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Home Luxury



One Hyde Park suffers from an image problem. When the ultra-luxurious Knightsbridge development went on sale seven years ago, it came with fantastic views of Hyde Park – and some of the highest prices ever seen in the capital. Yet it was quickly perceived as the acme of lights-out, buy-to-leave London: £75m flats for foreign billionaires who rarely set foot there.

The famously secretive brothers Nick and Christian Candy, of the CPC Group, who pioneered the development, became synonymous with a super-slick and suitably maligned aesthetic: the greige six-star hotel. The late AA Gill dismissed it as “the most pathetically unimaginative address in the city, a self-made ghetto of naff and gilt”.

So not only was our exclusive invitation a surprise – my apprehension heightened by the beefy doorman out front – but so, too, was the interior designer welcoming us in. Charu Gandhi worked for Candy & Candy on the launch, designing about 15 of the 85 apartments. Now she’s started her own firm, Elicyon, and has returned to the plutocrats’ palace to update the interiors at a few of the homes.

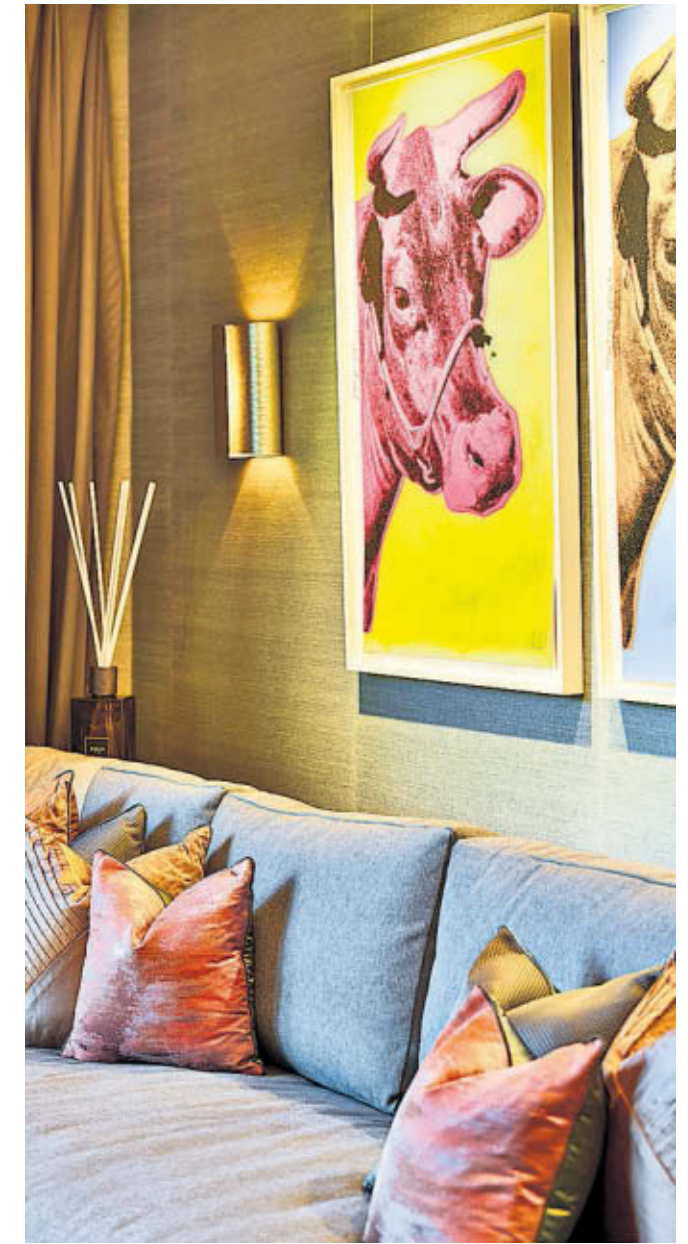
In person, Gandhi, whose business caters to the whims of the 1%, those multiple homeowners whose net worth is the GDP of a small country, is the opposite of grand. She’s chatty and down to earth, as happy talking about Antony Gormley as the lavatory habits of the rich and famous.

She won’t, however, reveal anything about the client who owns the flat where we meet, other than that he is European, has a wife and two older children, and uses the apartment only once or twice a month. But she insists One Hyde Park is full of life: “In the lifts, I see mums with their children doing the school run.”

For someone who made her name with neutrals, she is surprisingly animated and passionate about design: there’s a fire in her eye. “Moths aren’t allowed in One Hyde Park,” comes the deadpan response. “They don’t have an access pass.”

She’s not touchy about the G-word, either. “On the one hand, I am bored with greige, but the thing is, we all like it,” Gandhi says, sipping tea in the 40ft reception room, on a cushion-stuffed grey sofa that stretches for miles. “It’s comfortable. And any colour can work with it – if we swapped these cushions for burnt orange or aubergine, they’d work. Why reinvent the wheel, and the colour palette, if it’s enjoyable?”

That said, she concedes that the original Candy & Candy aesthetic may have been formulaic. “We were creating a brand, it was a look, and people were buying into it,” she says. “It worked, because it sold, but today the apartments could use a fresh approach. We’re not doing them up for selling. We’re bringing personality, character and individuality.”



