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how to spend it

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ITALIAN STYLE SPECIAL

MAKE IT SNAPPY
IT'S A QUESTION
OF ATTITUDE





Left: a reception room with decorative ceiling in a Chiswick property, designed by Found Associates. Below: a Surrey swimming-pool with ceiling design by Staffan Tollgard

Jamie Theakston, who is something of a serial renovator. His home in Chiswick (pictured left) was recently transformed with Found's help. "The devil is in the detail," says Theakston. "The original features are a vital part of the character of the house – whenever I start a project, I start from there." In the case of the Chiswick property, where one reception room with highly ornate original plaster mouldings was knocked into another, the temptation might have been to do away with them. But Found's practice replicated and extended the decoration in painstaking fashion. This contrasts brilliantly with a super-modern glass extension on the back, which features a glazed divide between the old brick and new pane, so that it almost appears to "float".

"I think you have to do these things authentically or not at all," says Found. "Our thoughts were, the more this looked like a period property, the better – to properly contrast with the contemporary extension." While historical accuracy in corning suits certain homes, Jake Solomon takes a wholly different approach. He set up Solomon & Wu in 2010 on discovering that there was a lack of contemporary cornice choices following a trip to the Louvre, where he marvelled at the frescoes and architectural detailing. The former professional basketball coach's modern plaster-mouldings portfolio now includes designs such as Cubist (£70 per linear metre), a 3D linear pattern; Wave (£75 per metre), inspired by Japanese woodcuts and rococo decoration – and which features in a recent New York apartment renovation; Linear Structure (£63 per metre), an inter-crossing of decorative lines; and the very pretty, almost lace-like Caumont (£70 per metre), based on rippling water. The collections include not just corning but coving, corbels, ceiling roses and skirtings, too (from £50 per metre for corning). In the UK most

National Trust properties – in collaboration with industry-favourite Stevensons of Norwich (from £29 for a 3m length). The idea, says Pentreath, was to produce a number of designs that would sit well within contemporary homes, rather like a "Farrow & Ball" of corning. To work, the creations were all taken from "the right historical examples, which meant not the grandest houses and rooms, but secondary and tertiary rooms – bedrooms, attics, corridors, small libraries and dressing rooms – and picking houses that are domestic in scale, not the massive country estates".

Pentreath suggests that the return to ceiling detailing is down to a number of factors. "I like my friend Alan Powers's theory, that when post-first-world-war fashions revealed women's ankles for the first time, the whole of interior design was suddenly about looking down – brightly coloured art-deco rugs, low-slung furniture – and plaster decoration was the first thing to be struck off.

"But I think people like detail and adornment. We respond to it innately," he continues. "Also, we've got to spend our money on something... so surface decoration seems like a good place to start. Rory Sutherland, the vice chairman of Ogilvy & Mather UK, tells an interesting tale about the negative economic effects of Shaker style on New England, America, in the 18th century. It is so plain and elegant that, as Shaker farmers amassed wealth, they had nothing to spend it on in their domestic settings; there was no lavish furniture, no expensive decoration. There is also tremendous interest in reviving historic detail in the home. Where so many cornices, staircases and fireplaces were covered up or boxed in during the 1960s and 1970s, people are keen to put the architecture back, even if they want the design, furniture and paintings to be contemporary. We enjoy the contrasts."

Take award-winning designer Richard Found, of Found Associates, and his client, the radio and TV presenter

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