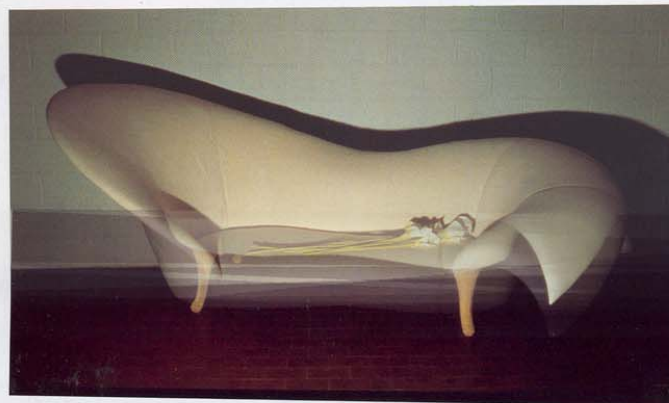


Designer



No Time For Minimalism

An English designer working in Italy prefers self indulgence



Minimalism is not part of Joanna Lyle's vocabulary. This British designer's world is animated by swirls, vivid fuchsias, stylized flowers and sequins. Indeed, her latest project under the Lyle & Lisa Design brand, is with Swarovski. For the Austrian crystal company, Lyle and her business partner Lisa Faatland, are currently designing cabinets, sofas, cushions and armchairs enriched with the famed crystals, often paired with studs. "I like decorative objects and three-dimensional designs, and working with colours – doing what I'm good at – it's pure self-indulgence..," said Lyle in an interview at her Milan apartment-studio which reflects her personality. "I

love déco things, and have never been interested in minimalism. For a while so much seemed to be grey, beige, square and uninteresting, but I thought it best not to force myself into a mould – to stick with what I'm good at," Lyle observes. Although the designer concedes her life is hectic, juggling a family and a career, she says she has never been as "assured as over the past couple of years," thus hinting at her growing business and professional reputation.

Lyle, born in the UK, moved to Italy in the early '90s to work on projects such as the Ovo canisters with Alessi. Other highlights have included neo-baroque armchairs with Arredaesse and the velvet Delilah sofa inspired

by a calla lily, with Edizioni Galleria Colombari. The Delilah sofa in fuchsia takes centre stage in Lyle's apartment, facing a lilac wall.

Lyle attributes her eclecticism to the British school system. "We were encouraged to approach design in a practical way and attended workshops where we would do glass-blowing, ceramics, silversmithing," she said, noting that in Italy design is more of a cerebral and philosophical act which puts British designers at an advantage.

Towards the beginning, of 2004, Lyle started working with Faatland, creating the Lyle & Lisa brand. "It was too much to do on my own," Lyle comments, noting how Faatland's different skills complement hers. "She is incredibly organised and an excellent project manager." Faatland used to design stores for fashion companies such as Gucci and Donna Karan. The two partners organise their own production, distribution and marketing in the Milan area. "This is the best place to work" said Lyle. "There are fantastic small companies prepared to undertake small orders here." However, her cylindrical hand-knitted cotton lamp shades with mohair fringes are made in England, while the chromed metal stands come from Italy.

Lyle concedes that business is harder now with the increasingly aggressive competition from China and other low-cost countries, but keeps her cool. "We are at the top-end of the market, therefore it's only good for us to have a made in Italy label." Lyle & Lisa's Swarovski cushions retail for around £180, while a leather-covered cabinet may retail at around £4,000. The Swarovski stones are usually arranged in waves, circles, and delicate geometric patterns. There is also a touch of the Orient in some of the designs.

Lyle plans to be at Il Salone del Mobile next April. "We are keen to be there and get more exposure, especially now that it will be held at the new site," said the designer, whose works were previously shown at the Fuori Salone events outside the Milan fairgrounds. ■

Above left: Jezebel cushion & chair
Left: Delilah sofa
Below: Jezebel pouf

