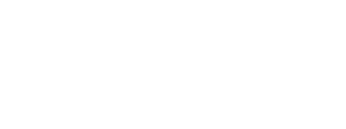


# Thomson Carpenter: How to Create Classical Cool

Thomson Carpenter's childhood shuttling between Muscat in the Middle East and the Sussex countryside plus stints in Germany, Dubai and Australia, has informed his elegant style, perfect for clients who love the classic feel with an international twist. Here he talks about how to create a timeless 'Jackie Kennedy' interior while keeping your own style.

## INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Thomson Carpenter



Your style is very interesting – there is a sense of classic English style but your childhood was spent in the Middle East...

I very much say to my clients that is not about my taste, that it's my role to bring out their taste, but that at the same time I probably am bringing in a flavour of my own nomadic life childhood.

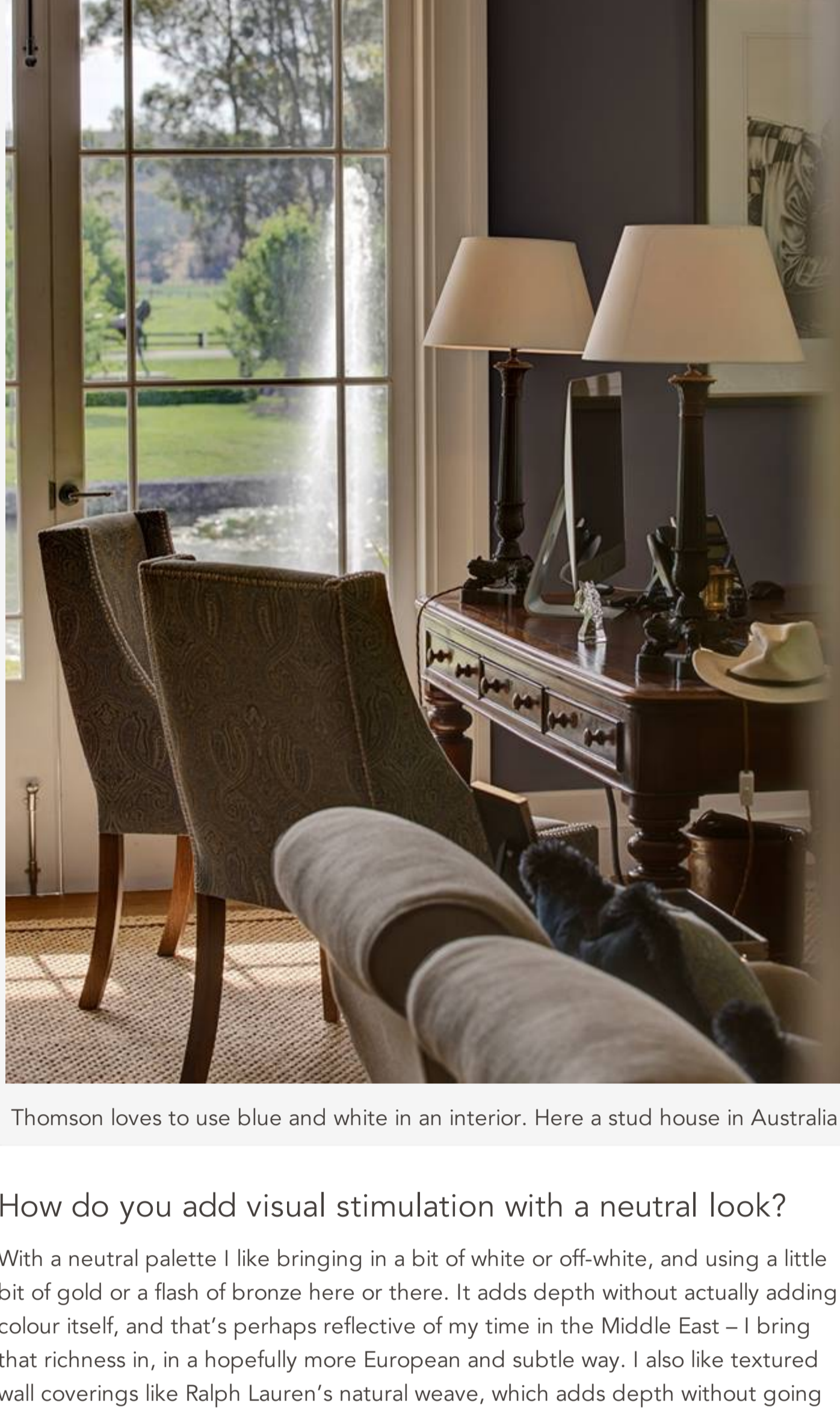
I was brought up in Muscat, my father was an architect out there for 30 years, so I suppose that influenced me when it came to Middle Eastern design and heritage. But I was schooled in England and spent time at our crumbling Georgian house in Sussex, so I also grew up with that aesthetic around me. I've always loved Georgian/early Victorian architecture, but while my projects might be traditional they are not stuffy or a pastiche – they have an extra something which I think comes from my time with [Thomas Hamel](#) in Sydney. I feel my interiors reflect a travelled, nomadic existence.



