



FAMILY AFFAIR

Interior architecture and design practice ASJ Design is run by a mother and daughter partnership who have gained a respected reputation for their innovative projects



Salisbury-based ASJ Design, run by mother-and-daughter team Amanda and Annie Stillman-Jones, recently won an award for the most innovative interior architecture and design practice in the south. Amanda founded the business in 2010 having already had a successful career in property development and restoration. With her passion for innovative and authentic design, she soon became recognised across Wiltshire for working with clients to make beautiful, yet functional design schemes a reality.

At the start of the pandemic, Annie joined the firm from the commercial sector. The pair pride themselves on their attentive and collaborative approach, which they say is the key to providing clients with a tailored design which truly reflects their personality and lifestyle.

We caught up with Annie to talk about favourite projects and the joys of achieving the impossible...

What's it like being a mother-daughter partnership? You must get on well!

We consider ourselves really lucky to continue to build this family-run business together and our greatest success is playing to each other's strengths and weaknesses. My mother has extensive experience from working on a diverse portfolio of projects over many years and I bring commercial-sector experience from large scale, high-profile projects. It's rewarding to work as a family duo, and we value a relationship that's built on trust and support, allowing us to work with clients seamlessly.

How does an interior architect differ from an interior designer?

We understand it to be the holistic approach to refurbishment projects – as an interior architect you are an integral part of the team throughout, from giving insight and direction of early designs required for relevant approval, through to rigorous space planning with structural and architectural understanding to maximise potential of client's home.

This is crucial to the success of the interior design. We believe aesthetics and function go hand in hand. When the configuration of internal space and how it functions is not considered from the early stages, it can give limitations when the interiors are detailed later on.

Can you tell us a bit about some of the favourite projects you've worked on?

Our favourites are always those that are truly transformational and really capture the vision that both the client and us had envisioned when in the initial stages of the project. Last year we completed a project refurbishing a tired, 70s house that was truly beyond its sell by date to a contemporary country forever home that was focused on the view to the hills beyond. An all-time favourite of ours was reimagining a piggy barn into a beautiful, ➔





functional family home with a unique interior that complemented the heritage of the building. The challenge of working with an existing structure and transforming it into a new home for our clients is something that we pride ourselves in at ASJ Design.

Do you have any favourite places where you source your materials from?

Where possible, we like to source local. Working through the pandemic has highlighted more than ever what bespoke services and products are available within the UK. We enjoy developing relationships with local suppliers to enhance the network around us, both in London and in Wiltshire. Building relationships with local suppliers, results in a more sustainable and more personal approach to design and allows us to support UK tradesmen in ASJ Design projects.

Tell us a bit about the tradesmen and artisans you work with

Over the years we have built a broad network of close partnerships with a variety of tradesmen and artisans; from glazing specialists who supply made to measure windows from Crittall to timber sashes, to joiners who create tailor-made kitchens and cabinetry and artisan upholsterers who produce truly bespoke sofas, chairs, and headboards. One consistent thread is their passion for what they do and their attention to detail. We treasure our 'little black book' as it allows us to design and source for projects of varying style, scope, and complexity.

Presumably sustainability and 'buying for life' are key elements these days?

At ASJ Design, we don't like to follow trends; interiors of a home should represent the people and the lifestyle of those that live in it. If the design approach is focused on what the clients loves rather than what's hot, that in itself is a more sustainable and results in a timeless design.

You've worked on some properties that were a blank slate, such as the self-build passivhaus – it must be daunting to know where to start on such a project?

For this type of project, we tend to approach



the process in reverse. It may sound strange, but it's important to start at the end and help clients figure out how they want to live and what they want from the space. We then work backwards to realise their vision within the parameters of the site.

What are some of the biggest challenges when it comes to interior design?

Space can be the biggest challenge and how to best create it within the constraints of the site. These challenges can come in many forms, for example the structural limitations or the listed consent conditions. Although what can be the most challenging is overcoming those within budget as it demands real creativity and 'thinking outside the box' ideas.

What are your three key pieces of advice when it comes to interior design?

Try not to overfill a room, circulation space is vital to how a space feels and functions. Remember to keep a sense of scale and proportion, the relationship between the objects that you fill a room with and their relationship to the room itself are key to a balanced design. Finally, never underestimate the importance of storage, as a house with well-designed and adequate storage is a happier, more functional home.

What are you working on at the moment?

We are working on a real variety of projects both in scope and size, these range from the conversion of a derelict cow barn in Wiltshire to a period penthouse in London overlooking the key monuments of the city. We've got some exciting projects in the pipeline for this year and through to the end of 2023.

What's your greatest ambition – a project you'd really love to have a go at?

We love rescuing the impossible because there is something really satisfying above breathing life into a derelict site that others would have written off to beyond hope. As the business continues to grow and projects continue to develop, we would love to have a go at this even bigger and bolder than we've done before.

What are your plans/hopes for the coming year?

Growing the team is a big focus for this year, while also finding a new normal in a post-Brexit and post-pandemic world! We're always on the lookout for new projects and are looking forward to seeing our penthouse and cow barn projects come to life in the coming months.