



It's all in a day's work for Caroline Paterson

DESIGNER PROFILE Caroline Paterson

Discussing design with Caroline Paterson is a delight. It's eleven years since she launched Paterson Gornall Interiors, and she is still passionate about her profession. She describes her profile as low key, but in the same breath admits to working around the clock. 'Occasionally there are ghastly days when I think I'll become a window dresser,' she laughs.

After studying History of Art in Florence, Caroline joined Christie's furniture department. Looking around her vibrant, sample-filled Battersea studio, it's hard to imagine she spent seven years 'cataloguing in a Dickensian warehouse'. On balance, she thinks, it was the stuffy atmosphere there that finally quashed her plans to become an auctioneer. At fine art dealers Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, she was increasingly drawn to the wonderful paintings of interiors often exhibited by the company, and a seed was sown. She subsequently landed a job assisting Chester Jones, who was then a director at Colefax and Fowler, which she still considers to be her luckiest break: 'He taught me everything,' she says.

Caroline credits Chester Jones with developing her love of colour and giving her an appreciation of fabulous furniture design. She is modest about her own talents but, when she stopped work to have her eldest child, word got round fast. The first client rang when her baby was a week old. 'She said, "I don't know you but I've heard all about you,"' Caroline recalls, 'and I spent two years working on her house in Oxfordshire.' Since 1988, she has had two successful design partnerships, first with Sarah Gornall and, latterly, with Vicky Fairfax, with whom she undertook the painstaking renovation of a fire-damaged house in West Sussex – no mean feat as every penny needed approval from the loss adjusters.

Now Caroline is going solo and, although clients come to her for her classical decorating approach, contemporary touches are definitely there: fresh on the drawing board is a Thames-side penthouse overlooking the Millennium Dome. Though she is tact incarnate, clients don't get an easy ride: they need to work hard. 'If a client says she loves yellow, I'll ask her whether she means a lemon bias or a red one.' And when clients suggest something that experience has taught her would be a jarring note, she takes a deep breath and 'gently, gently' approach. 'I am there to show them things they wouldn't otherwise see,' she says. 'The real art is to make them feel they've been on a journey.'

JUDITH WILSON

Paterson Gornall Interiors can be contacted on 0207-738 2530