London Mews House © Adam Johnson

Your look is quite pared down – do you avoid colour?

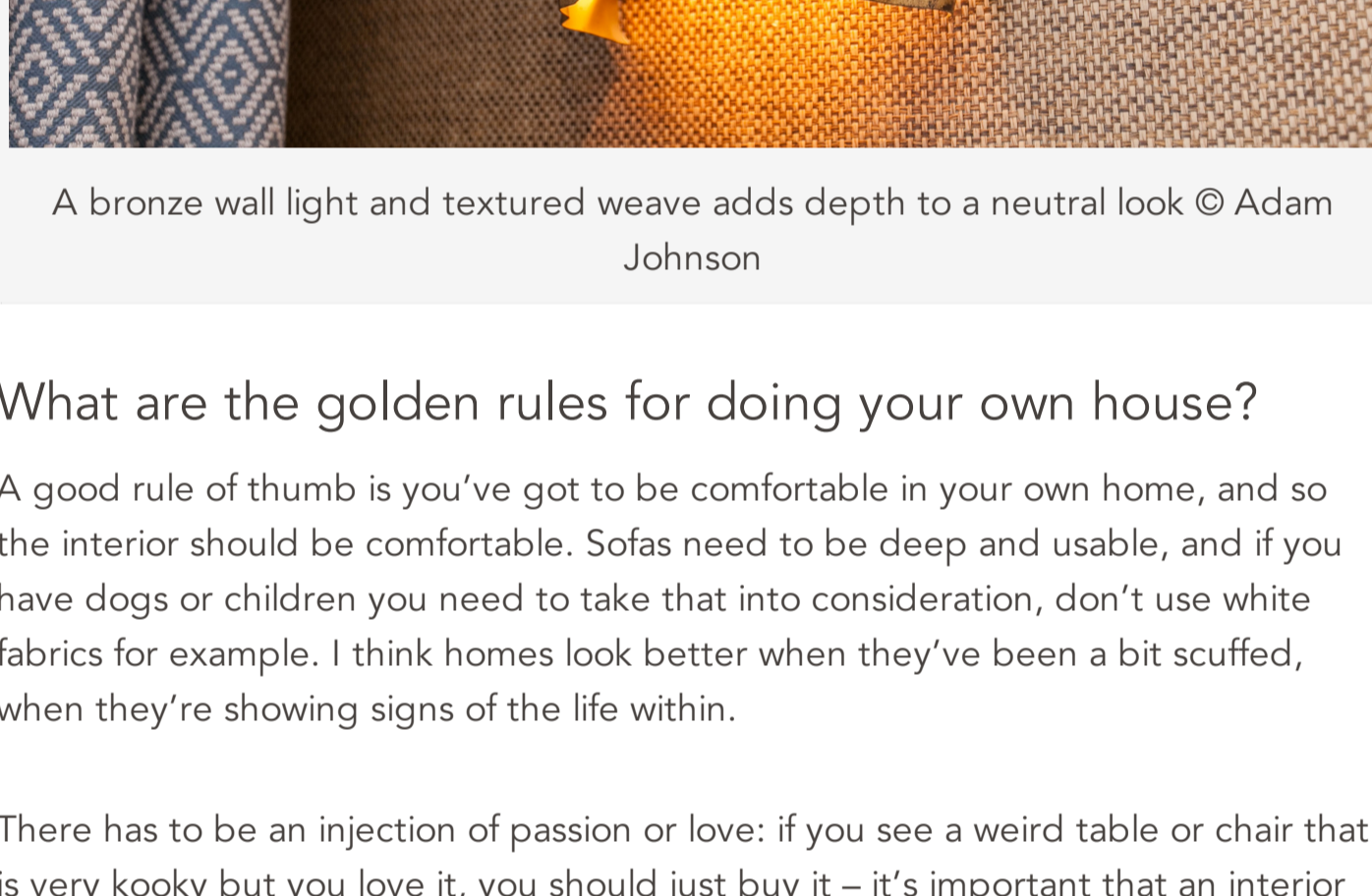
Not necessarily! I like colour very much in the right context – I love blue-and-white interiors. But again this is down to the client. For example I'm doing a very modern, apartment in Kensington for a young couple who don't live there very much. They want a very contemporary look but in a classical way so neutral makes sense. At the same time we are doing a federation Victorian house in Sydney which is a family home, and they want a very traditional English feel but not too stuffy or modern. I did a house in Belgravia which has a lot of neutral tones, it's a pied-a-terre for an older couple and their brief to me was the Bristol hotel in Paris, so very neutral. But I even snuck in a bit of blue there!



