



Ultimate interiors

With the right designers on board, remodelling a home can add serious value to your property, transforming it into a luxurious retreat, and even educating you about art. **Jessica Holland** looks at the top professionals who regularly turn homes into oases of tranquility

An excellent interior designer is about much more than picking out paint swatches and sourcing lamps. The elite players in their field tend to combine the roles of educator, psychologist, curator and set designer, figuring out what makes clients feel happy and introducing them to aesthetic

concepts they didn't even know that they loved. They are also financially savvy: well-executed design that's stylish rather than trendy can pay for itself once it's time to sell up. It's an investment worth making, with prices for hiring a top designer to overhaul a property often costing in the region of millions of dollars.

The Beverly Hills-based designer Joan Behnke (joanbehnke.com) knows this better than most. In an

interview with *Forbes*, she discusses the way she will wander around museums and artisans' studios with clients to inspire them to imagine their fantasy home. With the help of an international network that helps her source one-of-a-kind pieces – furniture made by craftspeople in Myanmar or picked up in Parisian flea markets – she creates interiors that are rich with history.

For award-winning interior design, Steve Leung (www.steveleung.com) has it all. Winner of the Andrew Martin International awards – considered the 'Oscars' of the design industry – an impressive nine times, Leung is a prominent figure in the Asian design scene



and is recognised internationally for his contemporary, minimalist style that skilfully incorporates Asian culture and the arts. With projects and clients spanning across the globe, he has designed exclusive residential developments such as the Lake Genève luxury villa project in Suzhou – the only detached lakeside villa complex in the area – and the prestigious 39 Conduit Road development, where a five-bedroom duplex apartment on the 68th floor broke the world record, selling ▶



Clockwise from left: Interior designer Joan Behnke; a sleek Beverly Hills residence; traditional Sardinian materials were used to create unique interiors for a villa in Sardinia, Italy

Portfolio

INTERIOR DESIGN

for an impressive US\$57m/€46m.

If there's a theme that runs through the work of South African designer Geoffrey Bradfield (www.geoffreybradfield.com/) – who has designed the interiors of properties for Gertrude Vanderbilt, Oliver Stone and the late King Hussein of Jordan – it's serenity. His own nineteenth-century New York townhouse is awash with pristine white, from the lacquered chairs to the Greek-style columns to the fittings wrought from white metals. He's also fearless when it comes to big, bold flourishes, which might take their inspiration from the Far East, Belle Époque Paris or classical antiquity. With offices in the Emirates and Qatar, as well as New York, he has helped remodel the interiors of palatial residences, super yachts and private jets.

Dubbed "L.A.'s reigning emperor of décor" by The Hollywood Reporter, Michael S. Smith (www.michaelsmithinc.com), has been making waves in the interior design world where he has remodelled homes for stars such as Harrison Ford and George Clooney, and that's not all. Since receiving his first big commission from Bruce Springsteen when he was still in his twenties, he's gone on to design the Long Island house that Rupert Murdoch later sold for US\$9m/€7.3m, and he was entrusted with one of America's



most high-profile design jobs: updating the Oval Office and private quarters for President Obama and his wife Michelle. While Smith knows how to create an imposing sense of grandeur, his designs are always suffused with personality. For the White House, he placed up-to-the-minute furniture alongside pieces with personal significance: ceramics from the National Museum of the American Indian, a rug woven with quotations from great American leaders, and models of patent submissions, which Smith has described as "small examples of American ingenuity".

Above and below: A former nineteenth-century church transformed into a luxurious home Below: London-based partnership Howes & Rigby offer a complete set of services

Sometimes it's hard to know where interior design ends and architecture begins. For individuals who want to completely overhaul a property but aren't sure where to begin, the London-based partnership Howes and Rigby (www.howesandrigby.com) offer a complete set of services. This begins with help searching and acquiring property; includes architecture and

planning paperwork; and extends to interior design, personal shopping and the training of household staff. A former nineteenth-century church redesigned by the firm recently sold for US\$78m/€63m, where the additions included a cinema, a circular glass elevator that reportedly cost US\$470,000/€381,887 and a "subterranean extension" made up of a high-tech gym, sauna, steam, shower rooms, a treatment room and a juice bar. Everything down to the bed linen and the art collection was taken care of, which meant that the only task the clients needed to take on was coming up with their vision of the perfect luxury home. ■

