

RIGHT: The transformed Tod's store features soft furnishings - like the yellow velvet sofa and green curtains - designed by India Mahdavi (pictured) herself. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Shoes, £550, Tod's. The Sloane Street exterior; inside it conjures up 'apartment chic'



India Mahdavi's Tod's store in Knightsbridge is a virtuoso vision of a home from home

Life in technicolour

By Charlie GOWANS-EGLINTON Photographs by Chris TUBBS

'They have a whole bunch of names for me,' says Paris-based architect and designer India Mahdavi, who the interiors world has dubbed the 'reigning queen' and 'virtuoso' of colour. 'Yes, I love colour – because it's happy, it brings energy to a space. I grew up in the United States in the mid '60s and my first memories are in Technicolor. I remember watching cartoons, my first movies – it was all in Technicolor.'

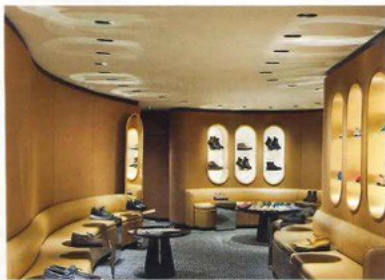
Mahdavi's latest ode to colour can be found on London's Sloane Street, at the new apartment-boutique of Italian luxury leather house Tod's. 'I always thought Tod's was a brand about colour, with their Gomminos in every single hue,' says Mahdavi. Those signature driving shoes are arranged in a rainbow on a stand at the centre of the room – the stand itself is the bright red of a sports car and shaped like a wheel, in reference to the original purpose of this now classic design. 'This is what they are known for, and although they have tons of other things that are fantastic, you shouldn't forget the DNA,' says Mahdavi.

On the ground floor, the women's collections occupy a living room and dining room joined by a long bar. Downstairs, menswear is housed in a room more like a gentleman's club. 'Diego [Della Valle, CEO of Tod's Group] said, "I'd like this to look like an apartment." So then I started cutting out images of all sorts. What is the language of an apartment? It's a curtain, a low table, an L-shaped sofa, bookshelves. You put all these elements together and that's the language.'

Vivid velvets – green curtains, a yellow sofa – in three different weights are Mahdavi's own designs, part of her True Velvet range for the French furnishing fabric and wallpaper company Pierre Frey. 'I know that the colours work together because I've been working on them for such a long time.' The same shades can be found on Tod's bags, too, an extension of the collaboration between the architect and the brand.

'The green belongs to London, with all the gardens. The yellow is more of a mustard – maybe it has a bit of saffron in it. I wanted yellow because it will bring sunshine, and I think London lacks that.' As we sit chatting on the velvet sofas, passers-by pause to look inside, drawn in by Mahdavi's homely aesthetic.

Making a shop a destination, rather than just a space in which to sell things, is crucial to survival, and Mahdavi's creations are certainly destinations. Take Sketch's Gallery, with its pink walls and custom velvet banquette seating and chairs, all by Mahdavi, topped by 239 David Shrigley drawings – the most Instagrammed restaurant



in London. Then there's Ladurée's macaron stores in Beverly Hills and Geneva's Quai des Bergues, the art-deco bedrooms at Claridge's and the Coburg bar at The Connaught, all equally photogenic. For Mahdavi, social-media appeal isn't something to be sneered at; rather, she considers it in her designs. 'I trained my eye to work like a camera. And I know that if something looks good in a photo, then it looks good in reality.' Her studio, furniture showroom and accessories boutique – all scattered along the rue Las Cases in Paris's 7th arrondissement and employing around 20 staff between them – are equally as impactful.

'I wanted to be a film-maker,' she recalls. 'Someone said, the best film-makers are all architects, so I said, "Let's start with that." And then along the way I got into this. What I do is very similar to film-making because I tell stories and then I create a total environment. The actors are just people from the street.'

Mahdavi's brief – to make clients feel at home – was more complex in practice than it sounds. 'I wanted you to feel comfortable inside but, in fact, you have a lot of outside through the windows. So the curtains frame it, this L-shaped sofa – you're nearly on the street, but you feel kind of protected, don't you? Those are all the little tricks that you think are easy, but are [the result of] 20 years of experience.'

De Gournay pink silk covers the walls of the stairwell to the men's space: the first attempt didn't dry as it should, so was stripped out and a new batch of silk applied, this time perfectly so. The flooring is geometric, 'more angular for the women's space and downstairs is more curvy for the men; some femininity for the men and some masculinity for the women'. Mahdavi has even contributed a pair of Robert Longo artworks from her own collection to the wall. 'I thought there was something missing.'

The luxury retail landscape has shifted – and so has what a shopper wants from a bricks-and-mortar store. Experience is the new credo. 'It's not about *buying buying buying*,' says Mahdavi, 'because today you can do that on the internet. Diego wanted to provide a real experience. It's like being at home, taking your time: you come in, you sit down, you grab a book, you're served a coffee. There's something timeless about this whole thing.' Shoppers may leave with a pair of shoes or a bag, but the exchange offers a window into a lifestyle that they're buying into as well. 'And I think that's what Tod's is about: it is really providing a dream.' ●