Thomson loves to use blue and white in an interior. Here a stud house in Australia

How do you add visual stimulation with a neutral look?

With a neutral palette I like bringing in a bit of white or off-white, and using a little bit of gold or a flash of bronze here or there. It adds depth without actually adding colour itself, and that's perhaps reflective of my time in the Middle East – I bring that richness in, in a hopefully more European and subtle way. I also like textured wall coverings like Ralph Lauren's natural weave, which adds depth without going fully patterned.

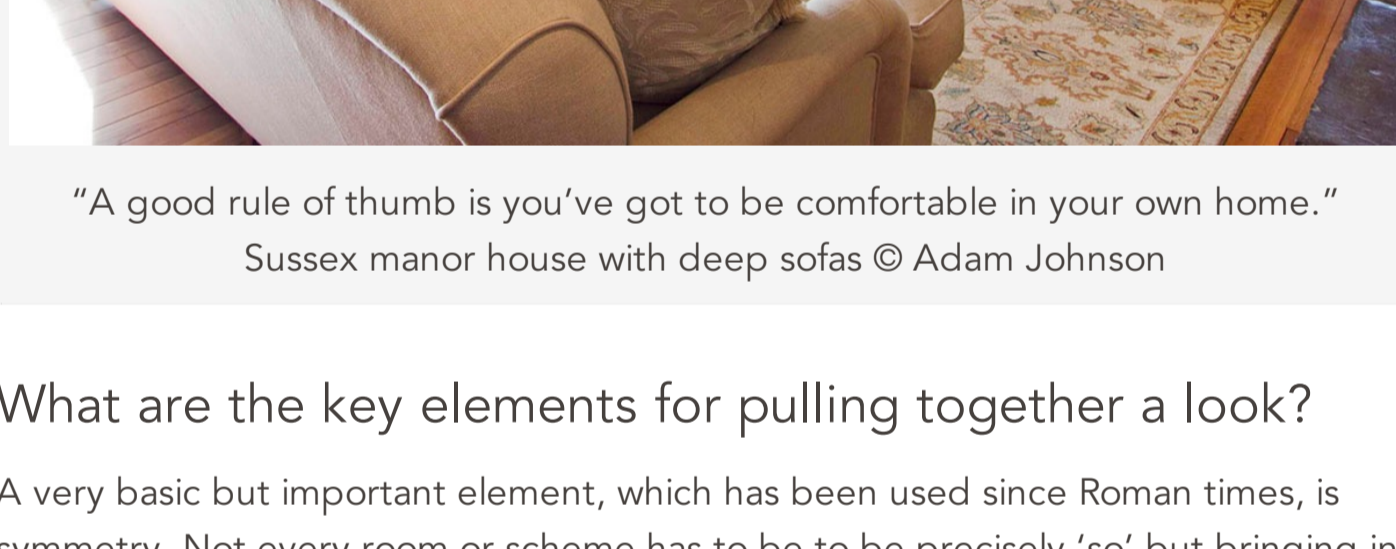


A bronze wall light and textured weave adds depth to a neutral look © Adam Johnson

What are the golden rules for doing your own house?

A good rule of thumb is you've got to be comfortable in your own home, and so the interior should be comfortable. Sofas need to be deep and usable, and if you have dogs or children you need to take that into consideration, don't use white fabrics for example. I think homes look better when they've been a bit scuffed, when they're showing signs of the life within.

There has to be an injection of passion or love: if you see a weird table or chair that is very kooky but you love it, you should just buy it – it's important that an interior has life and a story. I've just completed a house in St Tropez where the clients bought an five foot high ceramic yellow pineapple in Mexico. I did a simple, elegant scheme and now there's this giant pineapple sitting in the corner of the sitting room! But they love it, it's a reminder of a wonderful holiday and it adds a story to the interior. If a place has idiosyncrasies it makes it more livable and makes the owner happier.



