interior designer

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SHOWROOM SHOWCASE

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INTERIOR DESIGNER MAGAZINE TAKES A LOOK THROUGH THE DOORS OF SOME OF THE UK'S BEST SHOWROOMS. DESIGN DUO, **STEPHENSON WRIGHT** REVEALED THEIR LATEST VENTURE, THE POST HOUSE, AT THE END OF 2019, OPENING ITS DOORS TO THEIR ESTEEMED PEERS AND CLIENTS, WAVING IN A NEW ERA OF BUSINESS FOR CO-FOUNDERS NATALIE AND JULIETTE.

For all its negative press, more often than not, I find Instagram a wonderful platform for various types of news, announcements and declarations of positivity, especially in our interior design industry. So I was tickled pink to see Natalie Stephenson and Juliette Wright in the throws of the most epic showroom opening on IG stories towards the end of last year.

The Post House was a flurry of activity, with visitors and designers alike pouring into the new spot to witness what Natalie and Juliette had come up with, in their first exciting collaborative showroom space.

Having officially opened on 14 November and located in Surrey, where the Stephenson Wright team are based, The Post House is the next step in their design empire and is a beautiful, home-like oasis of wonder, designed to feel like the most comfortable space that will inspire and relax you, as well as offering up something of a playful party spot when needed (but of course).

The Stephenson Wright team are all incredibly busy with client design work, with current projects including redesign of a Ladbroke Grove townhouse for an influential figure in the art

world; an antiques-filled home in Eaton Square which they are infusing with colour and pattern 'to breathe new life into a well-loved space'; and one of the largest new build developments in the UK - a 44,000 sq. foot home in Ascot that will feature a private spa area, swimming pool, underground garage for a super car collection, a wine cellar, cinema and an industrial kitchen fit for a Michelin star chef. On the commercial side of things, Natalie and Juliette have recently reinvented a restaurant in Mayfair, The award-winning Mayfair Chippy, and an art gallery on the Kings Road.

Just before Christmas, and in the midst of this most busy time, Natalie and Juliette took a moment to chat to Interior Designer magazine about their work their latest, more personal project and what The Post House means to them as designers and as a studio.

Natalie comments on their first meeting back before they had set up their studio, "Juliette and I first met when working together at a top interior design studio (Helen Green Design) 18 years ago and we immediately struck up a great friendship. I then moved on to run the design department within the interior design studio for Harrods private clients, but we remained firm friends and came back together to form our own studio Stephenson Wright in 2013 – when our long-term vision became a reality." Juliette added, "We hit the ground running with several high-end residential projects in London and the Home Counties and haven't looked back since!"

On opening the showroom, something that not many designers have taken on, Natalie and Juliette picked just the right spot and really considered the realistic feel of the showroom in their design of the

Image: A view from the top. Natalie and Juliette have infused their love of nature into the space.

space. "Our showroom is an exciting collaboration with our talented lighting designer, Mark Kavanagh at Future Light Design and audio visual experts, Cornflake, who provide everything from home cinemas to smart lighting, heating and security. We work seamlessly with both companies on multiple projects and it was a natural choice to collaborate with them... We've worked meticulously to ensure the interior reflects that of a high-end home in order to showcase the possibilities to our clients. This is the first luxury lifestyle showroom of its kind in the area and offers interior design, lighting design, bespoke furniture and joinery, home technology solutions, art and a collection of beautiful lighting." Juliette said. Natalie added, "The building is, as the name suggests, a converted old Royal Mail sorting office dating from 1910. Mark, from Future Light Design owns the building itself and invited us to be part of the transformation. We felt this property provided a unique and well-located space in a charming location, to base ourselves close to our own homes and within easy reach for our London suppliers too." Natalie continued, "It has long been a dream of ours to open a lifestyle showroom where we can not only display our first furniture and furnishings collection, but also collaborate with a series of brilliant designers that we really admire. We hope that visiting the space will both inspire and guide clients who are looking to create original interiors."

The space itself is unique to that of a 1910 sorting office, so there were considerations there as well as the challenge of Natalie and Juliette designing for themselves, "Naturally it's always harder as a designer to do things for yourself as you know the endless opportunities that are out there. However, we found our core inspiration focusing around our international travels together and a theme of nature, which we often draw on." said Natalie. Juleitte continued saying, "The most exciting part was the journey we went on with the design and how it had time to infuse as the space developed. The more suppliers and trades who came on board to add their individual layers to the space, the more it evolved and the more we layered the finishes, lighting and our furniture collection was born."

