

# Tech the halls



If, like **KATE HAMILTON**, you hadn't quite made the connection between interior design and technology, then it's time to go back to the drawing board.



When thinking of interior design many people think about touch. Yes, the room needs to look great, but touch is just as important. Fabrics, textiles and soft furnishings are all there to be touched; things to be used on a daily basis. So it may come as something of a surprise to learn that technology, often hidden, has made such an impact on the world of interior design in recent years.

"From a client's perspective, interior design has always and always will have a sensory element and, as such, has remained partly immune to technological advances. For example, you can't feel the texture of a fabric on screen," explains Chris Russell, fully's head of operations. "There are however increasing expectations from clients in relation to presentation formats. 3D visuals are often expected, but often not possible, given show home lead times and budgets. In an age of

Instagram, Pinterest and online furniture stores, a "concept" is no longer satisfactory and our clients expect to be presented with detailed imagery of the products proposed, often requiring a few Photoshop tricks along the way."

For those projects that do have a longer lead time, CGI's are becoming increasingly important.

"As far as specifics for the design of show homes go, we invest more time in developing CGI's, so that our clients can better understand what we are promising to deliver," says Robert Walker, founder and MD of Alexander James Interior Design. "Being able to demonstrate a space virtually can be an invaluable tool, although, in the main, the design process still remains extremely tactile, and all of our designers are as hands-on as ever."

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ABOVE Intelligent design differentiates a house from the competition, says Claire Interiors

RIGHT Riverside Developments, Almonds Gate, Rogate, by Andrew Henry Interiors

FAR RIGHT Oliver Interiors assured that Hartingham in Lincolnshire appeared as much to London buyers as local clients

BELOW Designer Contracts' Soft Focus range in Starlight Grey



"Buyers have access to more information than ever; numerous online resources allow them to research locations, developers and developments without even stepping out of the front door.

"To be successful in this kind of environment, housebuilders have had to adapt and we have had to be flexible in terms of the services that we offer. We find that we're being engaged much earlier on in the build process, either consulting on practical aspects of house design, such as electrical plans and materials selections or else working with partners to create designs for CGIs that will demonstrate to those potential buyers scouring the internet what their new home could look like."

And it is an interesting point because, since the advent of the internet, buyers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about what they want. The recent proliferation of image-led social platforms such as Instagram, Houzz and Pinterest means that buyers are much more informed about trends and design.

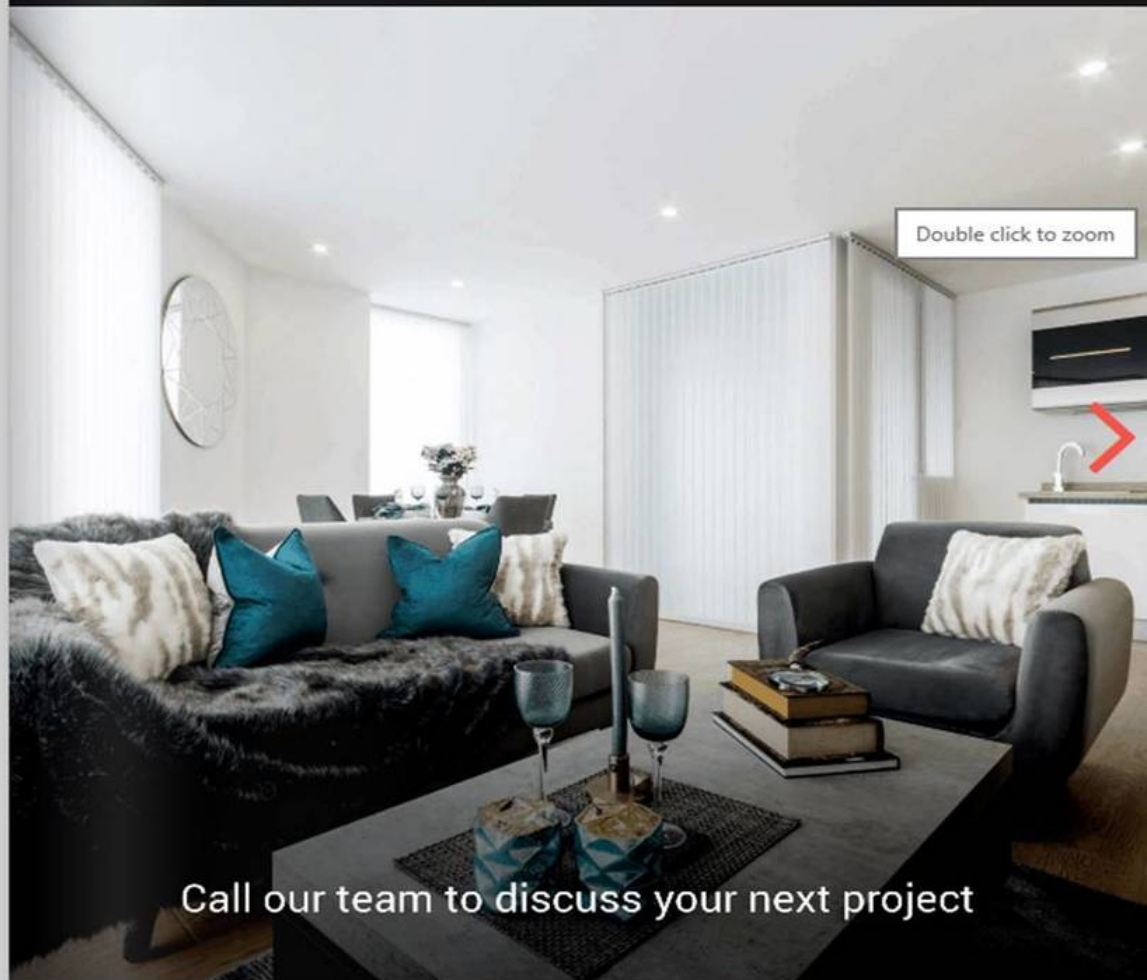
"Naturally this means they have higher expectations and so it's more vital than ever that we, as designers, create interiors that are not simply beautiful but also memorable, refreshing and inspiring," continues Gostomski.

