

# INTERIOR DESIGNER

*of the month*

## Todhunter gatherer



Quietly glamorous Emily Todhunter became an interior designer quite by chance. Natalie Sutton caught up with her in her busy Lots Road studio and chatted about rag-rolling, snagging and working mothers.

Unlike many other teenagers, Emily Todhunter earned her pocket money as a specialist painter and, under the careful guidance of Jim Smart, became an expert in rag-rolling, antique restoration, painting frescoes and so on. She had no precocious ideas about becoming an interior designer and, she explains, never really saw interior design as a concept in itself. She merely arrived on-site, together with a random crew of other people looking after the lighting, the kitchen units and the plumbing respectively, and got on with whatever mural or marble effect ceiling had been commissioned.

Jim Smart taught her well, she says, and remains her inspiration having

passed on to her his passion for colour and the way in which it is mixed.

Many years and a large number of walls later, Emily had collected so many ideas and seen how whole teams functioned that she decided to have a go at running the whole show - rather like Jodie Foster electing to go behind the camera and direct. A flood of commissions came her way including nightclubs, restaurants, castles and mansions both here and abroad. She had not, however, realised how much administrative work is involved in running your own business and book-keeping was not a part of the job that she enjoyed.

Administration and "snagging" are her pet hates in the world of interior

design. Being a perfectionist goes with the territory, but Todhunter loathes inspecting a project at the end and making sure that every little detail is absolutely right because, inevitably, it isn't. Although this in itself, she says, is a comfort because it shows that "it all happens to me, rather than me happening to it".

She joined forces with Katie Earle in 1998 to set up a thriving interior design business under the name of Todhunter Earle with headquarters in Lots Road, London's interior design mecca. At present they have a variety of projects on the go; a chalet in Gstaad, an elegant, glitzy, 1930s boat, a country estate in Yorkshire and a house on Tregunter Road and it's this sort of



variety that really excites Emily Todhunter. "No two projects are ever worked in the same way," she says. "You have a different brief and a different set of problems with each one." She has since launched her own collections of wallpapers, fabrics, rugs and bespoke furniture.

Diversity of projects notwithstanding, the high standards of Todhunter's work exist across the board and usually have the same result. She has developed, to her surprise, a trademark signature 'look' that is serene and calming, often referred to as 'quiet glamour'. It is unpretentious but, above all, comfortable with a lot of

thought given to lifestyle, suitability and design on the client's level. If her designs were a food, says Todhunter,

class connotations and an overall simplicity that is a pleasure to be surrounded by. "The opposite of a soufflé,"

'look' and finding what gives them a buzz. "It's a mind reading exercise in many ways," she says. "Everyone

the olive groves, as she is by wandering through the archives of a museum.

Todhunter's uncomplicated femininity shines through as she talks about life, babies and everyday things and is apparent in her views on future trends. "More curves," she grins. "Less boxy with drier, more natural materials. Isn't it bizarre how fashion and interior design go hand in hand?" She ponders on the shape of things to come, clearly dismissing the whole 'heroin chic' of the nineties in favour of voluptuousness à la Sophie Dahl.

## "Everyone benefits from living in the right atmosphere and it's up to me to find out what that is."

it would be everyday bread and butter; comfort food that is loved by everyone and can be dressed up or dressed down as you please with no

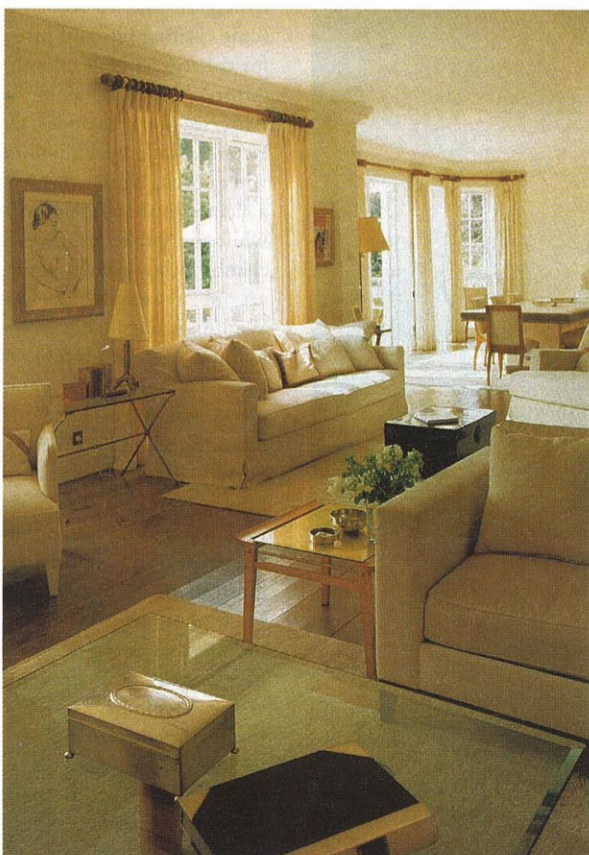
she laughs.

She admits that her 'flavour' grew and developed with time into a look without her being particularly conscious of it. It is only now that her collections of fabrics and wallpapers are available for distribution that she can look at them all and acknowledge that certain themes and tones are repeated and reflected throughout. She favours dry materials such as plasterwork for effects and the relief shown on some of her fabrics and cushions in soothing, neutral tones reflects this. Lighting, she says, is critical and should be thought about carefully with each spotlight doing a specific job to enhance the materials and textures used in a room. When selling a property, it is the structural aspects of a house that are important, according to Todhunter, rather than the window dressing that people often attempt to disguise faults.

Her approach to clients is to chat and get to know them before ascertaining their

benefits from living in the right atmosphere and it's up to me to find out what that is." The mobile telephone, for example, has, in her opinion, contributed to many people currently living a faster pace of life with less escape from the stress. Todhunter wants to create safe havens for people, particularly busy working mothers like herself, where it's possible to wind down after a hectic day and cook and chat with the family in big friendly rooms. Her idea of hell for a harassed Mum is a galley kitchen, isolated from the world and left to deal with the everyday ups and downs of life on her own while looking at a wall with soap suds up to her elbows.

Like many designers, travel plays a large part in Todhunter's quest for inspiration and ideas but not necessarily as part of far-flung adventures. She is just as likely to find a muse while walking with her children and admiring the pebbles on a beach in Greece, tempered by the mellow atmosphere of



### Fact file

#### CLIENTS INCLUDE:

Berkeley Hotel  
Daphne,  
Christopher,s  
Royal Berkshire Hotel  
Le Manoir aux Quat, Saisons  
Many private commissions

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