ONE HYDE PARK MARK TWO

Charu Gandhi, right, designed many of the flats for the launch of the luxury development and has now been drafted in to update the look



The plutocrats’ palace in London is getting a revamp. Bland hotel style is out, texture is in. But it’s still greige, finds Hugh Graham

To this end, her client’s four-bedroom apartment shows that taupe-loving high-net-worthers have a playful alter ego. Apparently, take the chandeliers: instead of oligarch Versailles, the pendants are cosmic and cool. Crystal saturnine rings in the lobby morph into swirly, sculptural tributes to the moon’s orbit in the reception room, at the end of a 30ft corridor. Deconstructed coffee tables are fragmented into jagged shapes and sprayed with liquid metal. The art brightens things up: bright Warhol cows and lurid Jeff Koons balloon dogs in the cinema room; colourful Miro smudges in the reception; Damien Hirst butterflies and Roy Lichtenstein’s pop-art violins in the kitchen; an autumnal Hockney in a bedroom.

“The base is neutral – the client wanted the colour to be in the art,” says Gandhi, who curated the collection. The property also appears to be devoid of personal items; the only books are coffee-table tomes.

If billionaires shy away from too much colour, they can’t get enough of texture.

It’s the new status symbol – the more mottled or dimpled the surfaces, the bigger the bank balance. It’s everywhere: buffalo-hide wall panels, speckled veneer cabinets, bumpy metallic finishes, pockmarked “carved” rugs, silk wallpaper, woven straw marquetry walls, vast tweed or leather headboards, a grainy dining table made from a Canadian barn door and covered in 80 layers of resin.

The TVs are hidden in faux shagreen frames, and even the wool rugs look textured: Gandhi uses a precise amount of silk for a hint of sheen. If you lived here, you’d be forever running your hands over everything, while walking on diamond-patterned floors of Volakas Italian marble: “It’s softer and warmer than Carrara.”

Other must-haves for the global elite: 4ft-wide bedside tables that can fit a newspaper and a breakfast tray; a floral “strategy” (Elicyon rotates three colour schemes for the fresh-cut flowers); display cabinets that show off a collection (in this case, Lalique crystal and vintage model cars); mattresses with different

firmness levels to suit each partner (“A split mattress can change a marriage”); monogrammed everything (drawer interiors, cutlery, bed linen). The rainfall shower head is so big, it could drench a rugby team: “The thing is, small shower heads usually have better water pressure. Big ones can be drizzly.”

A lighting designer is mandatory. Walls bask in celestial washes of light, from halos in the shadow gaps to uplit headboards. “You can have beautiful surface materials, and if it’s not well lit, they’re lost,” Gandhi says. “We check lumens and kelvins.”

“Here we’ve used the cooler end of a warm white to go with the white marble and greys. Lighting is complex. You can have three lights that are technically the same colour, but one has a red undertone, one green, one blue. If you don’t match them, you don’t know you can see it, but you can.”

The firmness of cushions is complex, too. When I visit, Gandhi is busy dealing with sofa-gate. “I chose foam for the sofas, because it’s firmer. It looks tailored and crisp. Feathers you have to fluff and pat, but an hour after we handed over to the client, I got a message – “The sofas are crazy hard.” The suppliers are refilling the cushions with feather, at our cost.”

The super-rich are also fussy about their loos. “Most of our clients ask for Totos, Japanese lavatories that wash you, then give you a blow-dry,” Gandhi says. (This flat doesn’t have one.) “Or they

UP, UP AND AWAY

A style barometer for the super-rich

- Floral strategies. Elicyon has three arrangements: opulent platinum for big parties; gold for intimate gatherings; and silver, when only the couple are in town. Faux flowers when it’s empty.
- Four-foot wide bedside tables that can fit a breakfast tray and newspaper
- Toto lavatories from Japan, for a wash and dry. You’ll never need loo roll again.
- Lighting design. Check your lumens and kelvins. The wrong shade of white can wreck a room.
- The super-rich have tired of shine. High gloss is out, texture is in.
- Tone on tone. These days, you need pops of colour to cheer up the greige.
- Smart technology. People are tired of reading a manual to turn on the lights.
- Dark interiors, except for small spaces such as a black marble bathroom.
- Visible TVs. Hide them in furniture, mirrors or faux shagreen frames.

want handheld douches mounted on the wall next to the toilet. In Britain, there are rules against those now – there’s backflow that contaminates the water system – but one client insisted on it, so we had to put in a special tank.”

One Hyde Park is fussy about its water. There’s a treatment system in place to descale it. “Limescale is not allowed here, either. No moths, no limescale.”

Not that they’re worried about the kettle. The owner rarely cooks here: the fridge is stocked only with bottles of Evian, Fiji and San Pellegrino water, Snickers and Double Decker chocolate bars, ketchup and HP sauce. He has converted his dining area into a cinema and orders room service from the Mandarin Oriental hotel, or goes out for lunch and dinner. Before he does, he’ll have a tittle from one of three bars: one stocked with pink Dom Pérignon, one with gin, tonic and all the fixings, the third with Baileys Irish Cream for nightcaps.

Wall sculptures of bowler-hatted Englishmen by the door, looking forward and backward, signify a transient lifestyle. “For a lot of my clients, this is their second or third home, or maybe their 10th.”

Just don’t say it’s hotel-like. “Ninety per cent of my clients don’t want the decor to look like a hotel,” Gandhi says. “You could say it is hotel-like in its crisp and precise look. But it’s not generic.”

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