There is no better way to welcome clients and like-minded designers into a new space than with a launch party, which was the catalyst for this feature. Of the launch Natalie said, "The launch party really was all that we had wished it to be; the

culmination of all the hard work of designing, decorating and installing from scratch and then having the chance to finally celebrate it with friends, suppliers, clients and family was the icing on the cake! We certainly enjoyed the buzz of the evening." Juliette agreed adding, "The Post House looks so warm and inviting in the evening, the scene setting of the lighting creates such a glow with the finishes and it was a pleasure to see it being enjoyed by others. It has become quite a 'home' to us so we love being able to share this now its open. Everything came together (albeit quite near to opening!) and we even had the exterior decorated by Holly at 'And Tomorrow' with a stunning festive floral installation." More on Holly's creation later…

On the overall visions and design layout of the space Natalie said, "Our design approach is always to combine thoughtfulness with the unexpected. In a nod to Juliette's South African family connections and our travels to France and Australia, a vineyard theme runs throughout the space, from the recessed spiral wine cellar in the relaxed reception area to the gentle colour palette of rose pinks and celadon greens and warm raffia weave wallcovering by Phillip Jeffries.
"The reception area's main walls feature distinctive verdigris leaf adornments by Philip Watts Design and a hand-painted and embroidered leaf wallpaper by Fromental, in a customised light green colourway, made especially for us.

The Post House collaborators

Future Light Design
Future Light Design specialises in lighting design and Lutron control for high-end residential projects, working on luxury homes both in the UK and internationally. With a superb lighting design and professional installation, the desired ambience and mood can be created for all occasions while illuminating the beauty of the house. From inception to completion, Future Light Design will work with the architects and interior designers to realise the full potential of every project they take on.

River Woodwork
Since 2007, River Woodwork has been designing, manufacturing and installing luxury bespoke furniture in residential properties throughout London and the Home Counties. Each project is unique, specialising in exclusive finishes and varied materials we welcome new design ideas using the latest in CNC machining and skilled craftsmanship. Members of The British Woodworking Federation ensures River Woodwork provide a genuine mark of quality. Ecological sustainability is a core company policy and that philosophy is supported in making furniture that is built to last. All suppliers are asked to provide proof of commitment to sustainable forestry management and information on the source of wood and wood products.

Cornflake
From Hi-Fi to Wi-Fi, home cinemas to home security, IT to CCTV, Cornflake are the masters of technology. We design and integrate completely unique home cinema and home automation solutions into your home so that you can enjoy the ultimate smart home experience. In fact, we're so passionate about home automation – we consider it an art form.

Jan Erika
A childhood spent on the east coast of England sparked artist Jan Erika's passion for the shapes, forms, patterns and colour found in nature. After a successful career as a classical cellist, she was drawn back to art and 'the rhythm of the landscape' – something which is reflected in her work which spans painting (Paul Weller is a client), silk scarves, rug designs and tableware. She has painted live at the Royal Academy of Art and Fortnum & Mason, and this October will be at Kensington Palace.

Spiral Cellars
Spiral Cellars design, craft and install exceptional wine cellars that indulge your passion for wine. With a pedigree of over 35 years of knowledge and expertise under their belts, they have created more than 3,000 wine cellars in the UK and numerous others around the world. Spiral Cellars have become the company of choice for those wishing to create a wine cellar in their home.

Fiona Stephenson Designs
Fiona Stephenson studied at the Inchbald School of Design where she gained a diploma with merit and she is a member of the Society of Garden Designers (SGD). An award-winning landscape designer, Fiona works on residential and commercial projects across the UK and abroad. When it comes to show gardens, Fiona loves to take a dynamic approach to the designs, which has seen her win a Gold medal for her 'Lying in State' garden for Hampton Court Flower show. The WWF then approached Fiona to design their show garden, whereby she recreated the rare and naturally occurring chalk stream and gained a Silver Gilt medal for this stunning garden.

"The ground floor of the showroom hosts a fully immersive lighting demonstration room and a tranquil meeting space with sophisticated technology solutions and bespoke cabinetry by River Woodwork. Juliette added, " The mezzanine level is home to the bar area which has bespoke wall cabinetry and features our striking hand-painted bar stools by local artist Jan Erika. It has a lovely natural light and stunning view of the roof garden (designed by award winning garden designer Fiona Stephenson, Natalie's talented mother). It's a perfect venue for workshops, talks and sociable get-togethers with clients, designers and industry professionals.

