INTERIORS

Home is where the haute is

A handful of designers are taking their cues from the world of couture, writes **Kavita Daswani**

The haute couture-inspired living room of The Sheffield in Manhattan; a silvery velvet chair (inset) – very fashion forward for the season – from one of The Sheffield's show flats

The term "fashionable address" is often bandied about in high-end property circles, indicating that the place in question is suitably soignée in terms of its location. But a crop of decorators is taking that concept further.

Prestigious Manhattan condominiums such as The Sheffield and Manhattan House have gone out of their way to put the "fashion" into "fashionable address" in a bid to appeal to people who work in the industry, travel to New York as a result of it, or who simply like to have their home interiors as well dressed as they are. Furniture designers are taking inspiration from runway shows, hoping to be moved by the colours and textures (think turquoise cabinets with elaborate raised white patterning).

At Manhattan House, the 1,150 square foot model home was decorated by acclaimed New York interior designer Celerie Kemble, author of *To Your Taste: Creating Modern Rooms with a Traditional Twist*, who referenced haute couture in her work.

For the look Kemble took the approach that currently reigns in fashion, where it is much more about distinctive, bespoke pieces that are individual and artisanal, and "less about the ostentatious showing of wealth and brand-focused luxury"; in short, the understated elegance of Oscar de la Renta or Lanvin. So, for example, the curtains she used in the space are sheer and iridescent, "very much like dressmakers' fabric," she says.

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>
> **Susan Hornbeak-Ortiz, decorator and furniture designer**

"I would say that the living room feels like a cocktail dress – not fancy, but certainly not casual. There is nothing formal in that space. The idea was to keep every material that went in as dressed," says Kemble. Other touches include a high-gloss black lacquer finish on the walls, a huge blush-coloured shagreen coffee table, gold ceramics and Lucite curtain poles.

"Everything was highly customised to have a fashionable, glimmering shine," Kemble says. "Living in New York, we watch this high-speed movie of fashion pass before our eyes all day. Fashion is about an overriding mood."

That sensibility is playing out in design circles everywhere. The correlation between high fashion and high-end interior design is close and intertwined; fashionistas who like to change their wardrobes every season or so would appreciate the ability to modify their home environment – if not every season then perhaps every couple of years – reflecting the mood of the moment.

"Currently, it does feel like there's a movement towards that," says Susan Hornbeak-Ortiz, a decorator and furniture designer in San Juan Capistrano, California, whose Shine by SHO collection is available worldwide. (She plans to open a showroom in Shanghai.) "There is the opportunity now to be very fashion-forward in your home – but the question is, how do you accomplish that without having to change the environment every five minutes?"

The key, say designers, is all in the balance – whether the space is being used for pure marketing purposes, as in show flats, or for personal and permanent homes.

"I've always loved watching runway shows, which I find to be so inspiring," says Hornbeak-Ortiz. "Those ideas filter down and become an element of what you do."

Nancy Ruddy, a principal of New York design firm Cetra/Ruddy, wanted to weave concepts of fashion into several model homes she recently completed at the 682-unit The Sheffield.

"It's a 1970s brick building on 57th Street, one of the great streets in Manhattan where publishing, fashion and high-level business interconnect," she says. "We wanted it to have a great sense of fashion, yet have a universal quality."

Instead of looking at images from couture shows, she and her team created fictional characters who might inhabit one of the spaces – a magazine editor, or someone who wears couture and sits on the board of the Met – and rendered an interior that matched what a fashion-savvy homeowner would want.

"In responding to the fashion element, we created something that was very sophisticated and urbane, for what we thought the target market would be."

Details are in the form of collectable *Vogue* issues from the 60s, delicate vintage perfume bottles and chairs covered in fabric embellished in old script. There is a nod to current fashion trends in the bedroom, styled in trendy neon brights, complete with richly woven throws, a rose-pink covered bed and silvery velvet couches. The looks have struck a chord; offers have come in to purchase them as they are, down to the bed linen.

For more permanent living arrangements, designers such as Hornbeak-Ortiz are translating fashion trends into tangible pieces. One of her signatures from a few years ago – embellished and studded tables – was inspired by the rhinestones and patterned designs she saw on runways.

"My look books and style boards incorporate a lot of different things," she says. "Fabrics, textures, photography – and images from fashion layouts. I just gravitate towards them."

It's not always a literal translation, she says. Furnishing fabrics can't necessarily be pulled from couturiers' stock because the materials have to drape a certain way. But the influences are there: nail head detail can simulate embroidery, or inspiration may come from the curve of the way a dress falls. In Hornbeak-Ortiz's most recent collection, for which she pondered how to make a chandelier based on a skirt, the furniture has circular lines and cut-outs.

