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THE INTERIORS FAIRY

Founder of My Interior Stylist, Zoë Brewer is pioneering Europe's latest approach to interior design and sprinkling her magic around west London...

As a child, Zoë Brewer recalls constantly redecorating her sister's dollhouse by painting wallpaper and knitting miniature throws. If that alone wasn't enough to sell her passion for interiors to her west London clients, Zoë has also trained with Channel 5's House Doctor, Ann Maurice, and is a consultant in her exclusive network of house doctors. The blonde and beautiful entrepreneur sits down with Vanessa Grall to talk high street, clutter and thinking pink.

You're an interior stylist. How does that differ from an interior designer?

What we call "interior styling" is a relatively new phrase in the UK, but is widely used in the US and Australia. An interior stylist takes a more flexible approach to interiors, particularly reusing existing possessions where possible, while using a creative eye to reinvent the space. It's about bringing together old and new, without breaking the bank.

What are your first steps when approaching an interior styling project?

There are three big things to consider: goal, timeframe and budget. Clients are always keen to talk about colours, furniture and all the lovely bits, but unfortunately the boring stuff has to come first.

There's just no point in choosing an amazing sofa at £3,000 with a 12-week delivery, only to find out later that the room has to be completed within four weeks with a total budget of £3,000.

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Does this mean high street is the way to go?

Most high street shops copy the expensive designs within weeks, so sourcing these is a major part of interior styling. It's crucial to get the mix right: key pieces such as a sofa or a bed need to be of the best quality you can afford. The room can then be styled reasonably cheaply with accessories. This means, if you want to update the look next season, you haven't wasted large amounts of money.

My Interior Stylist offers a service called "home staging", a growing trend in the UK, which "stages" a house for resale. What affect has this had on asking prices?

The rule of thumb here is to spend one percent to two percent of your home's value, to achieve a



price increase of between 10 percent to 15 percent. I recently staged a house in Kensal Rise, which had been newly renovated but was quite bare. The housing market had just turned and the property was already at the expensive end of the market. But, by spending just £5,000, the asking price was raised by £50,000 and an asking price offer was accepted within four days.

What's the most common problem you face when asked to stage a house for sale?

Clutter – without a doubt. However nicely your property is decorated and however beautiful your furniture, if it's covered in everyday clutter, it won't show its true potential. If you edit these things, it can be really cathartic – sometimes I feel like a psychiatrist rather than a stylist during this process.

Some homeowners are reluctant to hand over the design process to an outside influence.

How do you find a medium between their personal taste and your own styling instincts?

It is a tricky balance between what a client wants, how much they know about interior design and how open they are to new ideas. I find the easiest way of communicating about design in the early stages is with pictures. I'll encourage clients to rip out pictures from magazines. I then make up mood boards – often when you show people something they would never have thought about, they love it.

Do you have a favourite theme or style when it comes to decorating your own home?

I love pink! I tend not to tell my clients that until I know them a bit better, as I think they might envisage my lovely neutral designs for their home with big, Barbie pink, fluffy cushions everywhere. Pink is actually very versatile – I'm constantly finding new ways to use it. I've yet to find a client with the same pink appreciation. That's great though – vive la difference.

Curious to see what magic Zoë could work on *your* home? My Interior Stylist is offering *Matchbox* readers a FREE consultation (worth over £150). Limited availability, by appointment only. (07516 762 768; myinteriorstylist.com)

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