



Making his MARK

French interior designer Jacques Grange is an industry legend, whose latest project saw him completely revamp New York's Mark Hotel. *CAROLINE PHILLIPS* hops stateside to pay a visit and recommends how to get the look back home

Jacques Grange may not be a household name in Britain, but he has been called the world's best living decorator; been hailed one of the century's most influential designers; been awarded Legion d'Honneur (only a country like France would give its highest decoration to a designer); and has been doing up the private houses of A-list clients from Paloma Picasso and Yves Saint Laurent to Princess Caroline of Monaco for four decades. He has also worked for everyone from Isabelle Adjani and Alain Ducasse to Francois Pinault. 'He is, to put it simply,' says Emma Burns, director of rival interior decorating firm Colefax & Fowler, 'a genius.' Phew!

So who is this French demi-God of cushions, carpets and artefacts? After studying at the École Boulle and École Camondo in Paris, Grange worked for Henri Samuel (another interior designer superstar, who worked for the Rothschilds, Vanderbilts and Valentino) and Didier Aaron, the late Parisian antique dealer. Grange then established his own eponymous design firm in 1970.

Grange's style is encapsulated in that term over-used in decorating: eclectic. He is known for putting the antique with the modern: for juxtaposing furniture from Eileen Gray with objects from the

Renaissance; for placing late Medieval chairs next to a Jean-Michel Frank sofa, or a Donald Judd sculpture beside a Louis XVI table. Mixing genres is his trademark. He is also renowned for being bold and audacious and shirking trends; and for his artist's eye for materials, colours and shapes and his architect's sense of proportion. Enough, now!

He doesn't have a specific Grange look. He says he prefers to be 'self-effacing' in order to highlight the client's personality, taste and spirit. 'I also adapt my work to the feel and light of the place I'm decorating,' he says. His influences run from the Oriental to Western, and Rococo to contemporary via dacha-style. Take the variety of his work for the late fashion designer, Yves Saint Laurent: this includes the theatrical and Baroque (Saint Laurent's Parisian apartment) to the minimalist and austere (YSL's private studio apartment) and the Orientalist (YSL's Marrakech villa.) 'It's like a novel,' mulls Grange. 'Each commission is a new creation.'

Grange's latest venture is the super chic Mark Hotel on New York's Upper East Side. It's his first hotel. It's also a one-off, and a look to copy. Grange has retained The Mark's traditional architecture: 'I've kept the classical parts of the hotel – its cornices, coffered ceilings,



windows, doors...,' explains Grange, from his Parisian office. 'But the rest is about creativity, and 20th and 21st century design.' And those eras are as well represented in the hotel as they would be in an important private collection or even a contemporary gallery.

But let us backtrack briefly. Opened originally in 1923, the hotel's décor was formerly stuffy and traditional. Grange then gave it a \$150m makeover and it reopened in August 2009. And now? The 100-room, 50-suite and ten-Tower Suite residence hotel is more like a collector's fabulous private house with a trendy, playful interior, or even a contemporary gallery. 'This look is a first for a New York hotel,' says Grange.

The ground floor rooms feature contemporary furniture from A-list designers, commissioned by Grange's close friend, Pierre Passebon, owner of the Parisian furniture shop Galerie du Passage. Renowned designers, from Paul Mathieu (known for his signature sculptural style) and Patrice Dangel (think bronze craftwork), to Anne and Vincent Corbière (noted for their textured hand-crafted furniture) have created unique, bespoke pieces for The Mark collection. So far, so very good.

Walk into the foyer (above and above right) and you are greeted with a geometric marble floor of huge black and white stripes. ('It gives it an energy, a new dimension, makes it very modern,' comments Grange. 'And the effect of infinity.') Into this theatrical arena, Grange has introduced pieces like a Mattia Bonetti bench on Manhattan-socialite-skinny legs, velvet upholstered seating by Paul Mathieu, splashes of pumpkin and orange damask on sculptural seating, and a swirling 'Ge-Off Sphere' Ron Arad pendant light (of laser-sintered polyamide stainless steel cables, since you ask.)

The bar (right) goes for more visual high kicks. There's a racing stable's worth of low-slung Vladimir Kagan pony-skin chairs (Kagan

has produced tables and chairs for Gary Cooper to Marilyn Monroe); and a must-have (or at least wanna-copy) Guy de Rougemont cloud-shaped bar and matching signature 'Nuage'-style cocktail tables of plexiglas and chrome. On the floor is a Grange-designed, bespoke carpet: think *Lucy In The Sky With (orange and wine) Diamonds*. There's something of the nightclub in the feel of the bar, and it's witty.