"A good rule of thumb is you've got to be comfortable in your own home."

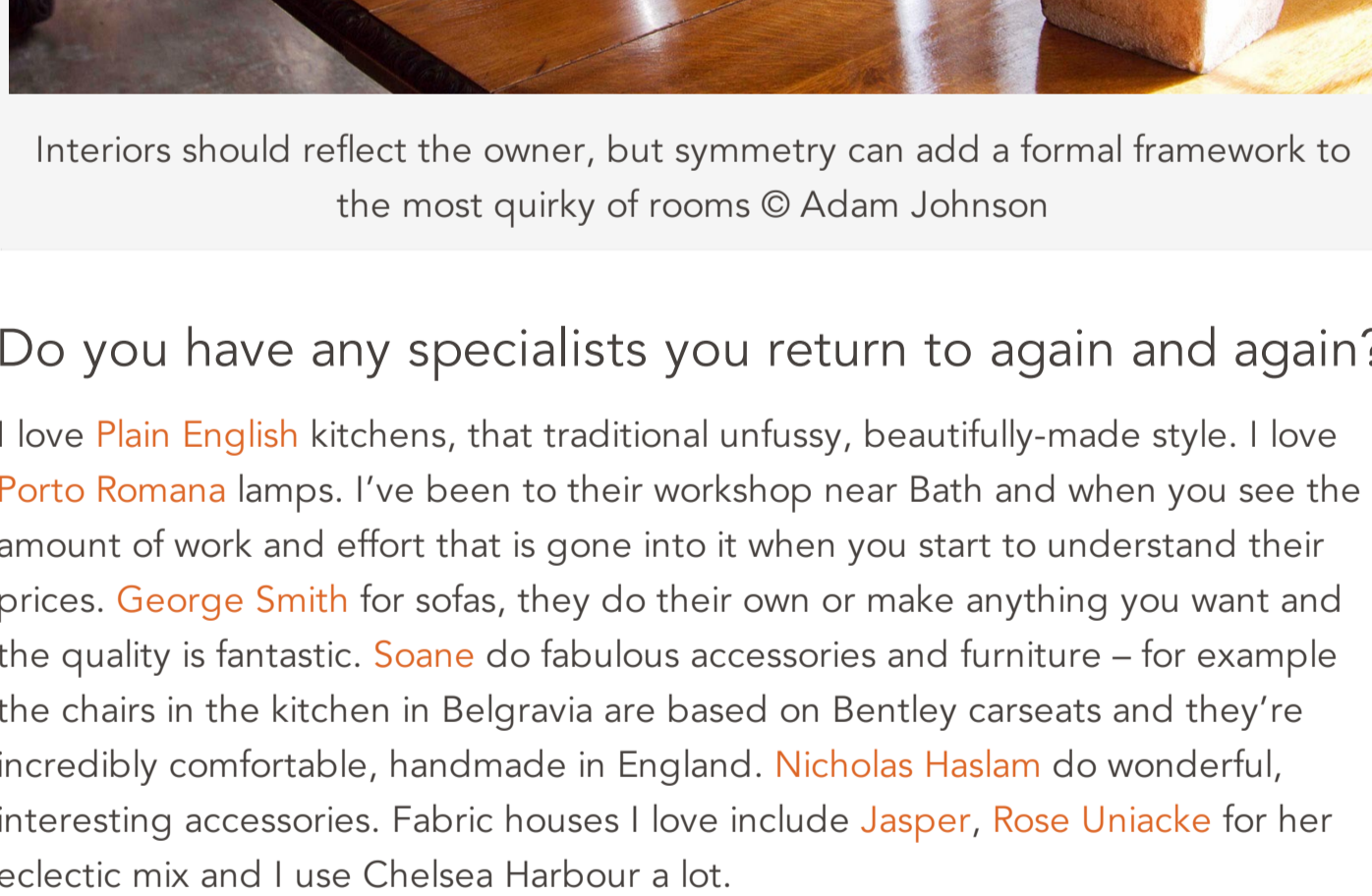
Sussex manor house with deep sofas © Adam Johnson

What are the key elements for pulling together a look?

