.

What advice do you have for someone starting out?

Take endless photos and move things all the time. Create a catalogue in your memory bank - so you recall a cobalt blue

that worked well in the past. Go into showrooms to get acquainted with texture and colour - and park every image in your phone. **AMANDA CABLE**

benjilewisdesign.com, zoomthatroom.com

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