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MARTYN LAWRENCE BULLARD

FOUNDER, MARTYN LAWRENCE BULLARD DESIGN

Known for his personable approach and love for challenging design briefs, Martyn Lawrence Bullard is a pioneer for ethnic exotica largely inspired by his frequent world travels. Master of exuberance and style, he reveals to Sophie Harper how he gained such notoriety in the world of design.

Martyn Lawrence Bullard, a household name in the 'States and renowned for his award-winning designs, was born and bred in the UK. Having gained much acclaim for his design work on the homes of the rich and famous, but also for his unique take and glamorous flair within hotel design, I wanted to catch up with the esteemed designer, a celebrity in his own right, to find out more about his background and climb to success.

"I started my career, without really knowing it, at the age of 12 when I convinced my father to rent me a stall in Greenwich Market selling bric-a-brac that I would buy with my pocket money," he tells me. "This hobby would in fact become my education of antiques and design, decorative arts and, most importantly, educated me on places of origin, styles and periods." Martyn did this until he was 17, at which point he joined the Lee Strasberg Acting Academy in London. For a few years he was an actor, eventually upping sticks and setting his sights on the Californian dream. "After a while in LA and few small parts, the producer from a movie I was in came for dinner at my little house that I rented and loved it, asking me to decorate their offices. I did it for fun thinking it would turn into another movie part," he says. But instead it led to more design jobs with a number of celebrities lining up to hire Martyn to design their properties. "Within nine months, I had six magazine covers worldwide and the rest is now history!"

From A-lister homes, Martyn had a solid client base and his name was fast becoming known in the world of design. So much so in fact, that it wasn't long before he found himself working on hotel projects, as well as creating his own product ranges and hosting his own TV shows. "I really enjoy hotel work," he tells me, "it's a great way to express your design in a more dramatic way and it gets seen by hundreds of people regularly – unlike a residential project, which only really gets seen by family and close friends." He adds; "Hotels and restaurants are always fun to design. Often with a theme, you get to create spaces that you personally want to spend time in and get to see others enjoying themselves there also. It's a great reward for a designer."

The level of design within a hotel strikes a chord with Martyn. When I ask him what is important to consider, he tells me: "Hotels must not only have an element of fantasy, but they must also be welcoming and always totally comfortable. Modern luxury is comfort, in both a home and a hotel, so luxury is key to the hotel experience. I believe hotels are designed to make memories, it's the key to their success. A good memory makes for the perfect business card... it's the ultimate recommendation and just keeps the clients coming back for more." Having just won 'Most Instagrammed Hotel Interior 2019' for the Sands Hotel in Indian Wells proves his point, "Drama and fantasy are the key to a good hotel, bringing strong design vibes and notoriety."

Having worked his magic on a vast number of different types of building, I wonder if Martyn has a tried and tested





Hotel Californian, Santa Barbara



Chateau Gutsch, Lucerne, Switzerland



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system when approaching new projects or if he looks to interior trends for inspiration. "I never follow trends, trends are to be made, not followed. I believe we should design for our clients' needs and not for a trendy look. I love to create spaces that reflect the client's personality, making the home their own and not some designer fantasy. There is nothing more interesting than a home that becomes a window into the soul of its owner. That's my goal to make each space individual, as individual as each client is. That's a true design triumph." He adds, "I always love to start with a blank canvas that allows for a full vision to be executed."

Having seen Martyn's work for clients from Ozzy Osbourne to Tommy Hilfiger, I can't help but wonder what interesting stories he must have lodged in his memory and I ask him to tell me about his most memorable projects. "I think my work for Cher has to be the most memorable," he says. "She asked me to create a home 'fit for the first wife of a maharaja', which was quite a fantastical task. Many decorative tricks were employed, and the world became my shopping mall to find exotic treasures to fill the rooms with." He adds, "One of the craziest things I was ever asked to create was a floor-to-ceiling gold leafed 12-car garage – a task I found crazily extravagant – and of course the hidden sex room that was designed to look like a quilted, black patent leather Chanel handbag!"

Martyn talks openly about his love for travel and the inspiration he finds from new environments. He tells me how places, people, food, and scent all have an impact on his own creativity and that he'll often keep mental notes as a decorative resource to use in future projects. "No two days are alike for me. I travel extensively for my projects, so each day brings new challenges and experiences. I love that I get to be creative every day, that as a designer I get to create beauty and execute rooms, homes, and buildings that make people happy and as such, make their worlds better to live in. I feel blessed every day that I have this career and enjoy my work so very much."

Having been central to the design industry for more than 20 years, I'm interested to hear what Martyn thinks about the changes over the last decade. He talks instantly about the effects of technology, "Design has changed significantly due to technology and all that brings with it. From computer generated programmes that form rooms at the touch of a button to furniture that can literally be printed out!" He talks about the way in which we use tech within interiors from lighting to decorative purposes. "Digital printing is bringing about new ways of designing, from fabrics and wallpapers to all home graphics." He anticipates great things for the future of design, talking about the speed in which things are evolving. "The next decade of design will be unlike anything we have ever seen before and is moving

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faster than anything else we have seen in decorative history until now."

A true mark for many of having 'made it' in the design business is being asked to design a product range, and Martyn certainly has his fair share of the market in that sense. Having collaborated with a number of famous brands, I ask more about the Martyn Lawrence Bullard brand. "I have been extremely lucky to be able to expand my brand with all my lines," he says. "I have eponymous lines of fabric, wallpaper, furniture, and jewellery all distributed from my workshops around the world, which I control the design of entirely. I also have 14 licensed lines that include wallpaper for Cole & Son, award-winning tiles for Ann Sacks, and furniture and wall coverings for America's oldest privately-owned fabric house, Schumacher. I have silver objects for Christofle, porcelain dinner services for Haviland Limoges, crystal and chandeliers for Daum, organic mattresses for Custom Comfort, furniture and decorative items for Frontgate, bathroom fixtures for Cristal et Bronze and my latest line for Hudson Valley / Corbett Lighting, which is very exciting as I have designed a varied format of lighting that encompasses many materials and looks." The latter of which has already been highly successful and set to expand further for winter 2019 and spring 2020.

So what does next year look like for the designer? Perhaps he'll sit back and take it easy for a while... unlikely. In fact, 2020 is shaping up to be yet another busy one for Martyn and his team. "2020 will be a very busy year, with two new hotels, the Four Seasons Residences (65 units and penthouses) in Beverly Hills, California, and private estates in Maui, Hawaii, Palm Beach, Florida, Rancho Santa Fe, California, County Laois, Ireland and Greenwich, Connecticut. I have celebrity homes in Bel Air, Beverly Hills, Malibu and Oklahoma all to complete in 2020 plus three new product launches and two TV shows to film. It will be a record year in many ways."



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