"The furniture we showcase from our 'Parcel Collection' around the showroom also ties in with our vineyard design theme. Our 'Vine 'sideboard made from light stained oak, features brass inlays spelling 'Vine' and we have subtly incorporated leaf motif's and stripes that mimic the rows of grapes growing in a vineyard, into the furniture and bespoke cabinetry design too."

The showroom has to function as a useable and thought-provoking spot, so with this in mind the designers have created a haven from which clients will feel fully immersed. Juliette commented, "The showroom is an inspirational and fully immersive space for clients to meet and plan their design projects and for us to be able to show them first-hand the luxurious style and finish of our designs."

Beyond the day-to-day running of the space, it is intended to be used for hosting events and evenings, as Natalie confirms, "We designed it using some of our most trusted suppliers and creative artisans and it allows us to really show the quality of our furniture, bespoke joinery and thoughtful lighting design all together. We also look forward to hosting a series of design themed events – our mezzanine area has already proved its perfect for entertaining at our launch party!"

For a space that is to feel at once, at home and immersive, balancing the amount of collections held in the showroom at once must have been a tricky task so as not to overpower the space, having said that, Stephenson Wright had just launched a new collection in October which takes centre-stage and nods to the heritage of the beautiful building. Natalie said, "We launched our inaugural collection of luxury, eco-conscious furniture accessories at Decorex this year to complement our high-end residential and commercial design services. It features several collaborative pieces and all items are on display in our showroom." Juliette added, "We called our first collection 'Parcel', in a nod to the Post House heritage, and it features bespoke hand-painted tables and bar stools painted by local artist Jan Erika. Our case goods are made by River Woodwork using FSC certified timber and a beautiful verdigris finishes created by hand in their workshops. We have incorporated our signature Stephenson Wright stripe into unique veneer detailing and on the upholstery pieces."

Of the highlights in The Post House, it would be heard to select just a few, but the natural build of the space itself was a gift to the designers, Natalie said "I love the main focal double height wall in the showroom which features layers of clever lighting, interesting striped joinery, bronze leaves and rock crystal accessories set off against textured raffia wallpaper. It really is a show-stopping feature and draws people in to admire the complexity of the design." For Juliette, "the design highlights include our 'Duvet' armchair. Named after its super-soft cushion filling, it's a chair you really don't want to get out of! This was a crucially important factor to our collection – the usability of it as well as the appearance. I also love the very special hand-painted and embroidered leaf wallpaper by Fromental."

Further highlights in the showroom include the decadent cloakrooms which Natalie and Juliette wanted clear his and hers styles for, but with a connecting common thread. The ladies' room includes rose gold taps (Dornbracht) and a thread of gold running throughout the wallpaper. It is warm, textured and luxe, offering immediate impact, which is underpinned by clever lighting by Future Light Design, utilising under skirting lighting for max effect. The art in here is by Jan Erika with wallpaper in both wcs by Innovations and basin by Lusso Stone.

Another highlight for both designers are the floral installations, created by florists &tomorrow. The owners of the florist, Holly and Sally, were both previously interior designers and now run &tomorrow which creates unique faux flower services for interior designers. Natalie described their work, "&tomorrow created a tall slightly asymmetric arrangement for the hall console to offset the wall light and a lower piece for the meeting room. They feature similar stems and florals, protea and pops of white anthurium mixed with some feature grasses, bright fresh ferns and leaves. The hallway features some dried palm leaves for added texture, as Holly loves mixing in dried with the artificial."

Speaking about their clients and visitors to The Post House, there is something for everyone, from fellow interior designers, who Juliette hopes will "know they are in good company!" to homeowners and potential clients, who Natalie hopes will feel "welcomed and in good hands." Juliette continues, "We really hope they would feel like they wanted to invest in good lighting and a good designer before they embark on the overwhelming process of their own project."

For 2020 the design duo plans to continue to utilise this wonderful new space in all elements of their work, as Juliette says, "We will be proudly showing off the space during our client meetings and presentations" There is also more to be done in terms to adding to the space as Spiral Wine Cellars will be installing their newly launched spiral cellar in the main showroom space so we will be filling that with some 2000 bottles of wine!!"

I for one cannot wait to visit this space in 2020, to enjoy the convivial environment created by these two exquisite designers.

Stephenson Wright collaborative showroom
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The showroom is open by appointment only.

www.stephensonwright.com