



A RICH interior

A man famed for transforming homes into palatial wonders, Juan Pablo Molyneux stands out as an interior designer with an inimitable style. Thomas Cabeceas uncovers the man behind the reputation for rich neoclassicism mixed with a touch of aesthetic modernism.

'I pay no attention to fashion fads,' says the interior designer Juan Pablo Molyneux. 'I would never follow trends. It all depends on whether you choose to be a follower or a leader.' The creations of Juan Pablo Molyneux, head of the JP Molyneux Studios in New York, are as much the product of years of observation and study as they are his openness to a multitude of influences across continents, aesthetic styles and traditions.

Many years ago, Molyneux's grandfather left his home in London. As he crossed the Andes on a mule he became lost, found himself to be in Chile and, having sought refuge in a nearby farm, fell in love with and married the daughter of the house. In many ways, Molyneux is the epitome of a citizen of the world. Growing up in Chile, he spoke Spanish, French and English, but was not stimulated by the Spanish architecture that surrounded him. 'If there was a name we could give that style, it would be Colonial Remorse,' he says, rolling his eyes.

Molyneux started his studies in Santiago, where the architecture course focused on the Modernism of Mies van der Rohe, the Bauhaus, Gropius and Le Corbusier. 'We studied absolutely nothing classical at all,' he recalls. 'It was as if the history of architecture began with the twentieth century.' But Molyneux had a hankering after history, luxury and fantasy, and so decided to head to Paris and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. 'As I arrived at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts through the

student entrance on la rue Bonaparte, I was faced with the beautiful façade of the Chateau de Gaillon and, behind it, the Palais des Etudes. I found that, for the first time, I was really very happy.'

Without a background in classical design, he believes that his first assignment – designing an orangerie for a chateau – was a failure. But he set about redressing the balance, discovering Andrea Palladio, 'the great master to whom I return again and again for inspiration and guidance', who was the architect of Le Petit Trianon at Versailles, Jacques Ange Gabriel, 'the long and noble reach of Greco-Roman architecture', and the Ancient Egyptians.

Absorbed in the art and architecture of the French capital, he remembers that, 'all I could think of was one day putting myself in a position to create structures like these.' Here he had learned 'the essential rules of architecture that I still believe in: harmony, proportion, symmetry and rhythm. From there you can go anywhere.'

South American journey

The completion of his studies was marked by an expedition through North and South America, Africa, Russia and Europe. A successful interior design and construction business as well as a retail outlet selling antiques and furniture,



which he had designed, was launched in Santiago in the early 1970s. This successful period ended with an exhibition of his work – fabrics, china, ceramics, carpets and furniture – at the Museo de Bellas Artes.

Juan and his wife Pilar decided to seek the stimulation of the cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires. 'Buenos Aires is very neo-classical and heavily influenced by nineteenth century French architecture,' he explains. 'As my work was becoming more neo-classical, more like it is now, it meshed well with both the city's buildings and its sensibility.' When he visited New York with a client looking for antiques, he fell in love and in 1987 moved to the USA.

An incredible range

The scope of Molyneux's work has been tremendous, including a 50,000ft² house in Monterrey, Mexico, a Palm Beach Mizner Mansion, an Upper East Side town house, apartments on residential cruise ship *The World*, some buildings for the Russian Government and a Harley Davidson motorbike, to name but a few.

Despite their variety, certain themes prevail. He does not believe in the preservation of 'old' just for the sake of it. He believes every residence should have a 'defined entryway', and he has an interest in the development of new fabrics that are durable and comfortable, as well as in new technologies.

The art of illusion has a particular appeal for Molyneux, who is known for his witty use of trompe l'oeil. He has employed it in rooms lacking views and in a Palm Beach house he added a storm-tossed sky to the ceiling. 'With trompe l'oeil you can create spaces, moods and shapes. It's not fake – trompe l'oeil is fantasy that provokes reality.'

Molyneux's career has been characterised by his attention to detail, his insistence on the finest craftsmanship and thorough and painstaking research. In design, he explains, 'There is no need for excess ornamentation to make things more important. I believe you should work with what you're given, and if everything is well placed – if things flow and you treat them with care and with love – then you're able to invent something spectacular.'

Renowned for creating phenomenally luxurious homes, Molyneux realises just what a pleasure this can be. 'I am one of the happy few whose work is based on the enhancement of life.' □

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