





FLOORCOVERING ON THE STAIRS: WESTEX CARPETS - HALLWAY RUG: CARPETS OF KIDDERMINSTER



Interior Designer Vanessa Brady, whose award-winning creations have appeared in everything from national papers to Homes and Gardens and idFX is the Chairman of the Society of British Interior Design, an internationally reaching organisation aimed at promoting excellence in design and extending professional accreditation to designers to protect the profession of Interior Design in Britain. As she prepared for the SBID official launch event in October, she spoke to Retail Floors about her vision for the future of Interior Design in the UK, the importance of education within the design profession and her vision on future flooring trends.

"SBID is not a trade association but rather was established to promote the profession and to protect the interests of the public by providing a one-stop destination for sourcing fully qualified interior designers and support services for the industry. We can look after the interests of suppliers and that makes us hugely important as we embrace manufactures and suppliers of quality and in doing so further protect our profession from cheap duplication. Our business model is protected so we can't be replicated. Our membership (672 so far!) is predominantly interior design and larger architectural practices followed by manufacturers and suppliers. We have a few affiliates at present and the student chapter for Universities, but we do not recognize design schools as promoting the profession at adequate practice level.

The Society of British Interior Design was conceived at Christmas 2008 after Vanessa

heeded the call to found an organisation that would set a national standard and represent the industry. Vanessa knew from the start that education would be the key to SBID because it formed the "absolute basis" of what she wanted to achieve. To this end she enlisted the help of designer Simon Cavelle who has extensive knowledge and experience of design education and an international reputation for championing the profession in the UK.

"I knew together we could create a much awaited change to the landscape of design in Britain. I know business and how to amortise a company, industry or product within the property and interior design sector. Simon has been proactive in Britain as a promoter of the profession and best practice for many years and it is he who is responsible for the partnerships of the most highly respected international bodies that exist in Britain today."

SOCIETY GIRL

RETAIL FLOORS INTERVIEWS VANESSA BRADY, INTERIOR DESIGNER

the couch get up the stairs? Will it turn round the staircase? Are there any weight impact issues, traffic areas, regulations and codes, etc? If you don't consider these things you could end up with a lot of furniture sitting in the streets which you are responsible for.

"If you work in a company or for a business, you have to understand costs because budget is everything. Graduates also don't seem to have a very good understanding of installation in terms of the product. If they don't understand the facilities and the use of a product, then they'll specify the wrong product. Beauty in my view is the final consideration as a professional. The first is function, then performance and cost. From that array of product choice you create the correct specification. If you hold yourself out as an expert you also have to understand the mechanics of a building: electrical, plumbing and water - they affect everything else in the design. As for surfaces, a designer should know and fully understand issues such as floor levels and unevenness, dampness, traffic areas, sustainability and budget as well as transportation, originality of source and manufacture techniques etc. This is the true meaning of a designer."

From years of positive and high-quality experience using interns from certain American universities, Vanessa wants to see the standard of internship schemes raised in the UK where, she says, "many interns are simply used as cheap labour: cleaning cupboards, making coffee, faxing, etc. instead of learning as much as possible about the job."

"The US has a very different level of measuring to qualify as a professional. There's an inspection of the projects contained within a CV, a professional must have a minimum requirement of a degree to be a professional designer. This is measured by an independent exam, health and safety monitoring and enforced practice regulations. Clear guidelines on measuring knowledge and ability exist and students complete feedback forms, it's very much more structured and professional. This is something we want to achieve with SBID and we want to address how graduate degree courses are preparing students for their career."

SBID is also reaching out to Europe and beyond to become an organization that will "incorporate the European Standards of qualification for an interior designer, which are the highest measured levels for the profession, making SBID the industry bearer in Britain. The benefit for the consumer is huge, as those who look for an ECIA (European Council of Interior Architects) represented country will get the same standard measure across the board." Already SBID has

links to 17 European countries and the USA. No other British organization has previously been a member of the ECIA, which has left Britain so far disadvantaged in competition as well as opportunity.

"It's good for competition, enthuses Vanessa, those countries' residents get the benefit of the standard here in the UK, and when our members go to Europe they automatically get equal opportunity. We intend to further promote our industry standard and apply to the Government to protect the title of a Designer and therefore the profession and its value to Britain." This move is yet another step SBID are taking towards combating "cowboy elements" within the design world. Interior Designers in the UK do not yet have the protection of governing or accrediting bodies which protect both professionals and consumers in other construction-related trades.

SBID aside, I couldn't sit with such a talented designer and not get her views on flooring trends. Vanessa sees a return to what she calls the "Shepherd's Pie era", a return to comforting, homely items brought on by the recession.

"Perhaps we have moved on from the era of "show" to that of comfort. You come home to a comfy sofa to crawl onto, luxury floorings, soft carpet underfoot as well as warm textured wood flooring. These textures add a layer of comfort as well as being practical for cleaning and easy sweeping. There's a lot of country furniture, cosiness and warmth, the security that came with yesterday. In terms of flooring we're moving back to carpet. I think we'd moved away because of heat. I like wood flooring but I love to have rugs and insets, there's nothing like getting out of bed and putting your feet into a squishy rug or carpet in Britain we are still cold in the morning with the still too frequent gray skies, I love tiles as well in all the communal areas. Ground floor interiors are good for wood and sisals."

Our clients nowadays are driven by source as much as by price and longevity as well as sustainability. Reflecting over the last ten years, people used to ask "How long is this wood flooring guaranteed?". Now it's also "Where is it from?", "How is it manufactured? It's a very important sales point from our perspective. We always need a certificate for wood flooring. Dampness and leaks are major issues in the UK because we have so many historic buildings, crooked floors etc. We've just used this woven vinyl in an old shed conversion that led into a house and the levels were different. We didn't want a ridge so we used the vinyl flooring and floated it into the next room where it met the 10mm tile and it worked wonderfully."

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FLOOR TILES: PORCELANOSA

The pair agree that many design schools currently are not adequately preparing students for the challenges and demands of the interior design market. So strong is the focus on actual design that little attention is paid to finance, business skills or specification training. Vanessa cites an example of a graduate intern who, when asked to source a bed for a client, did little more than Google a list of six beds then declared the work done.

"I explained that the client can do that on his own but as a professional charging a fee for a service we need to deliver much more than a sourcing service - that's not design that's shopping. We have to give clients options. It's not just about budget - although that is very important, but there are so many other concerns that as a recent graduate, she possessed zero knowledge of. I found that shocking. Besides deliveries, there are logistical issues: How will

