

VANTAGE

COVERING ST JOHN'S WOOD, MAIDA VALE, PRIMROSE HILL, MARYLEBONE, REGENT'S PARK AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Boutique Village

LOCAL LUXURY IN
PRIMROSE HILL

WEDDING
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FASHION, FRILLS AND FLOWERS



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CLASSY Casa

Sitting in her stunning home in the heart of St John's Wood, Anna Dodonova looks every inch the stylish interior designer. She talks to *Emma Mills* about designing furniture, creating outstanding spaces and living locally

If appearances matter, then Anna Dodonova has got it covered. Her home, and her fashion sense, are top notch. In towering heels, chic black trousers and stunning statement jewellery, she relaxes amid stylish lighting, plush sofas, bespoke flowers and one off art pieces, her beloved Pomeranian Pushkin scampering around at her feet. With a home overlooking Lords, a successful furniture store, Anna Casa, in Chelsea Harbour and an international interior design service under her belt, Anna has certainly established herself as successful London businesswoman.

"I love London," she says. "For a designer it's so inspiring to work with such a cosmopolitan range of clients. My base in Chelsea Harbour means I'm surrounded by creative people too, which I love."

Having moved to London four years ago after studying graphic design in Berlin, she started working predominantly as a freelance designer, indulging a creative passion she has had since childhood: "I was drawing and painting from a young age, I had private lessons throughout school, and then did three years at University which was great for me; East Berlin is a very creative place and was a great environment to work in." Anna then worked for an advertising agency but found the work wasn't as creative as she had hoped. "I am an artist inside," she admits with a smile. "I decided to come to London because Germany is not as developed as the UK in terms of interior design. And I absolutely loved it from the minute I got here."

Anna first lived in Mayfair before moving to St John's Wood and opening her furniture store in



Chelsea. "I have such a passion for high end brands and this allows me to pick and choose all the things I love even if I can't use them for my clients. It made sense for my work to be in Chelsea and for me to live in North West London because I like to get the space from work and it is quieter up here. Mayfair was fun but there were buses and traffic going past all the time. I like the local community feeling. Regent's Park when the weather is good is wonderful. I get on my bike in the mornings and it gives me energy to start the day. I love St John's Wood high street - it's like a little village, I know people here and I have my favourite bakery, drycleaners, fish shop. It's perfect."

Despite wanting space from work, Anna admits that very rarely is she not working. "I don't like not to work. Hate to be bored. Even when I'm on holiday I last two hours on the beach and then I have to check my emails!" Perhaps this tireless work ethic isn't surprising, considering how much her business has grown in just four years. Having recently opened a design studio next to her showroom, and about to launch a comprehensive website that deals with the interior design side of her business as well as being a portal to buy her furniture online, she is also working with various designers to design and make her own furniture, while still travelling globally as part of her business.

"Being able to design is about envisaging what I want, and then getting it made. A table I worked on with one of my furniture clients is now being developed to a whole collection which is being presented at the Milan fair."

Times are good, then. But they weren't always; the economic crash brought real challenges to the luxury interior and fashion industries, and Anna wasn't alone in feeling the pinch. "The crisis was hard," she recalls. "It was a big challenge. But I have to say, I was lucky because of my choice to open in the Design Centre in Chelsea. It's a big family, with a real sense of support. On the high street you can be quite isolated but I have



people around who know what they're doing, and I can ask advice, which is really helpful. I've never run a shop before or had my own business but everyone was so supportive."

Not afraid to ask for help and advice when you need it is an admirable quality and one Anna has made use of across her business. The interior design side of things doesn't just cover furnishings and accessories; she can, if required, manage the whole project, working with architects, contractors, surveyors, council offices and lawyers. "I've had to learn a lot about things I never thought I'd need to know but it's also been down to a small team that I trust. I have to make the right choice and that choice is about choosing the right people. It's one of the hardest jobs, but you build that network slowly; you don't try and jump over yourself."

Despite not having experience in running her own business, Anna has found that, because of her passion, so much of the work she does is second nature. "My favourite part of the role is the connection with the client. You feel great when you bring your ideas to them and they love it. I love what I do - my hobby is my work!" ■

www.annalasa.net

ANNA'S TOP STYLE TIPS

"My own personal style is modern mixed with classic. I like to make things personal, mixing brands and styles together. And I try to learn from my clients too. When you enter someone's home you see their own personal style, and often the cultural influences behind that. It's fascinating."

1. Use lots of neutrals and light colours. Mix in other colours according to the seasonal trends and achieve a positive atmosphere.
2. Plan ahead. Planning is very important before you start anything; in particular think about the foot traffic to and from each room and plan for this to flow easily.
3. Avoid filling up interior spaces with lots of furniture - less is definitely more. Give pieces the chance to stand out and leave as much room and air between them as possible.
4. If you like one particular style or period, rather than filling a room with everything in the same style, choose one personal piece to make a central focus. This makes the space more interesting. If you don't have one piece that can do this, keep it simple with a selection of little accent pieces.
5. Invest in good yet stylish pieces of furniture for storage and organise all your bits and pieces. I recommend that only a small amount of books, accessories and collectables are left out so your interior is kept neat and stylish at all times.