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DESIGNS FOR LIVING

Meet Doshi Levien, the creative duo behind JL's acclaimed new Open Home interiors collection

Jonathan Levien, co-founder of Doshi Levien, talks to Dalia Dawood about the design studio's exclusive 'Open Home' collection for John Lewis' Design Collective – furniture designed for today's homes...

DESIGNS FOR LIFE



Q Why did you choose John Lewis for your first British collaboration on the high street?

Nipa [Doshi, left, co-founder of Doshi Levien] and I have worked extensively with Italian brands and we've learned a lot about new production technologies and materials. We wanted to bring that knowledge and culture to Britain, and John Lewis was the right fit. If you look at which company in the UK is making design accessible and distributing it to such a wide number of people, it's John Lewis – a phenomenal company with a loyal following. It's almost as if we wanted our neighbours to have our products – that's the kind of reach John Lewis has.

Q What's the thinking or theme behind the collection?

We're noticing that people want to live in large, open spaces and that activities in the home have merged and are happening in one space, such as dining, playing, cooking.

That's why we think furniture has a larger part to play in defining how we use our homes. A sofa, for example, is quite bulky and sedentary, but that's not for everyone – people want to see more of their interiors. The Pondok sofa in our collection is lighter for that reason, but is still comfortable. We made absolutely sure we wouldn't compromise on comfort.

Q How do the pieces you've created cater for British homes and consumers?

We've pitched our work as modern because that's what we do. But a British customer likes a warmer notion of modern, so we've aligned our pieces

with Scandinavian design, which reflects that warm yet modern approach. British homes are also smaller than European ones – our pieces are lighter to make the home feel more airy.

Q What's your favourite piece in the collection and why?

The one that we put a lot of effort into in terms of getting the sculptural feel of it right was the Nami chair (*below*). We went through so many iterations of it, but we hit the right note with a little model we made to show to the John Lewis buyers and they loved it. We were determined to keep the essence of the model in the production stages. It's designed to cocoon the



person and create a space around them. To us a chair is not just an object, it's a space. It is as much about how you look as how you feel sitting in it.

Q Does Open Home respond to the way people live today?

I would hope our collection offers that – it's there to help people live. Our home, for example, is an accumulation of pieces over time. I'm more for that idea of building a home gradually, and that's the way our collection has been designed. Each piece has its own identity, but it also works as a whole.

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Inspiration for the way we live



Contemporary design has been enjoying a long and lively run on the international stage, but it's growing in popularity on a much more local platform: our homes. John Lewis has a strong focus on design, heightened by its current Open Home collaboration with design studio Doshi Levien.

The studio's collection is part of Design Collective, John Lewis' seasonal collaborations with renowned designers to create contemporary products for the modern home. "We've had some insights over the years that tell us provenance resonates with our customers," says Pip Prinsloo, John Lewis' Design Manager, Home (*above*). "It's important to them to know where a product is made, the materials used to create it and how it's manufactured. We hadn't introduced the designer before, but we're collaborating with people who are doing exciting, different things with design, so we wanted to tell those stories."

Doshi Levien is a fabulous chapter in the Design Collective story – their 'handwriting', says Pip, sets them apart in a way that's captivating for customers. Open Home's mix of Scandi-inspired colours and sculptural shapes sits well with what people are doing with their homes, using them as contemporary living spaces, she adds. "Designers like them push us forwards and set us apart from our competitors. On the front of our *Home* catalogue (*see over page*), we always carry the slogan 'Inspiration for the way we live now'... Doshi Levien's collection fits that philosophy perfectly."

The sky's the limit, people...

The new collaboration with Doshi Levien reflects the Partnership's aim to 'differentiate on product', with John Lewis and Waitrose developing exclusive own-brand collections.

Paula Nickolds (*right*), MD, John Lewis, spoke of John Lewis' and Waitrose's decision to invest more in innovation and design in a joint session with Waitrose MD Rob Collins at February's Leadership Summit and Partnership Council. "We need to treat our brands like the prized assets they are," she said.

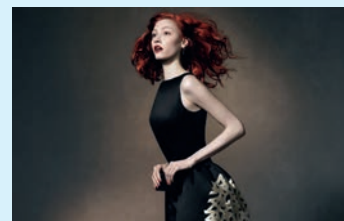
Paula also highlighted the potential if John Lewis could reach a point where 50% of its ranges were either exclusive to it or part of its own-brand offer. "We're setting our ambitions so high that we're setting the standard at the bar of the international brands," she said, asking her audience to 'imagine a world where our brands are the first choice, best in class, not just on a national stage, but internationally, too'.



Hit collaborations



Somerset by Alice Temperley
When launched? September 2012
What is it? An exclusive collection by the renowned British fashion designer



Bruce by Bruce Oldfield
When launched? September 2015
What is it? A collaboration, in selected stores, with couturier Bruce Oldfield



Loaf
When launched? September 2016
What is it? A collaboration with Loaf to create exclusive sofas and footstools



Palmer//Harding for Modern Rarity
When launched? September 2016
What is it? Designers Palmer//Harding's capsule collection of structured shirts



Genevieve Bennett for Design Collective
When launched? October 2016
What is it? A range of Art Deco-inspired cushions, rugs and wallpaper

WIN!