Designs for all Occasions also produces CGI's for all of its jobs. These show how the whole room will look, with the exact furniture and fabrics, so housebuilders can see at a glance what their show home will look like. All of Designs for all Occasions scheme boards are done using computer graphics, which allows the company to digitally send complete schemes to clients very quickly indeed.

"Technology has significantly speeded up the design process," adds Cath Amphlett, interior design expert at Designer Contracts. "We now use specialist software to measure and lay out a room. It makes it much easier to communicate with clients, sending drawings and making changes quickly, and it also enables us to keep up-to-date with the latest

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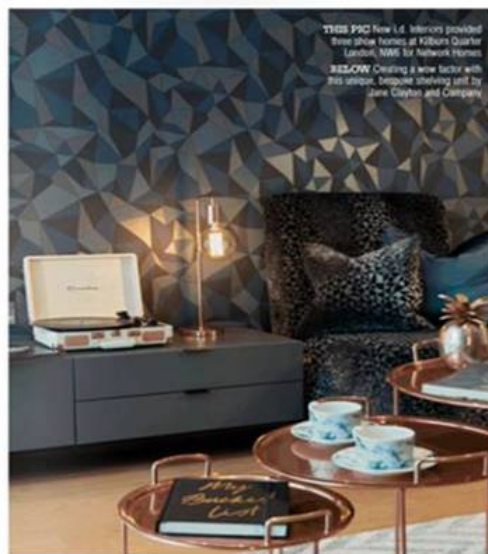
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THIS POC New 1.4. Interiors provided three show homes at Kilburn Quarter London, N15, for Network Homes.

BELLOW Creating a new factor with this unique, bespoke shelving unit by Jane Clayton and Company.

trends, ensuring clients are given the best service possible."

But it's not just service that has improved with technology – shopping is easier too.

"If we had to highlight a single area that has changed and improved the design process it would be the ease of research," comments Andrew Henry of Andrew Henry Interiors. "The internet and the sharing of imagery and ideas has revolutionised the way we can communicate the ideas behind our schemes to our clients. Was there a life before Google and Pinterest?"

Louise Wynne, creative director of Interhouse Design agrees. "The biggest change for our interior design process has come with the advent of the internet. Prior to its invention, our industry had to rely solely on a small number of

companies who posted us their product brochures," she explains.

"We chose the products we wanted and would then phone or fax our order in. The range on offer was limited, and every interior design company had to choose from a similar pool of products. Now things are very different. We have access to the whole world, and a huge and varied range of suppliers – and inspiration."

Products from large, established brands as well as smaller, independent shops are now at the fingertips of interior designers, and items can be shipped direct within days. And the products that are being shipped have also come a long way thanks to technology.

"Technology has improved the process of producing advanced and complex materials together with

The recent proliferation of image-led social platforms such as Instagram, Houzz and Pinterest means that buyers are much more informed about trends and design

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**THIS PIC** Excavated bed in the big tale by Jane Clayton and Company  
**ABOVE** BEDFIT table is bringing products from an increasing array of suppliers  
**BELOW** French style sophisticated bedroom by Jane Clayton and Company  
**BOTTOM** Alexander James Interior Design is constantly developing more flexible options to provide quality show home schemes within the limits of its client's budget and cash flow.



streamline contemporary surfaces within the wallcovering, fabric, furniture and lighting industries," says Dawn Kitchener, managing director of Blocc. "Advanced IT has also enabled the process from brief to installation to become faster and more effective."  
And it's not just about the technology that has improved the interior design industry - it's also

about the technology that the buyers themselves are demanding.  
"The advancement of technology has made a huge difference to how developers are thinking about their properties. To most purchasers the technology available in the apartment is crucial in their decision-making process. It is not just about the kitchen anymore," explains Daniel Caplan, CEO of New i.d. Interiors. "Going back about 15 years, a show home was always designed around family living, but nowadays our designs are very much based on the position of technology. We will now arrange the sofas, for example, around the position of the television."  
Vogue Showhomes is also finding that a lot of new homes now incorporate media technology - meaning that this has to be carefully considered at the outset when ►

"Advanced IT has also enabled the process from brief to installation to become faster and more effective"





**LEFT** Alexander James Interior Design takes every scheme from the start

**BELOW** Newland Homes, The Old Nurseries, Freme, Somerset, by Andrew Henry Interiors

**LEFT MIDDLE** The interior design world has been opened up by the internet says Interhouse Design

**BOTTOM** A Designer Contracts show home for Lovell Homes



designing a show home. And never is such media technology more prevalent than in a luxury home.

Oakeve Interiors recently undertook the interior design of a £6m new build manor house in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. Located on one of the area's most prestigious residential roads, the property was dressed to an exceptional specification with a sumptuous, state-of-the-art interior. The combination of tactile interior design with the latest behind-the-scenes technology resulted in the property being sold within two weeks of being put on the market – and within 5% of the asking price.

A result indeed, and one that couldn't have been achieved without the combination of classic interior design, and the latest in modern technology. ■



## CONTACTS

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