

# Party On!

After a career in advertising in both London and New York, Niki Schäfer was professionally trained as an interior designer at KLC School of Design. Shortly after, Niki set up Niki Schäfer Interior Design, based in her hometown of Henley on Thames.

A modern-day renaissance woman, Niki is an author, penning interiors title *Creating Space*, a professional speaker, and frequently appears on radio and TV as a home expert. She is also the director of the Henley House & Garden Show, which takes place in Henley every March.

Based in the Gloucestershire countryside, Niki was approached by a private client to transform their recent extension into a lively space, suitable for any party, whilst complementing its rural surroundings.

Fabric covered double doors lead into the living room



Located in the picturesque countryside, this Chiltern stone farmhouse was about to undergo a large oak frame extension. The project brief was to design a media room, dining space, and party venue in the extension to the client's stunning country home. The client specified the desire for a contemporary extension that incorporates both the luxury and modern technology of 21st century living, whilst staying in keeping with the countryside surroundings the property is set in.

Extensions can often feel very 'bolted-on' if the scheme and flow hasn't been thought through appropriately. I was set the challenge, with a nine month timescale, to design a contemporary party-proof extension that blends naturally with the existing property.

Before any work got underway, I arranged an initial briefing meeting with the client to fully understand their vision for the project, as well as providing an opportunity to share potential ideas for the scheme. Arranging a face to face meeting is not only a great way to understand the client and their expectations, but to get a greater perspective of dimensions and scale of the space in question.

One of the main challenges I gathered from the initial meeting with the client was how to create a media room in an opened glazed space; the extension is encased by glass panel windows that span more than two stories high. Typically, media rooms are suited to basement conversions or areas of the building that are subjected to dark lighting; this is to set the ambiance and allow for the ultimate visual experience.

Excess lighting can disrupt the screening quality and detract from the contrast and colours. While it's easy to switch off or dim internal lighting, natural light unfortunately doesn't play by the same rules and can become very disruptive to visual technology.

As well as lighting, we also had to think carefully about the acoustics, glare, heat, and ventilation, for both humans and the technology. I recommended the use of sound absorbent materials wherever possible, such as fabrics, rugs, or wooden furniture to help eliminate sound reverberations. Acoustic art has grown in popularity as an innovative way to reduce noise transference and internal echoes whilst providing the room with custom art, text, or photography. ▼



Niki Schäfer

▲ However, sometimes the very solution can clash with the client's vision. Subsequent discussions with the client brought up specific preferences that they wanted to include in the rooms. The client was particularly fond of glass table tops, mirror and acrylic, the very materials – large, hard and reflective surfaces – that can interfere and cause detrimental acoustic quality. We therefore had to think carefully about how to satisfy the client's aesthetic vision whilst making sure the audio quality of the media room, in particular, didn't deteriorate.

The solution: soft furnishings. We designed fabric covered double doors that led into the living room at the rear of the property, and brought the same teal faux suede fabric throughout the room as the key colour. Highlighting one material or colour and featuring it across several different rooms can bring a sense of consistency and belonging to any building, preventing rooms from feeling disjointed and separate to the rest of the house.

As well as the double doors, there were

several Niki Schäfer bespoke items that I designed myself, including the TV unit and bar that also feature fabric coverings. Nicky Drummond Brady produced the bespoke furniture and was instrumental in the success of these furnishings.

The sofa and armchair were covered in tactile grey fabrics, chosen to add a variety in texture and to create a base colour layer for the design. Pop colours were then used on top – the faux suede teal and a shiny lime green, which appeared in the ▼



Featuring teal across several different areas brought a sense of consistency



The same flooring was used indoors and out

▲ cushions, a plush throw, drinks coasters and buttons in the dining chairs.

Using teal as the accent colour, the rest of the room was left as a neutral grey allowing the indoor-outdoor nature of the space to be appreciated. The house is situated next to a wonderful English garden with stunning views of the pond, stone walls, and the courtyard featuring magnificent sculpture collections. On the wall connecting the extension with the original house, I left the Chiltern stone untouched, giving the room character and to act as a unique feature

wall, bringing the outdoors in.

For flooring, we chose to use a very hard porcelain grey floor that had a hint of metallic. This was selected to add warmth and pick up the colour in the oak beams that were part of the extension's structuring. No other oak was used in the scheme, thus generating a more sophisticated, rather than rustic, ambience.

Although aesthetically pleasing, the highly robust flooring proved difficult to cut when it came to installing the fibre optic lighting!

The final creation was worth all the broken drill bits, as the fibre optic lighting twinkles around the perimeter of the room and outside in the courtyard adding a magical quality and definite conversation piece.

The same flooring was used indoors and out, creating a cohesive, flowing atmosphere. We also used the same tiles to build a fire table to sit around in the evening. Lit pots were then arranged around the courtyard for trees or flowers. To date, these have yet to been used for shrubbery, but ice buckets when entertaining! ▼

▲ An important aspect to designing any room is lighting. Bringing a contemporary and vibrant feel to the room, the ceiling lanterns transition from blues to purples to orange.

The dining room's chandelier, from the Contemporary Chandelier Company, is a centrepiece to the room. Not wanting the other light fittings to compete with it, we found sculptured paper shades that provide a beautiful glowing light as well as interesting shapes to the room.

The client was closely involved throughout the whole process of the design and, as an artist themselves, contributed a lot of ideas. The client was particularly pleased with the glass and marble Roche Bobois dining table. Being acoustically flawed, it was the exact opposite of what I'd originally recommended, but positioned under the bespoke chandelier it reflects light and stands out as a true feature piece.

It is a pleasure to work with clients who let designers 'run with' ideas that might,

at first hand, seem a bit unusual. This was the case with the bespoke double doors I created; they began as a fun idea, but ended up playing a pivotal role in the success and originality of the room. Ideas need to be encouraged and can grow in all kinds of unexpected ways if given the right TLC.

Overall, the scheme was a very successful combination of the travelling and international nature of the client and their very English traditional home.



Soft furnishings help eliminate sound reverberations