

CHRISTIE'S
INTERIORS

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Objects, art & ideas





Gold standard

For the interiors of her new London studio, Natalia Miyar took her cue from Gustav Klimt.

By E Jane Dickson

‘Wonder when luxury fell out of fashion?’ asks Natalia Miyar. The Cuban-American interior designer speaks English at Spanish-speed; ideas are sent spinning high in the air – rolled, as it were, from hand to hand, until they’re smooth and serviceable.

‘I think that today, people sometimes look at wanting to be surrounded by beautiful objects and beautiful materials as a little bit negative,’ she goes on. ‘Glamour is seen as a little bit vulgar.’

True glamour, in Miyar’s opinion, is never vulgar; vulgarity tries too hard, and glamour is effortless. Effortless glamour, however, requires a lifetime of thinking. The quality Miyar most prizes – a certain nonchalant elegance – requires a third language to pin it down. ‘*Sprezzatura*,’ she pronounces with a conjuror’s aplomb. ‘That is what I want my interiors to have.’

Miyar’s pleasure in finding the right word, the right sofa, the right shaved-concrete wall finish, is infectious. Her studio, in a South Kensington mews, is like a nest for the world’s most discerning magpie. Rose-gold coffee spoons, nacreous seashells, pussy-willow buds – all are part of a subtly curated vision inspired by Gustav Klimt’s early ‘golden period’.

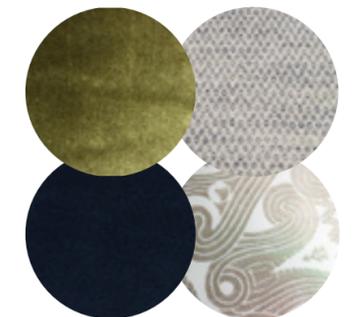
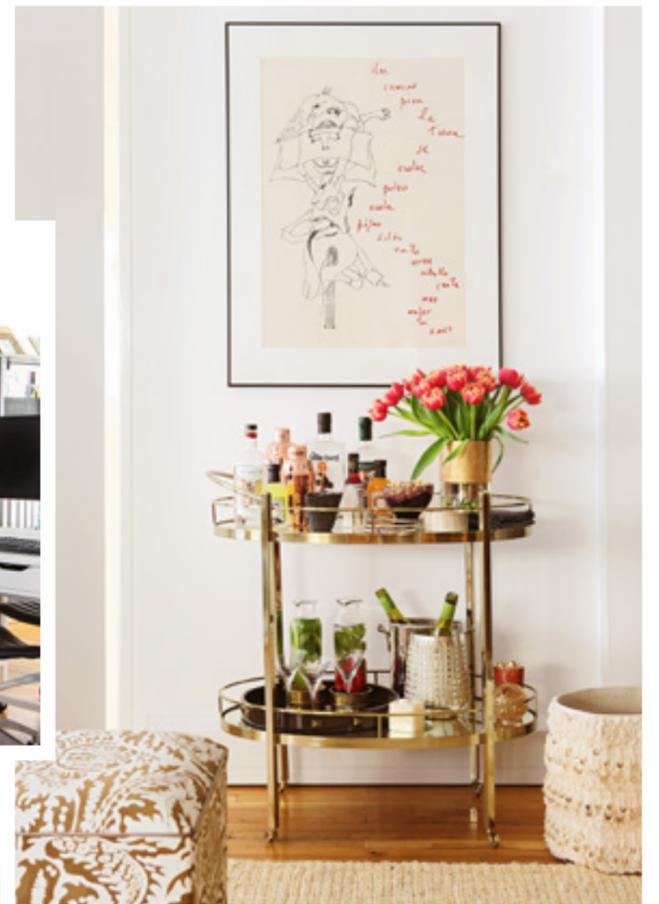
Eighteen months ago, when Miyar saw Klimt’s 1906 *Portrait of Fritza Riedler* in Vienna’s Belvedere Museum, she felt an immediate connection. ‘It’s a wonderful painting – so tactile, full of contrast and personality. I bought the postcard and thought: one day I’ll do something with this.’

Back in London, the former design director at Helen Green Design was preparing to launch her own company, Natalia Miyar Atelier



THE METALLIC TONES IN GUSTAV KLIMT’S *FRITZA RIEDLER*, 1906, ARE ECHOED IN THE STUDIO’S COPPER

CHAIRS AND BRONZE-GREEN SOFA, WHILE THE GRID BOOKCASES REFERENCE THE PAINTING’S STRUCTURE



(she opened for business in February and is already planning a sister studio in Miami for next spring). ‘We were talking about the design, and I thought, well, we have this gorgeous, gorgeous reference in Klimt! In my interiors, I love plays on texture, I love combining materials. The more I thought about it, the more the Klimt picture seemed the best expression of what we hope our work is like.’

The notion of a ‘signature style’, stiff with rehearsed statements, is anathema to Miyar. ‘I design homes for individuals,’ she points out. ‘So the idea of the studio is that you’re coming into a space that feels like a home, you’re seeing all the elements that can make a home. Truthfully, this feels very much like my own house.’

Miyar grew up in Mexico and Florida. Her parents, exiled from Castro’s Cuba, are collectors

of contemporary Cuban painters, and a radiant canvas by Humberto Calzada, filled with sunlight and imagined architecture, serves as a kind of ‘hearth’ for the studio. ‘It works well with the Klimt palette,’ says Miyar. ‘I was trying to evoke a general feel rather than being too literal about things.’ Sculptural copper chairs, their edges softened with velvet cushions, are a more obvious nod to the metal sheen of the Riedler portrait. Black-grid bookcases echo the painting’s structural rigour, and an oversized sofa in fathomless bronze-green references Klimt’s dense and discrete blocks of colour.

‘The sofa is silk-velvet with two tones in it. I like it with the smudgy marks of hands on it,’ says Miyar. ‘The armchair fabric has the same kind of depth: it looks like a solid colour, but when you get up close, it’s a very tight

herringbone pattern, which has the effect, almost, of an optical illusion – rather like the grey, white and black graphics in the painting.’

Laid out along one wall is a tempting smorgasbord of organic materials: little bowls of lava rock and agate, Mexican turquoise beads, fiery corals. ‘You want a design to have longevity and, for me, that’s about working with natural materials. These minerals and pigments have been around longer than we have. And look at this!’ says Miyar, stroking the Missoni stripes and extravagant whorls of a massive uncut agate. ‘You’d never think of putting these colours together, but they work so well!’

Sample tiles of specialist finishes – geometric, stamped gesso, crackle glaze, silk-smooth concrete riven with bronze –

recall the applied arts of Klimt’s Wiener Werkstätte, while stacks of art books bring a sense of hinterland to the newly arranged space. ‘I can’t live without books,’ says Miyar, who studied art history at Brown University and trained as an architect in Miami. ‘I have no formal training in interior design, but I have a lot of training in scale and proportion, in drawing and in looking, really looking at things.’

Is there an ideal client? Miyar combs white hands through long copper hair. It’s a very Klimt-y gesture. ‘I love working with collectors and connoisseurs,’ she says, ‘because the art is so inspiring. But I’m as interested in people who don’t know what they want as I am in people who do. Because that’s where I come in. It’s where the fun starts.’ ♦

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