"I was entranced by a collection that Marc Jacobs did; gorgeous and flowing, with pieces that had these great, giant hibiscus flowers and a real tropical feel." The result for her: geometric furniture and colour schemes that ran to corals and reds with flesh tones and pinks.

For those who are using the fashion connection to market a property – and the potential lifestyle of inhabiting the property – the approach offers plenty of mileage. Jacqueline Urgo, president of New York firm The Marketing Directors, which is working on The Sheffield, oversaw the production of a promotional publication that is much more *Harper's Bazaar* than strictly brochure.

"We wanted to create a highly designed magazine format to convey the sophisticated nature of the offering," she says. "It follows the format of a couture magazine."

There are high-fashion models on the cover, a stylish mix of black and white and colour renderings in the inside pages, a montage of the glossy boutiques in the neighbourhood.

"The design and sensibility of the property is for people who see themselves as couture dressers who are in the know," she says.

The approach is working: The Sheffield sold 14 units in October, a record for the building, with buyers (two were from Hong Kong), paying from US$700,000 to more than US$7 million.

"We're seeing a lot of people from Asia," says Anne Young, senior sales manager at New York property company Corcoran Sunshine, which has the exclusive sales rights to Manhattan House, where prices for the 570 units range from US$1.1 million to more than US$10 million. Young recently sold a US$2.2 million unit to a Hong Kong Chinese family as a second home.

The experts

- Celerie Kemble – www.kembleinteriors.com
- Susan Hornbeak-Ortiz – www.shinebysho.com
- Nancy Ruddy – www.centraruddy.com

How to dress up your home

To make your home something of a fashion plate, designers suggest treating it like a wardrobe: keep the ensemble modern and tasteful, then punctuate with daring accessories. Here are their suggestions:

- Think details: a beautiful glass vase to hold pencils and an interesting notepad.
- Find one or two bold pieces (in designer Rita Konig's case, a large gold pretzel sculpture, iconic of New York) and thick coffee table books.
- Home fragrance items from a brand such as Santa Maria Novella have a unique retro-vintage sensibility.
- As in fashion, think comfort. "So many places are overdecorated," Konig says. "You want it to be relaxed – light, friendly and cheerful."
- Get inspired by fashion magazines; look at the season's key trends for direction. Out: overdecorated and overly grand looks. In: accessible style that is lived-in and welcoming.
- "Like a well-put-together wardrobe, you have your basics and classics – the larger pieces – and the ability to change it up with paint colour and accessories," says Susan Hornbeak-Ortiz.
- Think of a great pair of black slacks or perfect black dress, then all the other elements – accents and jewellery or, in a home, lighting and accessories.
- Don't be shy with pillows and throws, or even consider making full slipcovers for pieces that can change the room from whites and pastels in the summer to rich jewel tones in the winter.
- Be adventurous with fabrics: curtains don't have to be as obviously luxe as damask when a sheer muslin might convey both warmth and light.
- Set the right tone, look at proportions, a colour palette, a mood. Buy the best fabric you can, and then accessorise smartly around that: a single black wall here, or mixing vintage with modern.

Kavita Daswani

People

Photo: AP

Billboard honour for Glee's Michele

Although Lea Michele stars in a television show, her *Glee* role has had such an impact on music that *Billboard* is honouring her with a "triple treat" award.

Michele (right) was due to receive the honour yesterday at *Billboard*'s annual "Women in Music" luncheon in New York honouring the Black Eyed Peas' Fergie.

"We worked so hard over here at *Glee* and we put together these mini-movies every week that are filled with dancing and singing," Michele said. "It feels like such a wonderful recognition."

Although she's being honoured by a music publication, Michele has no plans to put out a record like her co-star Matthew Morrison, who started working on an album this year.

"I am taking my time with making an album," Michele said. "It will be somewhere in my future but right now we are so busy." She also noted the success of *Glee*'s soundtracks." *AP*

Franklin focus of prayer vigil

A community prayer vigil has been held in Detroit for Aretha Franklin, a day before organisers said the singing legend was to undergo a medical procedure.

City councillor JoAnn Watson and others gathered on Wednesday to pray for Franklin. Last month, she announced the cancellation of all concert dates and personal appearances in May on the orders of her doctors.

Franklin wasn't at the vigil, but in a statement she thanked the city council, saying "all prayers are good".

Franklin's medical procedure was scheduled for yesterday. *AP*

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