



Are You A New Design Studio?

By **Ciara Ephson**

Founder, **Fentiman Design**

Ciara Ephson is Founder of Fentiman Design, a London-based studio where contemporary art and antiques inspire beautiful, bespoke interiors for residential projects. Established in 2016, Fentiman Design is an interior design studio based in Fulham, London. Following a degree in History of Art and Spanish, Ciara went on to study at KLC School of Design before embarking on a career in high-end interior design at Todhunter Earle. Having successfully completed a wide variety of projects, both in the UK and abroad, Ciara founded Fentiman Design with the aim of creating unique, thoughtful spaces based on her love of contemporary art, antiques and bespoke design. Fentiman Design prides itself on excellent attention to detail in every aspect of the design process and strong relationships with clients, consultants and suppliers. Here, Ciara talks about the opportunities for setting up your own studio and how, if you're ready, you should go for it!

Running my own design studio has been a dream come true. I set out in interior design with the intention of working for myself one day, so when the opportunity presented itself I grabbed it. The creative freedom it has granted me has been fantastic and being my own boss has given me an opportunity, not only to set my own schedule, but also to work on a huge range of projects. Subconsciously, I think I always knew I would work in the interiors world. I created many bold bedroom schemes whilst growing up, but it wasn't until university that I decided to pursue my interest in interiors as a career; given my love of art and design, it was an obvious choice. I wanted a job that would



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challenge me creatively as well as test my business skills, so after completing my degree, I went on to study at KLC School of Design. Following that, I was offered jobs in various parts of the industry, including stints at John Cullen Lighting and House & Garden, before settling into interior design full-time at Todhunter Earle.

When a project came my way in 2016, I decided to take the leap and set up my own studio and I've never looked back! My style is very much project-led; I prefer not to implement a set look in multiple properties, particularly for private clients. This means I really push myself to create something different for each project and I'm always on the hunt for new ideas and interesting

suppliers. The variety of projects I'm working on really suits me. I love the challenge of crafting a bespoke design for each client, all the while carefully considering their style and requirements. I love many aspects of the job, but the satisfaction of producing something physical is hard to beat. There's nothing quite like the gratification of seeing all your hard work, often over a number of years, come together successfully and to the client's satisfaction. From a creative perspective, switching off the interiors part of your brain can be difficult. I am always analysing and critiquing my own, as well as others', work. When I'm in a new space there's a constant internal monologue: 'That's a good architrave detail ... must make a

note of that stone profile ... nice curtain headings ... uncomfortable banquette, I wonder if I could measure it without anyone noticing?!' It may sound completely crazy to those outside the industry, but I'm confident all interior designers would say the same. I surely can't be the only one who keeps a tape measure in her handbag?... My advice to anyone setting up a new studio is, to be patient, be proactive and be kind to yourself. Working for yourself is extremely rewarding, but not without its challenges. There is a steep learning curve, so it's important not to be afraid to ask for help or take time out when you need a break. Learn your strengths and understand that you can't do everything yourself, this insight

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will put you in a position to deliver the best service. Before you can properly organise a business and effectively manage your time, however, it's important to assess your requirements and take time to work out how long each aspect of the job actually takes you to do. You can then invest shrewdly in the relevant help.

For a start, my advice is always to hire an accountant. Together with the other consultants I employ, I can trust my accountant to get on with the job without me looking over his shoulder, thus removing some of the daily pressures of running a business. I also constantly review project progress (both in-house and on-site), planning my team and adjusting workloads accordingly.

In addition to the people you might engage to help you do your work and run your business, it's important to create a network of fellow interior designers you can rely on for support and advice. For me this has been the key to remaining sane! It's immensely reassuring to know that others are facing the same challenges that you are. Another recommendation for the early years is to learn when to say no to a project. There is an impulse to take on everything that comes your way for fear of not having any work, but doing the wrong jobs can really hold you back. Be brave! Ask yourself if the job will contribute to your overall career goals before saying yes. Working in a creative industry, it's especially important to stay fresh and stimulate your mind. There can be a temptation to remain glued to your screen looking at all of the wonderful interiors images online, but I think it's very important to get out and see things in person; go to the theatre, for example, visit

galleries and antiques fairs. Trips to old houses and travelling abroad provide a huge source of inspiration for me; from the colours of faded frescos to the architecture of skyscrapers, there is so much to absorb and re-imagine if you are open to it. Making time for this is often the biggest challenge, but one well worth doing.

Looking ahead, I am excited to see what 2019 holds for interior design. I think we are going to continue to see a rise in the popularity of using colour and pattern; I'd like to see this done in a restrained, elegant way. Cool toned greys are most definitely on the out and I'm hoping to see a

much greater use of warm neutrals, earthy tones and natural materials in their original form and colour. From a family living point of view, huge open plan spaces are starting to lose their popularity. Open plan kitchens and dining rooms will remain important, but increasingly people want wall space to hang art and parents want rooms where they can unwind in the evening, free from children's paraphernalia, so I think we may well start seeing a return to more traditional layouts. It's an exciting time to be in an interior designer!

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