

SOME LIKE IT HOT

It's all about style and impact when designer Charles de Lisle steps in the room. MARIN PRESKE takes in some of his kaleidoscopic works.

photography by Cesar Rubio and David Duncan Livingston



In true de Lisle spirit, he gleefully notes the twist: “The rooms are all a different color—hot pink and army green—really different from the entryway.”

Undeniably, the most prominent attribute of de Lisle’s technique is his capacity for risk-taking. Big, vibrant prints and saturated colors lend a fashion-like element to his work. When he gushes over the shade he recently painted a kitchen in Palo Alto, he could just as well be referring to a Versace creation: “It’s this

school-bus yellow—the most toxic yellow that you can imagine. It’s just so absurd and great.” Likewise, when he opts for a more muted palette, de Lisle takes to aggressively layering and customizing fabrics, such as the haute table draping he crafted for last year’s Decorator Showcase. “I had seen this silk bodice at Stella McCartney that was top-stitched over and over again. It was shredded like it had been overly laundered, and that’s where the idea started,” he says. “The whole skirt under the [top layer] is ripped crinoline, and all these threads are hanging out of this ruffled silver satin. It was this dragged-through-the-mud underpinning with a structured top. I get excited about seeing ways of producing things out of materials you understand, and interiors people don’t do that often.”

It’s a far cry from the archetypal California style spearheaded by West Coast designer Michael Taylor, dictated by white and beige tones that make for an unfussy purity. “I grew up in New England, and although it’s traditional, things had a tendency to be bold. Prints were big, and there was a lot of color,” says de Lisle, who nonetheless cites Taylor as an important source of inspiration. During his Gatti tenure, de Lisle recalls his reaction to a client’s Taylor-designed home: “It felt different than any other space I had been in because of the texture and subtlety. It had this

amazing depth. So I’m taking all the sensibilities I had from the East Coast and tweaking them in a California way.”

In a city where polyester, silver satin and toxic yellow don’t exactly top the list, de Lisle finds himself urging clients to think outside the box. “People in San Francisco are pretty conservative, and that’s hard, because I don’t think what I’m doing is that out there,” he says. “There is this narrow perspective on what is tasteful, and there’s this Mediterranean look that is hard to get over.” If terracotta tiles and sun-washed stucco are not indicative of de Lisle’s aesthetic, last year’s Decorator showroom demonstrates it entirely: “It all made sense and was the most tuned

PALETTE TEASERS

(this page) A soft blue wall gives a burst of life to a client’s dining room. Brno chairs by Mies van der Rohe and a custom hickory table emphasize a clean modernity. “The idea was for it to be a huge picnic table, but a little more refined,” says de Lisle. A dainty chandelier by James Misner and trio of antique paintings are colorful accent pieces. *(opposite)* For the same house, de Lisle outfitted a tropical-themed sitting area with vivid, playful prints, Indonesian tables and a dramatic wall covered in glossy brown lacquer.

into who I am as a designer so far.” Neutral colors combined with the intrepid use of fabric and prints resulted in a modern space with hints of traditional elegance. From the silk-screened wall panels that echoed the floral couch patterns to the nautical rope “sculpture” in a box, the room was a funky spin on a Nantucket seaside retreat.

Despite his propensity for the avant-garde, de Lisle’s spaces don’t resonate with shock value. His anomalous details are subtle; although he once wove a client’s drapes with Saran Wrap and reupholstered a headboard with disbanded antique Persian bags, the distinctive touches work remarkably well. “I have a friend who is a clothing designer, and I shared an office with him for two or three years. He was constantly collecting piles of crap, like parachute tarps and boxes of feathers, so we had this playroom. It kind of jaded me to think anything can be anything.” It’s a sentiment you might expect from an artist or couturier—which is exactly what sets de Lisle apart. x



“I ALWAYS THOUGHT I WOULD BE EITHER AN ARCHITECT OR AN ARTIST—AND SOMEHOW I ENDED UP BETWEEN THE TWO.”