Just steps away is The Mark Restaurant by Jean-Georges Vongerichten, with its bronze and amber ambience, geometry of wood mirrors, quirky Mattia Bonetti furniture and Murano glass wall lights, plus a dramatic Eric Schmitt skylight. 'I went for a mix of energies here,' reveals Grange. 'I wanted to create the feeling of an Italian bistro, something that I love.' Overall the look of the ground floor public rooms is bold and energetic.

Upstairs in The Mark's suites and bedrooms the look is more muted. It's more classical, with relaxing colours from the grey-blue spectrum. 'I wanted to create a quiet, soft atmosphere,' explains Grange. The

custom-made fabrics are refined and the Deco-reminiscent furniture – designed by Grange in ebony and bronze – is sophisticated and sober.

With their large white marble Deco-style bathrooms with striped black and white marble floors, nickel fixtures, Quagliotti linens, Crestron touch controls (for blinds, music and heat control) and Boffi kitchens with Sub-Zero fridges, no expense has been spared. The Mark is also comfortable.

In short, this is the hotel as chic home. 'It's very personal,' agrees Grange. 'It could have been designed for a private residential client.' Naturellement. ■

The Mark, 27 East 77th Street at Madison, New York, NY 10075, +1 212 744 4300; themarkhotel.com. Rooms from \$825 and suites from \$1,590. Preferential rates are given for long stays.



HOW TO GET THERE:

Unless you're flying by private jet or First Class, there's no better way to reach New York than in BA001: the new British Airways Club World's only flight from London City to JFK. It stops briefly in Shannon, Ireland, to refuel and clear US immigration then arrives in JFK's domestic airport, thereby skipping Manhattan-length queues. It boasts 32 flat bed seats – and room for 100 seats – a fantastically attentive cabin crew, decent meals and OnAir, the pioneering in-flight communication system.

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GET THE LOOK

DAVID GILL often works alongside Jacques Grange and specialises in 20th and 21st century decorative art in his eponymous Fulham Road gallery and vast Vauxhall showroom



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Richard Prince 'Man's Hand'; Barnaby Barford's 'I'm a Rocket Man'; Oriol Harwood's 'Sirena Chandelier'; Fredrickson Stallard's 'Bergere High' chair and Oriol Harwood's 'Voluta' table, all stocked by David Gill

A human polyhedron, Gill is a curator, patron and promoter of new talent, art consultant, art historian and furniture designer who has been called a 'creative visionary' by the *FT*. In the same article, the *FT* asserted that, 'Gill's style dictates new trends... He's a man who doesn't so much sniff the zeitgeist as make it.'

Gill's own London home includes an eclectic and very Grange-style mix of the traditional and cutting-edge: from **Charlotte Perriand** dining chairs (she worked a lot with Le Corbusier) and 1920s Baroque Venetian stucco chairs to **Paul McCarthy**'s Pinocchio sculpture, **Richard Prince** photographs and a **Garouste & Bonetti** 12-seater oval 'Samson and Delila' dining table with scagliola top. Even Gill's kitchen boasts a **Le Corbusier** table, **Jean Prouvé** chairs and 1950s **Serge Mouille** mobile light juxtaposed with contemporary stainless steel.

Visit Gill's Fulham Road emporium to source period pieces by 1950s designers like Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé alongside contemporary masters. You'll find works by **Mattia Bonetti** – who designed the brand image for Christian Lacroix and now produces extravagant, often kitsch and always confident small-run pieces; **Oriol Harwood**'s must-have fantastical, surreal candle-dripping chandeliers, androgynous heads with flames shooting from their tonsures and other ostentatious creations; and smaller,



ironic works composed of porcelain figurines by artist **Barnaby Barford**.

If you want a treasure warehouse of contemporary design, make an appointment to go to Gill's Vauxhall showroom. There you'll find furniture as fine art by masters such as **Fredrikson Stallard** – their innovative and now much-imitated 2001 table of raw birch logs lashed with a steel strap on metal feet is there, and so too their limited edition Berger chair of stainless steel and rubber with a pink base. Also for sale are the design-boundary-pushing polyurethane shelves by uber architect **Zaha Hadid**; unique pieces like Oriol Harwood's flamboyant fibreglass and gold table; **Mattia Bonetti**'s fibreglass, glass and gold leaf table; and **Garouste & Bonetti**'s white terracotta vase with a black patinated bronze base. ■

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