

ELLE DECORATION



SMALL SPACES
BIG IDEAS





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JOANNA LAAJISTO

We talk to our favourite interior designers about their work and ask them to share their styling tips

Who is she? A Finnish former professional snowboarder who switched to design when she felt it was time to get a 'real job'. Joanna Laajisto was living in California at the time and chose

interiors rather than fashion design, having always been interested in both. 'I felt I could create something more lasting in this field,' she says. After graduating with a BA in interior architecture from the Interiors Design Institute in California, she worked for Gensler Architects in Los Angeles for five years. In 2008, she moved back to Finland and set up her own studio two years later.

What's her style? The first thing that stands out is her muted, timeless palette, seen, for example, in the hint of blue that she used to decorate the Finlandia Caviar restaurant in Helsinki. 'I pick colour palettes that one doesn't get bored with too easily, and natural materials that get even better with time,' she says. Functionality is as important as aesthetics. 'A lot of analytical thought goes into the design concept before we start picking any colours or materials. When everything works together you don't pay attention; if it doesn't, you notice.'

What are her most recent projects? OX restaurant in Helsinki (2016), where Laajisto has paired red marble with mint-coloured corrugated metal walls and exposed air ventilation pipes. 'I wanted to play with contrasts in the design, just as the chefs play with the menu,' she says. Elsewhere, she has used green wood-panelled walls inspired by 1940s outdoor kiosks, which can still be seen around



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Helsinki today, at Michel restaurant (left; 2015). It also features cognac-hued upholstery, white marble tables and brass detailing. Other recent projects include a 1900s apartment in Lahti (main image and detail). 'With residential projects, you're creating a personal space, so you need to get to know clients to understand what works for them,' she says.

What is she currently working on? A new design concept for the European stores of an international women's fashion brand. 'It is very interesting to be involved in the retail industry. Our approach is to view things through the eyes of the customer.'

She says 'After living in LA for such a long time, the mid-century modern style speaks to me, but at the same time I like the simple Scandinavian aesthetic' (joannalaajisto.com).

Turn over for Joanna Laajisto's guide to working with wood >

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JOANNA LAAJISTO'S INSIDER GUIDE TO WOOD

The designer tells us about the different types, finishes and design options

Types of wood

I tend to use lighter woods, such as oak and ash, which have a classic Scandinavian look, but are also more readily available here. I also look out for timber that is FSC certified, rather than rare tropical woods cut from the diminishing rainforests. I use wood for wall panelling, flooring and furniture. I have also used reclaimed wood in the past: repurposing old floorboards is a great way to give wood a new life.



Sustainable options

We recently designed the interior of Löyly (above and below), a building that is part restaurant, part public sauna in Helsinki. We worked with Nextimber, a company that converts waste from the plywood industry into new wood (nextimber.com). The great thing about this innovative laminated birch is that it is durable with a fresh light tone. The project was the first in Finland to earn certification from the Forest Stewardship Council.

'Use timber that is FSC certified, rather than rare tropical woods from diminishing rainforests'

Installing wood

Wood continues to expand and contract when exposed to different types of humidity, so when installing wooden flooring it's important to be mindful of this and allow enough space between the timber and the walls. Similarly, the wood in mitre joints (which is where two pieces form a corner) can crack as a result of movement, so it is worth strengthening the joint with a spline (where the grain runs across the joint). Also, make sure that the wood is properly glued together.



Solid wood vs veneer

Solid wood is always my preference, because the grain looks better, but I often combine the two by making cabinet tops from solid oak and the doors from oak veneer with a plywood backing.

Wood finishes

There are many to choose from, from oils and waxes to lacquer. Oak has a stable colour naturally, but ash and softer light woods such as pine and spruce tend to yellow when exposed to light, so you need to protect them. If you are using wood in a bathroom or kitchen, it's important to add a water-repellent lacquer.



EIGHT TOP TIPS FOR MOVING HOUSE

Having recently made a big move herself, Amy Bradford shares her step-by-step guide to packing up your property (without the stress)

1 As soon as you have decided to move house, have a good clearout. If you aren't using something, give it to charity, list it on Ebay or employ a clearance company (the *KwikSweep* app is great if you live in London). The more stuff you have, the more ruthless you need to be.

2 Start packing non-essentials early and store them out of sight, even if you haven't found a new property yet – it will make your life easier once a house purchase is under way.

3 Clearly label boxes with details of contents and which room they need to go in once you move. If a box contains fragile or heavy objects, make sure you use lots of bubble wrap and label it accordingly. Throws and cushions are handy to provide extra padding for fragile objects.

4 Interview at least three moving companies well before you move. They should do a site visit, assess how much stuff you have, how it needs to be wrapped, and give you a rough schedule of how long your move should take. Check their insurance policy, and don't be tempted to skim on cost: it's normal to spend over £1,000 on moving, unfortunately!

5 Pack a box containing passports, power leads, mugs, kettle – things you couldn't survive without for long or that mustn't get lost. Keep this with you rather than your movers.

6 Notify utility companies, the local council, phone and internet providers and banks of your new address as soon as you have a moving date. Most will allow you to switch your details a couple of weeks before you move.

7 Book engineers to disconnect any lights or appliances you want to take with you. Many moving companies will reconnect washing machines in your new home, but things like gas cookers require Corgi-registered experts.

8 Take a break from work after your move so that you can unpack and settle in properly.