

## DESIGN &amp; DECORATING

20 ODD QUESTIONS

## India Mahdavi

The Paris-based designer talks color timidity, celebrating your bad taste and her favorite place to eat like an Egyptian pharaoh

**"MY WORK IS** about a modern comfort, which is also visual and sensual," said India Mahdavi of her unapologetically colorful interiors. "We've come to a world that can be quite harsh, spending a lot of time in front of a screen. You have to compensate in some way with your surroundings." By this, the Tehran-born, Paris-based architect and designer means tactile textiles and materials, like velvet upholstery and silk wallpaper; organically-shaped seating; and a color palette that knows no limit to compensate for the unrelieved bluish grays of the personal-tech bubble.

The prolific designer—who recently opened a Marie Antoinette-meets-Hollywood version of the popular Parisian macaron shop Ladurée, in Beverly Hills—is wasting no time this year, with a forthcoming redesign of London's tony Connaught hotel bar and the launch of a round leather coffee table that folds up like a book for Louis Vuitton at the Milan furniture fair. We caught up with Ms. Mahdavi, who shared her wisdom on diversifying your dining room, why cork isn't just a '70s relic, and the biggest error you can make when decorating with color.

**The most common mistake people make when designing with color is:** they don't dare. I think the minimum palette of colors should be three, but four or five is great. What bothers me is when people do two colors, like orange and white. It's a bit boring and very static.

**To find three colors that work well together:** take two that are quite close to each other, like a medium blue and a medium green, or a fuchsia and a red, or a dark brown and a dark blue. Then you can break them up with a black or white, which are both very graphic and bring depth.

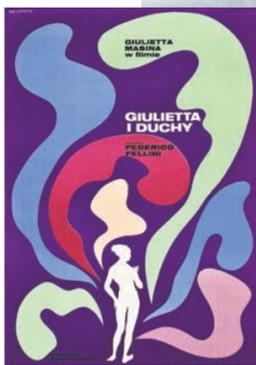
**Colors that make people joyful include:** yellow, blues and, most recently, pink.

**To make a room more masculine:** use more wood, hard materials, square shapes, grays and browns. Then soften it a little. If you have a very square sofa, you might soften it by pairing it with a round side table.

**One of the most underappreciated materials is:** rattan. It's associated with inexpensive furniture, but it has a very warm texture. Also overlooked are linoleum floors—especially when you use different color tiles to make designs—and cork. Cork brings a certain warmth and texture, and you can get it in several tints of brown now.

**My design pet peeve is:** anything too matchy-matchy. I like things that are slightly off. Some colors when you put them together, they swear at each other. I like putting colors in danger.

**One of my signature design tricks is:** using sofas with a certain roundness. They are more versatile and give a room a different, less static



feel. Sometimes you come into a room and see the back of a rectangular sofa. It's pretty harsh, no?

**A space that's hard to decorate is:** the dining room. Entertaining today is very different. To deal with it, I make dining

rooms versatile. I might include a bookshelf, so it can be turned into an office. With [laptop] computers, you can work anywhere.

**Colors I'm gravitating toward now include:** terra-cotta and what I call a purple rain (between a purple and fuchsia), Bordeaux red, mint and lilac.

**When I fly, I always carry:** a Le Papier Fait de la Résistance sketchbook and a case with my Caran d'Ache pen-

cils. It gives me pleasure and reminds me not to forget to draw. That's what I'm supposed to do, create. Not necessarily answer emails.

**A strange tip that really works is to:** reflect both your good and bad taste when you decorate. Incorporate kitsch elements or something that has tons of strong colors. You don't want things to be perfect.

**Right now, I like to use fabrics:** on the walls, like a wallpaper. I think it tailors a room very nicely. Silk, linens and natural coverings, like natural fiber coverings—to add texture to walls.

**Films that inspire my work are:** ones by Fellini and Stanley Kubrick. Also, "The Party" with Peter Sellers. It's a crazy house. There's so much humor, but I also like the colors in that movie, including the way Peter Sellers is dressed, in a pink beige

suit with a red tie and a pair of white shoes. Last time I watched, I was taking photos of the screen.

**One of the most beautiful hotels is:** Adrère Amellal, an eco-lodge in the Egyptian desert. Everything is constructed with salt and mud. There's no electricity. The food is a modern version of old Egyptian cuisine, the cuisine of the pharaohs. Everything is cooked *feu de bois*, with fire and wood. Everything is organic because the food is grown in the oasis. You have sycamore fruit and mangoes. You have basil that has a bit of a lemon taste.

**When decorating a room, I start with:** my intuition. I listen to my body. I think about where I would like to sit, what I would like to look at, where I want to be placed in the room.

—Edited from an interview by Kelly Michèle Guerotto

## EVOLUTION



## SET THE CLOCK FORWARD

The grandfather timepiece gets more than a face-lift

**THEN** Pendulum clocks, a big advance over the hourglasses and sundials humans once peered at, remained the most precise timekeeping technology until the early 1900s. Based on Galileo's discovery that rhythmically swinging bodies can denote intervals of time, the first such clock was put in motion by Englishman William Clement in 1670. The long-case version—its 6-foot body often elaborately embellished—became a staple in homes and businesses, where it (and its chimes) alone tracked the hours. As for its nickname, credit the 1876 song "My Grandfather's Clock," by American Henry Clay Work. Inevitably, technology yielded more-compact options, and many grandfather clocks entered retirement or became covetable heirlooms.

Chippendale Tall-Case Clock, sold at Christies in 2012 for \$242,500

**NOW** "I have always wanted to design a grandfather clock, but it had to be completely opposing to what we've come to expect," said London designer Lee Broom of his new limited-edition take on the tall ticker. Referencing the sharp, simple lines of Brutalist architecture, Mr. Broom's youthful grandfather clock sheds the traditional warm-wood countenance. Of his decision to craft it from Carrara marble, he said, "I wanted something monolithic and statuesque." No glass protects the polished-brass spherical pendulum and triangular prism of the weight, which nestles into the right-angled clock chamber. And though Mr. Broom eschewed chimes, the mechanism does require its owners to perform a time-honored chore: winding it every five days. —Cara Gibbs

Time Machine, \$55,000, pre-order at Lee Broom, 212-804-8477



**YOU CAN HELP 20,000 NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN GO BACK TO SCHOOL CONFIDENT AND PREPARED**

NOTEBOOKS  
RUBERS  
PENCILS  
PAPER  
ERASERS  
DICTIONARIES  
PROTRACTORS  
PENS  
CALCULATORS

**OPERATION BACKPACK**

Volunteers of America

**Thousands of school-age kids live in a New York City homeless shelter. One of the most devastating consequences of homelessness is the impact it has on a child's education. Without our help, many children who are homeless would approach the school year without the supplies they need to succeed in their classes.**

**We're seeking sponsors now for the 2017 campaign.**

212.496.4305 | [OperationBackpackNYC.ORG](http://OperationBackpackNYC.ORG)



**SHADY LADY** Clockwise from left: India Mahdavi in New York's Ralph Pucci showroom; her Jelly Pea Sofa; sketching tools; linoleum squares; Adrère Amellal hotel; 'purple rain' paint; Fellini movie poster.