

Inside secrets of super-rich decor

The opulent bathroom suite of Beau House, on Jermyn Street, by the Oliver Burns interior designer practice Holly Thomas and Anne Ashworth

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In one way, the typical interior of a super-prime property is not so very different from the average home: grey will be the favoured neutral shade. The sofas will almost certainly be grey, for example. However, there the similarity ends. We take you through the latest obsessions in the super-prime home and explain how you can get the look for less – or subvert it.

The master suite bedroom is a key selling point in the luxury home sector, because this is often the only space in the house that the 80-hour a week investment banker owner sees on a regular basis. Some high fliers also install spa rooms and hairdressing rooms – heaven forfend that they should be seen in a high street salon with wet hair.

Celia Sawyer, an interior designer, recently completed a five-bedroom house in St John's Wood, north London, now on the market for £30 million. She says: "The luxury master suite dominated with its his 'n' hers marble bathrooms and walk-in dressing rooms. People love a showpiece." LA-based British designer Gavin Brodin at Domvs London says dressing rooms can be a standalone feature worthy of star pieces of their own. He says: "A male client had an impressive watch collection that they wanted to be displayed and made into an interior feature. We created a special cabinet using reinforced safety glass to ensure that the items were visible yet they were securely stored."

The master suite obsession is the key trend that has spread from the prime sector to the rest of the market – the bedroom is a second living room, with chairs and sometimes even a sofa. The grey Julianne loveseat from Tesco costs £449.

Although the owner of the super-prime pad may not see the sitting room much, this remains an important space as it showcases the art collection. Buyers in this sector used to favour glass and steel apartments but, although such a design provides plenty of light, expanses of white walls are now the thing, as they allow the hanging of priceless artworks. This is one look that you can have for next-to-nothing: a few cans of white paint and pictures that you have picked up for pounds, rather than millions at car-boot sales or second-hand shops.

In the bathroom, a haven of opulence, marble is the favoured wall covering. Joe Burns, at award-winning architectural interior design and development practice Oliver Burns, says: "Bathrooms feature wall-to-wall book-matched marble, and buyers often insist on incorporating two or three types of marble to create impact and a distinction between each element." Burns has recently completed a £15 million penthouse on Jermyn Street in London at a development called Beau House. He says: "We used polished white Namibia marble on the floor and walls, polished Arabescato marble in the shower and a Blue de Savoie marble for the floating vanity unit. Marble will always be one of those timeless, elegant stones but it is the attention to detail in the way it is cut and book matched which shows it as its finest." If you like the marble look, marble wall tiles cost from £10 per sq metre at B&Q.

Bespoke is big in the super-prime world, as these individuals want to have something no one else possesses. Indeed, Faiza Seth, founder of Casa Forma, the interior design practice, says: “We create ‘money can’t buy’ unique bespoke pieces with every detail considered. One of our clients loved Cartier so much that our team of designers created bespoke panelling and joinery for the project in beautiful rosewood with inlaid bronze trims with the iconic screw details added in. You can’t just buy pieces like that.” Bespoke is beyond the pocket of the average householder, but do not be discouraged: you can upcycle. Repaint an old piece of furniture and you will have created something personal.

High-end designer names are also big — there being nothing more comforting than brand in this sector. Burns says: “There’s a huge interest in luxury lifestyle brands such as Fendi, Armani/Casa and Ralph Lauren. It’s not only about a brand name but it reinforces the quality being delivered. In the master bedroom at Beau House we’ve selected a console table in dark oak and a dressing table lamp in black nickel and dark brown lizard skin, both designed by Armani/Casa.” If you too like a designer name, the high street has plenty to offer, including the Conran range at M&S and the Ben de Lisi, Jasper Conran and Betty Jackson lines at Debenhams.

The super-rich like a silk carpet, because this type of floor is reassuringly expensive — around £450 a sq metre — and because it is anything but practical. Sawyer says: “Not only do silk carpets feel extremely luxurious underfoot, they also give off a sheen which sends out the message that you should leave your shoes by the door. Popular colours include whites, creams and greys and granites.” The taste of the super-rich for fancy flooring does not stop at silk carpeting. Seth says: “We designed flooring with semi-precious stones set inside it.” Then there are stone floors, inlaid with gold and silver-leafed gesso finish treated with acid, finally achieving a tarnished look. Tarnished is not the same as shabby chic — which is something that the super-prime crowd don’t understand at all. Why would you want to look poor when you don’t need to?

If floors studded with gems are not your thing, even if you could afford it, you should espouse the make-do-and-mend decor philosophy. *Keep It Simple* by Atlanta Bartlett and Dave Coote (published by Ryland Peters & Small; price £19.99) is the text book for those who want to make more with less. This movement’s flooring choice is old scaffolding board, or polished concrete.