A very basic but important element, which has been used since Roman times, is symmetry. Not every room or scheme has to be to be precisely 'so' but bringing in little bits of it, for example a pair of lamps, chairs or paintings, adds a touch of formality which means everything else can be a little more haphazard. It's very subtle but it adds a framework to any house.

Then start with something you love, for example a fabric or a table and go from there. Don't bring in too many contrasting colours or patterns, if it's too confusing it might be a bit jarring which makes it less liveable. So bring your must-have fabric, but then do the walls in quite a neutral colour. If you're dying to have a red-walled room, perhaps save it for a downstairs loo.

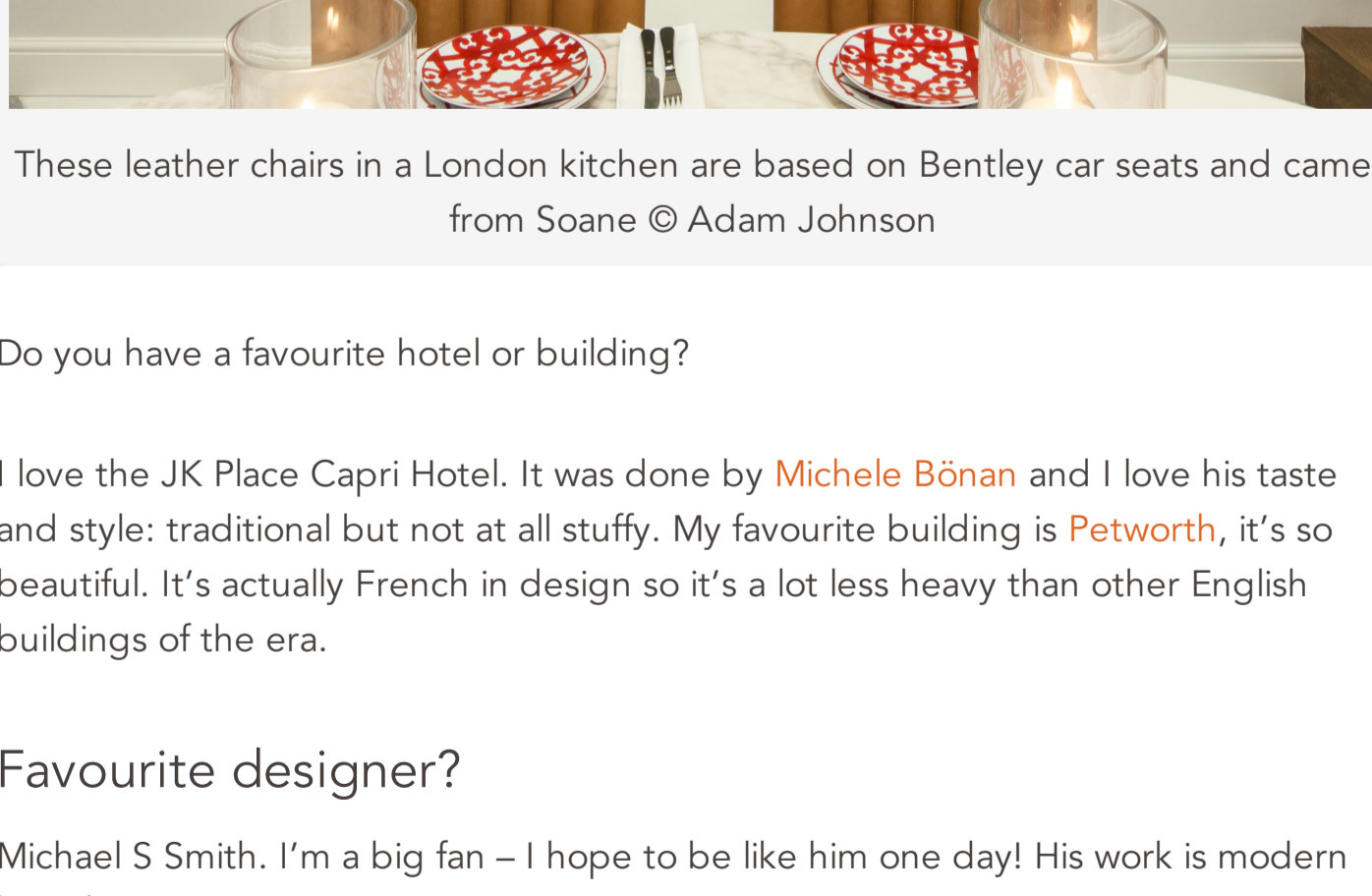
Interiors shouldn't date too quickly. They should be like Jackie Kennedy: if she was walking down Kensington high Street today, she would still look like she fitted in. Interiors shouldn't look 'of a period' – their aesthetic should be timeless.



