



PERFECTLY POSSIBLE

From royal palaces to showstopping children's bedrooms, London-based designer Shazma Maladwala is the queen of bespoke interiors. **Kate Salter** meets her

Photograph by Ben Quinton

Every interior designer can recount horror stories of grand pianos getting stuck on staircases and chandeliers cascading to the floor during installation. For Shazma Maladwala, founder of Mokka Design, her own wince-inducing tale involves a giant model aeroplane and a project on Belgravia's Eaton Square.

"My client had bought a very expensive, handmade aeroplane for one of her children as a bed," says Maladwala. "It was huge, about four metres across and we had to get it into the house. Four days before the client comes home from holiday, this thing arrives. We measure it and the supplier hadn't given us the full wing span

correctly. We couldn't get it in the windows, we couldn't get a crane." Her solution? "We broke all the walls to get the plane into the room and rebuilt them to perfection over the weekend. If our clients want something we'll make it happen, whatever that might be."

Maladwala and her colleagues specialise in making their clients' fantasy interiors a reality, a world where nothing, it seems, is impossible. On the same Eaton Square project, Maladwala was asked to design a living room based on the Royal Ballet's production of *Onegin*. "My client had seen the ballet and wanted me to create a living room like the set. The next thing we knew VIP tickets to the ballet

‘Projects span the globe, from a penthouse in Cape Town to a private residence in Nigeria with a private mosque’

GRAND DESIGNS Clockwise from right: Mokka Design's Eaton Mews North project; the bespoke children's theatre in Latvia; the aeroplane bed; fabric choices for a project



were hand-delivered for prime seats at the Royal Opera House.”

At another project in Latvia (a property so large there is no address, only a GPS code), Mokka has created a working theatre for the clients’ lucky children to perform their plays. A specialist from London’s West End was flown in to advise on the technical aspects of the stage and lighting, and there is even a little foyer complete with popcorn machine

and mini fridges filled with treats.

Maladwala says they are installing one of their most spectacular bespoke pieces at the project in Latvia – a grand piano encased in bronze. The piano will cost £850,000 and when I ask Maladwala if it will play, she laughs and says “it should do for that price!”.

Ever since she started out in interior design, Maladwala has attracted a certain strata of

clientele. Her first big commission was for Queen Rania of Jordan, who asked Maladwala to move to Jordan and become her personal interior designer. At only 24, Maladwala designed the Queen’s palace. “There were 23 bathrooms,” she says, “and every single flush plate had to be different, every loo brush was different.”

Originally from Mumbai, Maladwala says that a childhood

spent travelling helped give her an international outlook appreciated by her clients, many of whom will have numerous homes in different parts of the world. “My father was an art collector so I’ve always been exposed to art and culture,” she says. “We travelled a lot when I was younger and we were always going to museums. Modern art and architecture were real passions of his.”

Art is still an important part of

her life. “Sometimes art can be the thing that triggers a room’s design,” she says. “A client might have an art collection and our rooms are designed around those pieces of art. We go to Christie’s exhibitions and auctions – I’m very passionate about it.”

In 1997 Maladwala came to London to study at the Inchbald School of Design. She went on to work for the interior designer Stephen Ryan, then Helen Green Design, finally setting up her own company in 2004. Now, Mokka’s projects span the globe, from a penthouse in Cape Town to a 20,000sq ft project in Nigeria

comprising of a private residence, fitness centre, swimming pool, staff building and even a private mosque.

Wherever its projects take them, Maladwala says that she will try to incorporate as much homegrown talent as she can. “British craftsmanship is something we focus on,” she says. “A lot of the time even if things are going abroad, the cabinetry, timber and loose furniture is all made in England.”

Mokka’s London projects encompass the city’s smartest addresses – Trevor Square in Knightsbridge, Connaught Place,

Eaton Mews North – and involve intricate panelling, Fromental wallpaper and pristine cabinets by firms such as Linley. But a current project in Putney shows there is a fun side too to smart interiors.

In collaboration with garden designers, Maladwala is helping a client who is fond of entertaining in his garden create a “beer tree”. Not a tree that bears beer as fruit, (which really would be impossible even for Maladwala), the focal point of the garden is a favourite tree that will be surrounded by a bench which converts into a huge ice trough, essentially “a massive ice bucket,” says Maladwala.

Maladwala says that entertaining is often at the heart of her London projects. People are living in a more informal way, with the kitchen still very much the heart of the home. In fact, she believes that whatever the budget, the end goal is often the same. “However rich or however much they might have, they still want a comfortable home that doesn’t feel like a hotel. People want to come home and feel that their home is cosy and practical. I think they’re just like the rest of us.” ■

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SET PIECE Above: The living room of the listed home in Eaton Square that was inspired by the set of the Royal Opera House’s production of *Onegin*