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London's annual Design Festival is worth the hop across the Pond

As proprietors of Design House in Southampton, a full-service interior design firm and shop, we are always following the trends and looking for new inspiration. So what better excuse to pop over to London than the 10th annual Design Festival?

written and photographs by Suzanne Caldwell and Maria Greenlaw



AS PROPRIETORS OF DESIGN HOUSE IN SOUTHAMPTON,

a full-service interior design firm and shop, we are always following the trends and looking for new inspiration. So what better excuse to pop over to London than the 10th annual Design Festival in late September? Especially since we hadn't been to the British capital in years and were dying for a design infusion.

Upon arrival we dropped our bags at the Pelham, a boutique hotel in South Kensington that embraces an updated traditional aesthetic. Bright turquoise bookcases and red cloth-bound books in the cheery dining room, Lucite curtain hardware in the classically English and (almost) stuffy sitting room, and acrylic-framed artwork floating on toile walls in our guest room reminded us just how progressive British design can be.

Armed with cameras, USB cables, and brand-new U.K. adapters, we took the tube to designjunction, an informal exhibit of both innovative and classic designs housed in an old postal sorting office, where we found everything from a furniture-making demonstration by Thonet to an array of woven plastic outdoor rugs by Missoni to a giant replica of King Kong made from recycled tires.



The following day, we ventured out in the pouring rain (some things never change) to the main event, the 35th edition of Decorex, an exhibition held on the grounds of the majestic Royal Hospital in Chelsea, which is still used today as a retreat for hundreds of veteran soldiers. More than 300 international brands were showcased here, with an emphasis on bright color and super stylish design. We stopped to chat for a while with the charming, brilliant Carolina Irving, who has created bespoke lampshades and accessories to complement her line of eclectic fabrics, which is sold at John Rosselli in the States. Meanwhile, the nearby Chelsea Design Centre—London’s equivalent of the D&D Building—was buzzing with activity, with practically every major fabric house introducing colorful new collections. We met up with our good friend Stephen Elrod, VP and creative director of Lee Jofa, who showed us the latest designs from Lee Jofa, Brunschwig & Fils, Mulberry, and GP&J Baker—all trending toward bold, colorful prints. And at Tissus d’Hélène, the ebullient Lisa Fine showed us her boutique line of screen-printed linens, which has expanded to include all the classic blues as well as hot pink and orange color ways, while Dennis Shah of Studio Printworks unveiled adventurous new wallpaper patterns that are designed and printed in New York. Hermès debuted home fashions including bright wool challis and bits of leather (of course!), and Pierre Frey, Jim Thompson, Romo, and Sanderson were all coming up in Technicolor. After all the neutrals we’ve been seeing lately, we just couldn’t get enough of these vibrant, statement-making hues—even when it came to duty-free shopping at Heathrow upon our departure. Who knew Smythson made that many colors?

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