

# LIFE IN *colour*

TEXTILES DESIGNER **LOLA SWIFT** TELLS **MAIRI MULHERN** WHY BRINGING COLOUR INTO YOUR HOME WILL NOT ONLY MAKE IT LOOK GOOD BUT HELP TO LIFT YOUR MOOD, TOO.

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nown for taking a creative and colourful approach to her interior design work, it's no surprise that Lola Swift's office is filled with intriguing mood boards, colour wheels and all sorts of prints and objects that

tell the onlooker this is an artist's space.

"I have everything I need to be creative in this room. There's a lot going on, but everything is exactly where it needs to be," Lola, an artist and textiles expert, explains. "All I have to do is swivel my chair and reach for what I need. I always say it's like cooking: to be creative you need all of your tools in front of you, so I decorated this workroom with that in mind."

It's impressive the way Lola has managed to make this flurry of colour look intentional. But that's her speciality.

"It's cosy and comfortable and has become my favourite place to spend some 'me' time," she adds.

With the rainbow theme come unique objects, which Lola explains are a mix of vintage charity shop finds, auctioned pieces and family heirlooms.

"I really love going to vintage shops just to walk around. It depends on who I'm buying for, but if you find the right place, independent local shops always have lots of lovely quirky ornaments, furniture and soft furnishings. My favourite shop ever is Designers Guild — I could honestly wander through that shop all day if I didn't have a life to live and a business to run!" she says.

Upcycled heavy oak cabinets and reupholstered side tables hold dozens of family photos, painted ceramics and some paint swatches here and there, too.

"I'm realising that I'm maybe a bit of a hoarder... I don't like throwing things away, because they're memories. Photos of my kids at different ages and handmade gifts from over the years are everywhere. It's quite nice to glance up and get inspired by them or just to smile."



“Colour and wellness go hand-in-hand when it comes to decorating at home.”



Lola's cabinets are old recycled pieces, sanded down and painted in a lovely ocean blue to create a tranquil look. Everywhere you look in the house, there is something to intrigue and catch attention. >>



Sourcing older, more characteristic pieces isn't just about creating an eye-catching look, Lola explains.

"Sustainability massively impacts me personally and I've always championed independent craftsmanship. I've had previous textiles and design companies — mainly working with wool in Scotland — and my focus has always been on using eco-friendly materials and supporting local businesses and producers."

This mindset is what powers her professional work today. "It was a natural progression to put those goals into my work. Everything I put in my clients' homes is naturally sourced based on the quality of material, the impact of the production process and its prior life cycle."

Creativity has always come naturally to Lola. "My mum loves colour and she's always making things, too. I was raised with the ideal of 'why buy something when you can make it yourself?'"

"Art was my favourite subject in school. I loved screen printing, knitting and embroidery because they gave me a basis to experiment with colour and pattern."

Lola admits she wasn't a traditional art student. "I never felt that drawing was my strong point. I defaulted to using texture and three dimensionality to make up for the drawing skills I lacked." Of her time studying at The Chelsea College of Art in London, she says, "I always thought I wasn't good enough when I was there because I couldn't do fine art, but it was that 'lacking' that



helped me find out I was actually really good at the textiles stuff."

Lola finished art school and built a business from the ground up. "Designers Guild bought my collection for my network brand at my degree show, so I fell into my own business from there. Just simple commissions to start with, making whatever orders came in by hand."

Eventually Lola started selling to companies including Selfridges. Having branched out on her own, she is now the proud owner of Lola Swift Design, a boutique design business that helps people turn their houses into their sanctuaries, bursting with colour.

"A lot of my clients buy a house, decorate it and then realise that they actually feel a little unfulfilled in it. The way we feel is hugely influenced by the atmosphere we're in, so what I do is take what a client loves about their home, explore their character a little and then create mood boards with them."

"After some brainstorming,



Lola (below right) considers lighting at every stage of the design process, because well balanced natural light complements colour.



I'll add colour to everything and then fill their home with beautiful things that are not only bright and uplifting, but reflect their personalities too."

As well as providing a top class design and decorating service, Lola now offers workshops and teaching courses, which focus on educating others in the art of using colour to create a happy home and in turn, hopefully a happier life.

"Colour and wellness come hand-in-hand when it comes to the home," she says. "I always begin by asking people about their interests or looking at what colours they like to wear."

For example, if a person who wears a lot of



green and loves cycling asks for Lola's help, she will find subtle ways to include both of these things in their home. "As soon as people start researching, they quite quickly recognise what they like and, most importantly, what they don't like," she says.

Lola mostly focuses on muted rainbow palettes, using darker wood and statement patterns to bring out the hidden boldness in pastels and pale tones. "Often, when people think of a colourful space, they think about the maximalist trends: walls of red and emerald or oddly shaped sofas with bright blue fluffy rugs. Colour doesn't have to be that way at all!"

In her own house, much like the workroom, Lola bases her designs around style and memories, so practicality and beauty come in equal measure. Though it's gorgeous now, Lola's six-bedroom 1950s home was a fixer-upper when they moved in around ten years ago.

"We actually used to live right across the road from where we are now. This house was always hidden behind lots of trees, so we never paid it much attention.

Then we got to the stage where we needed more space and started looking for somewhere new," Lola says. "I spotted this place and had a look on Rightmove out of curiosity to see if it was for sale — and it was. I got so excited that we just walked across the road and made an offer there and then," she laughs.

When it came time to view the house, Lola and her husband realised why it had been shrouded in those trees... "I don't think it had been touched properly for at least 20 years. We had to pull everything out; electricity, plumbing, every wall, every floor — everything."

That was what the first two years of life in their new home looked like, but once all of that was done, the fun part could then begin.

"We've collected furniture over the years. We actually used to have an amazing second-hand furniture shop nearby. I would regularly pop down and get little side tables and artefacts," she remembers.

A decade has passed and Lola admits that she's never really stopped making changes and trying new ideas. "I'll often make random changes and shift all of the furniture around. Otherwise, it gets boring looking at the same thing year after year! But now I have what I call the '10-year itch' where I want to re-do everything completely.

"I help so many people these days, maybe I need to start getting creative in my own home again!" ■



Lola's office and workspace has mood boards, gorgeous prints and is a truly creative environment for her to work in. "The way we feel is hugely influenced by the atmosphere we're in," she says.