3x £100 Hotelopia Vouchers

PHOTO: EXTRAVAGANTINI

With winter well and truly behind us, it's time to think about that summer break, and even better you could win one of three £100 Hotelopia vouchers to help you on your way.

Hotelopia works with hotels and providers in the UK and across the world to help you book the perfect break.

The vouchers can be used in over 70,000 hotels worldwide, subject to availability, and must be used before 31 August 2017.

All Partners can also get 14% discount (up from the usual Partner discount of 12%) on UK and worldwide hotels if you book with Hotelopia before the end of April. Visit www.partnerchoice.co.uk for details of how to book. Partners will need to visit a dedicated page of Hotelopia to book – <http://whitelabels.hotelopia.com/JLP>.

To be in with a chance of winning answer the following question:

What is the usual Hotelopia discount offered to Partners throughout the year?

Send your answer with your full name, branch and phone number to gazette@johnlewis.co.uk with 'Hotelopia' in the subject line by midnight on Friday 5 May. All usual terms and conditions apply.

To find out about upcoming offers you can subscribe to the Hotelopia newsletter at <http://whitelabels.hotelopia.com/JLP>.

Partnership Terms and Conditions: All usual Partnership competition terms and conditions apply, and are available on the Partner intranet • Competition entry is open to John Lewis Partnership employees/members sending the right responses before the 5 May • The draw will take place in the first 15 days of May and the voucher(s) will be issued between then and the 31 May • The voucher can be used until the 31 August 2017 • You can use this voucher in over 70,000 hotels worldwide, subject to availability • Voucher not redeemable online – please see call centre instruction to redeem the code • Voucher redeemable only via our call centre – please call us on 0203 499 4587 to speak to our agents and have the promo code ready to finalize your reservation on the phone • The winner(s) is (are) responsible for expenses and arrangements not specifically included in the prizes, including any necessary travel documents, passports and visas • You can only use this voucher once and in a single transaction • You cannot exchange this voucher for cash and it is not transferrable to another person • Confirmation of the prize will be made in writing to the winner(s) with promo code available in a PDF attachment • Partners may submit one entry only for this competition



SPOTLIGHT ON: Doshi Levien featured in *The Book*, JL and Waitrose's joint customer publication

Q Can you tell us about your creative process as a design duo?

It begins with a discussion about the feeling behind the collection and what parameters there are for the project. Then we go away and come up with individual designs. We have different ways of working: Nipa will go into her sketchbook and start painting and drawing lovely, irresistible illustrations, while my approach is to sketch in 3D. I use wire, card and tape to make mini sculptures in a more hands-on way. The hard bit is when we come together to offer criticism of each other's work. It's a constructive process as it's about our interpretations of the pieces and it works for us.

Q It's rare that this type of quality design is seen on the high street – did you consciously want to make this accessible to more people?

Yes. With the right collaboration and retailer, you can create these accessible and affordable designs. It's bridging the gap between high end and high street.

Q Are you a John Lewis shopper?

Yes I am – it's one of the reasons why John Lewis was a good partner for us. I think the last thing I bought was bed linen. I'm always amazed that I can buy something online and pick it up the next day. It frees up our time to do other things we enjoy.

Q Such as...?

Nipa and I are learning Indian classical music. Nipa's learning classical singing and I play the tabla drums. It's another creative outlet for us, although we haven't become a musical duo... we'll stick to design! 🎵

YOU'RE THE DESIGNER BEHIND THE TEXTILE DESIGN OF JOHN LEWIS' SPRING/ SUMMER 2017 KIN WOMENSWEAR COLLECTION: TELL US ABOUT YOUR BRAND.

I started developing my brand after graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2007 – 10 years ago this year! I launched my first pattern-centred interiors products in 2010, and have been designing under my own name ever since. I have launched new collections each year at London Design Festival, and lately I've started working on larger-scale projects, such as my collaboration with John Lewis.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO LAUNCH YOUR OWN BRAND INSTEAD OF WORKING FOR ANOTHER DESIGN HOUSE?

I quickly realised how important colour, drawing and the connection I had with my working processes were to me. I felt I wouldn't be able to push this through working under another company's design 'handwriting'. I thought that as I was starting out in the industry I wanted to give my best shot at establishing something for myself. It's been incredibly hard work but so very worthwhile.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR DESIGN AESTHETIC...

Contemporary, pattern, print, mark-making, texture, collage, colour, cut out, playful, statement: these are all words I'd use to describe the aesthetic of my work. For me, it is all about drawing and colour, and how the two work together. I am obsessed with process, collage and printmaking. My work is most often abstract in nature and I look at lots of painters' work to inspire my own: people like Betty Woodman, Jean Arp, Robert Motherwell and Ellsworth Kelly. There aren't any restrictions on my inspiration. Fashion and architecture play a huge role, too.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST FORAY INTO FASHION – WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO WORK WITH JOHN LEWIS?

John Lewis is such a quality British retailer with great history, but it has a real understanding of contemporary design. On meeting the Kin womenswear team for the first time, we