



# Point of DIFFERENCE

WORDS BY DAN WARDEN



CREATE

*Trading fast fashion for longevity in design, Frances Healy has been at the top of her game for more than three decades.*

**F**rances Healy trained and worked in a top London practice for 15 years, managing the interior design for everything from classic period London homes and contemporary apartments on the banks of the River Thames, to the well-heeled country estates of Surrey, Sussex and the Home Counties. That is, until she decided it was time to bring her experience, knowledge and address book with her to the south west, ‘setting up shop’, as it were, in Devon and Cornwall.

“I grew up in Penzance in the 1970s,” she explains. “My parents bought a large Georgian country house, which was literally painted cream from top to bottom – every ceiling, wall and surface! I remember that they worked through the house, transforming each room with colour, wallpapers, pattern and textures – I loved it, and I knew from that moment on, that interior design was going to be my career.”

Having grown up here, it only seemed fitting, having ‘paid her dues’ in London, that it was here she should return to in order to launch her own practice. As she puts it: “I lived in Penzance and went to school there, and although I moved away for art school and my early working years, I always knew I would return to Cornwall.”

That was 20 years ago. Since then, Frances has overseen the interior design in some of Cornwall’s most astonishing homes, and just a quick scan of her website is enough to whet the appetite of anybody in search of inspiration for their own four walls. She continues to work across an entire spectrum of property types, too, meaning that she is just as likely to be found restoring large granite manor houses on the moors of Bodmin, Dartmoor and Exmoor, as she is detailing the designs of ultramodern, new-build houses at the ocean’s edge.

I’m intrigued to get Frances’ take on interior design in Cornwall, compared to the wider UK. In particular, London, which many might consider to be at the heart of UK design and fashion. In actual fact, she explains: “Interior design here in Cornwall is as good as in any part of the country, and I see no reason why anyone needs to compromise on design, product, quality or service, just because they are not London based.” Indeed, over 21 volumes of DRIFT to date, if we’ve learned anything, it’s that Cornwall is fertile ground for innovation, with no shortage of creatives breaking new ground across a multitude of disciplines. From crafters of handmade furniture, to weavers of luxury fabrics and wallpapers, to bespoke electrical specialists,

LEFT  
Frances Healy



artists, and more, as Frances says, there's really no need to compromise.

I find myself pondering what is most likely a naïve question, and I'm quickly proven right. I ask whether Frances can define a coastal interior, to which she replies: "No, not really! Every house and every client is different, and I would never want to enforce one 'look' on anyone. Of course, if a client wants a classic 'blue and white' seaside theme, then they can have it. Equally, if they want the whole house swathed in chintz, they can have that, too. "My job," says Frances, "is to guide, advise and hold their hand through the process, but at the end of the day it's their home, and it must reflect their wishes and personality. It would be like insisting that you must eat fish, just because you are in a harbourside restaurant!"

What about a home's surroundings, then? Is it always necessary to reflect or complement the landscape in which a home sits, with the interiors? "I think it's nice to, because where a house sits in its environment is often a big inspiration for me. But it's not essential. Everybody's home is their castle, as they say, and they should have it designed as they wish."

Of course, as is only natural with a professional as creative as Frances, it's impossible not to have her own personal 'style', but I wonder whether this ever changes at all, and if so, why? "My personal style changes all the time! Every time I look at a magazine, or go to a trade show, or stay in a new hotel – I'm constantly inspired and find myself wanting to use everything at home." Laughing, she continues: "I drive my husband mad, as I'm constantly adding a new

ABOVE  
Interior harmony



ABOVE  
A variety of styles reflects Frances' client-led approach



TOP  
Height and scale  
are important details



ABOVE  
A mix of colours, pattern and  
textures create unique schemes



cushion or lampshade, or changing a paint colour. I can't help it though – I love it!

“I do, however, try not to be led by trends. The problem with trends, is that they often become quickly dated, and I believe that if you are going to the time and expense of updating your home, you want to ensure your chosen décor has longevity.”

This is a tough line to walk, and I know from my own experience how easy it is to be led by the latest ‘in vogue’ colour, metal or style. With the advent of online retail, not to mention the world of conflicting articles, Pinterest boards and Instagram stories, it's very hard not to be led by what you see there. With this in mind I ask Frances what advice (other than hiring an interior designer) she would give to those seeking to update their home. “Take your time,” she explains. “Try and live in the house for a while first, if you can; look at it on different days, in different

weathers and at different times of the year. The light can alter so much, and this might make you rethink how you want the house to work, or the colours you want to use.

“I worked on a project recently where we moved the entire kitchen from one side of the house to the other, because the light was better. Also, because the kitchen is so often the heart of the home, this is where they knew they wanted it to be, but decisions like this are worth taking the time to make.”

Even if you're building your dream home from the ground up, says Frances: “Still go and stand in the site and see where the sun rises and sets. You'd be amazed how much it can influence your decisions. Also, as anyone else who lives in Cornwall will tell you, it's well worth checking which way the prevailing wind blows!”

[franceshealyinteriors.co.uk](http://franceshealyinteriors.co.uk)

ABOVE  
Carefully considered zones add  
interest and functionality to large  
open-plan spaces