Interiors should reflect the owner, but symmetry can add a formal framework to the most quirky of rooms © Adam Johnson

Do you have any specialists you return to again and again?

I love [Plain English](#) kitchens, that traditional unfussy, beautifully-made style. I love [Porto Romana](#) lamps. I've been to their workshop near Bath and when you see the amount of work and effort that is gone into it when you start to understand their prices. [George Smith](#) for sofas, they do their own or make anything you want and the quality is fantastic. [Soane](#) do fabulous accessories and furniture – for example the chairs in the kitchen in Belgravia are based on Bentley carseats and they're incredibly comfortable, handmade in England. [Nicholas Haslam](#) do wonderful, interesting accessories. Fabric houses I love include [Jasper](#), [Rose Unickie](#) for her eclectic mix and I use Chelsea Harbour a lot.



These leather chairs in a London kitchen are based on Bentley car seats and came from Soane © Adam Johnson

Do you have a favourite hotel or building?

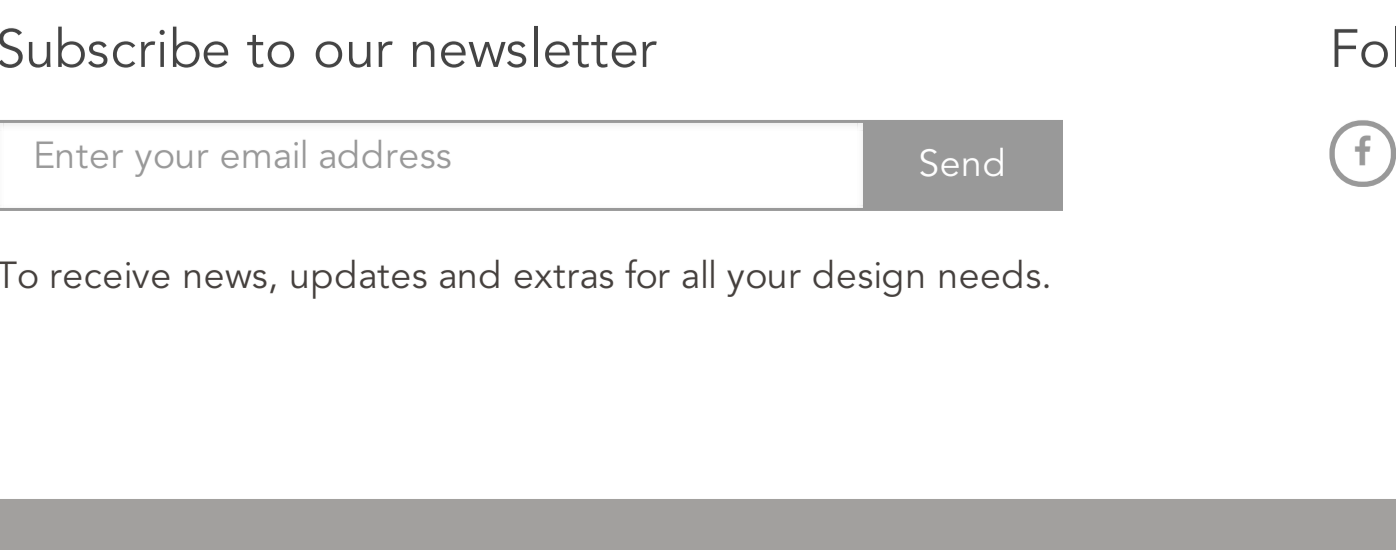
I love the JK Place Capri Hotel. It was done by [Michele Bönan](#) and I love his taste and style: traditional but not at all stuffy. My favourite building is [Petworth](#), it's so beautiful. It's actually French in design so it's a lot less heavy than other English buildings of the era.

Favourite designer?

Michael S Smith. I'm a big fan – I hope to be like him one day! His work is modern but elegant.

What does luxury mean to you?

Understated elegance. In the Gulf States I see a lot of ostentation and for me that's not really luxury. It should be about craftsmanship. Beautiful handmade things are often expensive but that reflects the time and quality. I try to use English craftsmen wherever possible.



Thomson tries to use craftsmanship where he can – here a Plain English Kitchen

What's your next move?

I'll continue to do residential interiors but one day I'd love to do a small hotel, one which is like an amazing home. I just like to make people comfortable!

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