

As interior designer to the stars, Kelly Hoppen is used to handling exacting clients – but nothing

Is taupe still cool? Dur!

THE queen of taupe, as Kelly Hoppen is known, cheerfully describes herself as “the client from hell”. Having sold her Notting Hill home for a cool £6 million, the A-list interior designer has recently finished the most difficult and important makeover of her entire career: her own “dream home”.

Hoppen spent 15 months and many millions turning a former derelict auction house in west London into what can only be described as a temple to taupe. “I have arrived. It’s beyond extraordinary, but it took me forever,” she says, leaning forward and fixing me with an intense, clear-eyed stare.

Today, the space is transformed with lofty double height ceilings and acres of glass. A six metre-long sofa and a similarly vast stone dining table stretch out beneath bespoke industrial pendant lighting. Elsewhere there are swathes

of white marble, a bath in the shape of a gigantic egg shell and, of course, “zillions” of shades of taupe.

So taupe is still cool, then? “Totally, yeah. Dur! It’s become an iconic colour that the Americans called mushroom for years, which is where I first saw it, and I just thought mushroom wasn’t going to go down too well, so looked it up and taupe (the French word for mole) became my colour.”

“Doing the house,” she says, “was like living with gummy bears in my head. The nightmare was which of the 12 million wood samples that I have in my studio I really wanted. I thought the wood flooring guy was going to go into a coma because I asked him to redo it so many times.” The final result, a herringbone parquet floor in a mixture of “taupe, blonde and grey, is beautiful – like perfect John Frieda highlights.”

She has had the nine thousand square foot space “cleared” by healer and

osteopath Kristian Wood. “He said it was the clearest space he’d ever done. I had to put an amethyst in one corner and a geopathic stress monitor in another.”

What’s a geopathic stress monitor? “I don’t know. You’ll have to look it up. It’s something to do with electrics, isn’t it? If a home is over the Underground, think of all that bad energy.”

“I don’t know enough about it but I just know if it doesn’t feel right. I know where to place things to make them work. It’s a very serious thing but it became bubble gum when people called it Feng Shui. But actually balancing out a home and making sure that it’s right is a very important part of what I do.”

Her neighbours probably wouldn’t agree. Last year Hoppen, it was reported, upset some of them by endless digging and drilling for the renovations including a basement extension. “We didn’t dig down. That was just nonsense in the paper. It’s been taken

off, we sued them. We don’t have a basement. Because it was a warehouse we put another floor in.”

So she knows only too well how stressful and time-consuming a bespoke residential project like this one can be. Which is why these days she prefers doing commercial work, in places such as India, the US and Asia. In one Chinese tower block she designed everything from the reception and apartments to the car park.

“We’re running about 38 projects around the world and have a waiting list. They’re all at different times and different stages. Every Monday morning we get a spreadsheet the size of this table and it lists every single job – who’s on it, when it’s being installed and when the next meeting is. I run a very tight ship,” Hoppen says sharply, and I believe her.

Still, falling in love and deciding to live with former IT executive John Gardiner, whom she met at a party four years ago, has clearly mellowed her. After two failed marriages and a string of unhappy relationships, including with Sol Campbell, Jamie Theakston and Nicky Clarke, she says: “I’ve given up chasing rainbows. I’m there in the rainbow. He’s east, I’m west, and he’s made me much more content.”

Did she consult him on the exact shade of taupe for the sofa she had chosen? “Kind of. I did show him CGIs and said ‘what do you think?’ But he totally trusts me – we have a perfect relationship.” Do they have plans to marry? “I hope so,” she says, with a sultry laugh. “My daughter [Natasha Corrett, from Hoppen’s first marriage to Graham Corrett] got married last year. I don’t think John he was about to propose then, but I think in his own time...”

“Do you know what? It’s picture perfect right now – so I think [he will propose] when I least expect it. I’m Miss Control Freak and what’s great about John is he surprises me all the time.”

Their day begins at 6.30am every morning with a cup of hot water and lemon. Hoppen spends an hour exercising – weights or Pilates in the downstairs gym or running in the park – before getting to her studio in Hammersmith for work at 9.30am. She “sleeps like a baby” and eats healthily, largely thanks to Natasha’s influence, whose fourth alkaline cookbook, *Honestly Healthy in a Hurry*, comes out in May.

“Natasha was the first to write about it and has many imitators,” says Hoppen, “but she’s a real chip off the old

Designs on you: Kelly Hoppen is currently running 38 different projects around the world, including a yacht and a Chinese tower block



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Temple of taupe: Kelly Hoppen spent 15 months transforming a former auction house into her home, below



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compared to creating her own ‘dream home’. She tells **Katie Law** about life, love and furnishings

and every so often I’ll go and do cupping with him and acupuncture.”

She also goes to Linda Meredith for an oxygen facial once a month and has her hair and nails done every week. “I have a hairdresser who comes to my home. I have to put products on it because otherwise it goes very frizzy. Then I just sit there with a diffuser and it takes 20 minutes to dry. John always says I look ridiculous.”

Less ridiculous is the revelation that, since appearing as a judge on *Dragon’s Den*, Hoppen is developing her own line of hair products. “My hair has become so recognisable; it’s been the most consistent thing in my life, like my best friend.” Any other plans for world domination? “Yes, I’d like to bring out my own vodka. What George Clooney did with tequila [launching his own artisanal brand, Casamigos Tequila with mates Rande Gerber and Mike Meldman] was so brilliant.”

Hoppen’s company has several arms and is growing quickly. The interiors business, which turned over £5 million last year, forms the core with a retail website and a range of licensed products, from baths and taps to paint and wallpapers, on the side. There have been umpteen style bibles and lucrative sales of taupe bed linen on QVC. She is launching a new furniture line in April, “the best thing I’ve ever done”, and has

designed a 90-foot vessel for luxury motor yacht company Pearl in August – a steal at £3 million. In October, a new book, *House of Hoppen*, celebrating 40 years in business, is due out.

Ever the entrepreneur, Hoppen, who was made MBE in 2009 and is reputed to be worth £50 million, believes we should stay in Europe. “Our membership allows us to trade freely with other EU countries with no tariffs or barriers. We only have to deal with one set of regulations – and we get free access to 500 million customers across the EU rather than 60 million in the UK, which for small businesses and start-ups is vital.”

She is pro-Tory. “The Government has done fantastic things for us. If you think of where we were in the recession and where we are today, it’s pretty incredible.”

The knock-on effect of all this, together with living in “an incredibly unsettled world”, is that people, Londoners especially, want to live in more open-plan spaces. “Home really is that safety pod and people are very conscious of how they bring up their children. They want them to do their homework while they’re cooking, and when they entertain at night they want to be seen to be cooking. And that’s the way life should be. I’ve been barking on about it for years in my books.”

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