

INSPIRING INTERIORS

DESIGNING INTENTIONAL JOINERY FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES

A bedroom bay window reading corner with bespoke navy joinery, enhanced by antique brass grills.
© Alexander James



The craftsmanship of joinery dates back to ancient Egypt (3,000 BC), consisting of the essentials – wood and nails. The main purpose was functional and served for storage. It was not until the 15th century that joinery became popular with European furniture makers. In the 17th century carpentry evolved into a more commercially sophisticated trade in Britain.

Joinery in historic interiors is not solely functional, but when designed authentically it has the power to enhance the character of a property.

Functionality plays a key role and must not be overlooked when designing bespoke cabinetry - the space must be analysed properly. Kitchen cabinetry is a prime example of the significance of joinery, the durability and aesthetic are often a key feature of a kitchen design, lasting decades. The ideal storage depths for objects, or heights of the work tops must be considered during the initial design process. Often storage is a key aspect, for example it is clever to integrate drawers into a bay window seat to create a double function piece.

Detailing can vary and be personalised not just according to personal taste but it should also respect the history and the 'bones' of the chosen property. Sometimes period appropriate antique furniture, panelling or a chimney piece can inspire a skirting or moulding detail of a joinery piece. Plasterwork motifs could be repeated in a subtle way or embellish the corners of a cabinet. Books such as Elements of Style by Stephen Calloway or Dictionary of Ornament by Philippa Lewis and Gillian Darley are useful sources when looking for inspiration for relevant detailing. Existing joinery can also be restored by skilled joiners or serve as an inspiration for new additions.

Paint colour plays a key role and often eggshell finishes are preferred in high traffic areas such as kitchens or entrance wardrobes due to their durable properties. Furthermore, the reflection which is often a favoured result of the glossy finish effortlessly enlarges a space. Choosing a matte breathable finish from sustainable companies such as Little Greene, Rose of Jericho or Francesca Paints can be recommended in humid areas such as bathrooms, for the health conscious customer. The application of a lighter moulding colour creates a sophisticated statement and enhances the joinery piece by creating more dimension. Introducing colour schemes which are period relevant can also be an interesting way to bring historic character into a space in a subtle way. Books such as Architectural Colour in British Interiors 1615-1840 by Ian Bristow and Anatomy of Colour by Patrick Baty are excellent resources for inspiration.

Further personalisation can be attained by using details such as reeding. Often an antique mirror finish provides a timeless appeal to joinery pieces and helps it blend in more with the historic bones. Wallcoverings are another playful way to embrace joinery and add some contrast through different textures, prints or colour. The use of an elegant grass



A dressing room corner with an integrated walnut desk and window seating. Golden olive green eggshell joinery is combined with ecru hemp wall coverings for a timeless appeal.
© Alexander James

cloth or raw silk wallcovering at the back of an open living room shelf creates intrigue and sophistication. Hemp or rattan can also look charming inside panels. Printed papers or any wallpaper remnants are an enchanting surprise when used inside wardrobes. Furthermore, a historic wallpaper remnant which could have been discovered during a renovation or historic cornicing can serve as an inspiration for selecting a wallpaper or moulding. It is recommended to create a scheme board of the joinery finishes, from paint colours, ironmongery to wallpaper to optimally visualise the final result.

Ironmongery is an important finishing touch to joinery and can look very smart and authentic when chosen in living finishes so it patinates in a timeless manner, creating a nostalgic appeal.

The actual forms can distinguish historic eras such as the Georgian from the Victorian and are a lovely way to add a period relevant touch to joinery. For a more modern look a simpler

form such as an oval knob is a classic choice and would integrate well in an antique finish. Kitchen cabinetry allows for creativity as certain cupboards, or a butchers table can have diverse shapes of ironmongery for an interesting and dynamic appearance. Metal in the form of grilles are another way to add contrast through a different texture to joinery in a polished way.

Collaborating with local joiners is not only the more sustainable option but also embraces the wonderful historic artisanal skill of cabinetry. Joinery design is a personal and joyful process and should blend period appropriate detailing with the home owners' taste to create unique pieces with longevity. 🌿

Christiana Kehrler Interiors
www.christianakehrler.com
IG @christianakehrlerinteriors