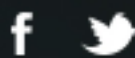


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TEXTILE TOUCHES

Nicky Mudie - Violet & George
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DESIGN, FEATURES



Can there be many more miserable shopping experiences than hunting for the perfect lampshade? This is the thought Nicky Mudie had when she set up her business back in 2009 after failing to find any original or creative soft furnishings for her interior design projects. Nicky is the woman behind the interior tailoring business **Violet & George**, making beautiful bespoke and sumptuous cushions, lampshades, curtains, blinds and upholstered furniture. Ostensibly, Violet & George is a soft furnishings store, but for anyone with a love of textiles it's more like lingerie for furniture.

Violet & George's focus is on the finishing touches of people's homes. The firm is often engaged when a client has run out of enthusiasm or when a house has had work carried out by a developer or architect but doesn't yet represent the client's personality or feel like their home. Nicky spends time getting to know her clients, discussing what inspires them, finding out what they consider a beautiful interior and seeing what existing furniture, fixtures and fittings will fit into the final scheme. Violet & George is client-led, so their designs are always an interpretation of conversations with clients, who can be involved in the process as little or as much as they wish. Nicky often finds herself leading them on a journey of discovery regarding their own tastes and influences.

When Nicky launched her business four years ago, it brought together her experience of fashion and interior design. "My passion for textiles started young," she says. "I made my own clothes as a teenager and studied for a degree in textile design. While at university in Leeds, I dressed nightclub interiors using fabric from local markets and draped clubs to create drastically different environments for various promoters. I then made the move into working as an interior designer but I always found myself drawn to the softer side of things." The combination of her passion for fashion and love of interiors comes across in her designs, and with relationships already built with some amazing craftspeople with amazing skills, this was all Nicky needed as the inspiration for Violet & George.

What drives her is knowing she is supporting British artisans – pleaters, makers of lampshades and passementerie [elaborate trimmings] – whose skills could so easily be lost. "A lot of these arts are declining as manufacturing moves overseas and a generation of craftspeople retires," she says. "I am keen to keep that work here, and to keep it alive." She also champions emerging textile designers so that her customers benefit from little-known ranges and don't see their curtains replicated in the homes of their friends.

The traditional values of craftsmanship and quality underpin Violet & George's offering. Violet & George have collaborated with seamstresses, fashion designers and craftspeople to create their one-off designs and a range of furnishings that are truly unique. Their team of curtain makers have more than 70 years' combined experience, and their upholsterers are skilled craftsmen with more than 60 years' experience. Their lampshade frames are handmade with fabric hand-stretched, pleated and stitched over the frame. They design and produce furnishings that will last for years to come, so traditional techniques always take precedence and are at the forefront of their philosophy. They feel that mass production can often take away the quality from a product.

A clue as to how close the business is to Nicky's heart lies in the name. Violet and George were her grandparents. Violet was a passionate seamstress, an eccentric character and a huge inspiration to her grandchildren. George was a pilot in the Second World War, who, when not in the air, was impeccably dressed in the best suits Saville Row could offer. "Both had a passion for tailoring, for glamour and for interior design, and growing up around their style influenced me greatly," says Nicky. "I was obsessed with all the trinkets and treasures in Granny's sewing box and loved our sewing afternoons together." It could be said that her love of textiles is in her blood, and the sense of heritage and inspiration is certainly reflected in her design. Violet & George hope to reflect the passions of Nicky's grandparents in their soft furnishing designs.

Fashion also has a big influence on their designs. Fashion and interiors are never far removed from each other and Nicky is constantly inspired by the catwalk. "This season we have used a lot of suede, wool, linen and lace fabrics in a palette of purples, oranges and blacks which were abundant in collections from **Prada, Gucci** and **Christopher Kane**. We like to push the boundaries of soft furnishing and look to tailoring to use upholstery fabrics in new and interesting ways. Aside from the catwalk, we also research different eras and our creations vary from theatrical and opulent to simple and elegant. We have been going through a phase of being inspired by Victorian decadence but as the mood shifts, so will our designs."

Violet & George's clients range from interior designers to clients who do not require the full service offered by a traditional interior designer, but simply want soft furnishings to complete the look of their homes. Nicky's background gives her the knowledge to be able to make home visits, to understand clients' needs and to complete their schemes with fabrics from a large samples library housed in Violet & George's Fulham studio. As a designer, her bias is towards creating something unique for her clients, taking a piece of existing furniture and adding interesting detail, or making curtains with a twist that become an art form in themselves.

Violet & George has grown a lot since it opened in a small studio at the back of a trading estate in Fulham. The huge progression happened in July 2012, when Nicky came across the opportunity to open an on-street showroom on St Helen's Gardens in North Kensington. She hasn't looked back since. "We love having a window to dress and somewhere to show off our products. We get so many compliments from customers popping in; they always seem to be pleasantly surprised when they look around. It's a nice feeling to be able to make people smile and raise an eyebrow here or there! I think they are surprised by what can be done with fabric."

It is no surprise that opening a shop has proved a success for Nicky. The exciting and luxurious window just begs you to go in and take a look. Once inside, you can rummage through boxes of fabric cuttings while relaxing with a coffee. Even the floor features seven types of wood, so clients can understand the difference between walnut, ash, smoked oak and others.

While Nicky is busy creating more magical pieces, she still has time to work on a new wallpaper and fabric range which is clearly going to be the next 'must have' for all those with house decorating on the horizon. She is also looking into the next colour palette for shades and cushions. We can't wait to see what she comes out with.

Violet & George, 57 St Helen's Gardens, London W10; violetandgeorge.com



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