

DESIGNER PROFILE

# JO BERRYMAN

JADE TILLEY TALKS TO **JO BERRYMAN** ABOUT DEFINING HERSELF AS A DESIGNER, HER LOVE OF MOVEMENT AND THE LITTLE RUSSIAN DOLLS THAT REVEALS THE LAYERS OF ALL OF US

JO BERRYMAN IS THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF JO BERRYMAN.

Jo has a background in fashion, working for Elle and Agent Provocateur before setting up her own store. From there she moved into interiors launching Matrushka before launching Jo Berryman in 2009. Jo welcomes my call for this profile piece with the sound of someone who has had a truly relaxing Christmas. The day of our chat is a gloriously bright, yet cold January day and Jo has already been out before work for a bracing walk with her family, embracing the local area and enjoying some mind-opening time in the outdoors. Here, Jo and I converse about her formative years, unraveling her creative personality and her obsession with River Phoenix that leads to semi-regular outburst of 90s charm in her designs.

**WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY OF DESIGN HAVING AN IMPACT ON YOU?**

For me, it's more about when my design consciousness was awoken. I went to boarding school and I remember at the age of 10 or 11 bedecking my walls with Vogue covers and posters of River Phoenix. I'm actually having a real 90s moment right now in my work. It's like I'm harking back to my youth, which is fun.

I needed to carve out my own niche when I was younger. Utilitarian design felt boring to me and I was interested in layering my own identity with a real blend of creative industries. Fashion was and continues to be huge in my life, and music and film also feature heavily. I think at that young age, trying to dress my wall at school was like, how much





can I get on my wall that defines me? There's a contrast that comes with boarding and I guess that I was always trying to be unique, to think outside the box, outside the prep room, the institution, but at the same time, I loved boarding school because it gave me independence and my own space to create.

#### WHERE DID YOU STUDY DESIGN AND WHAT DID YOU SPECIALISE IN?

I didn't study interior design. I did film theory, English literature and physical theatre at Middlesex University. I've always been into movement so the choice of course was driven by that appreciation and love of movement. I had a really interesting time studying and then diversified into fashion, which has long been a love of mine. I then spent a year interning at Elle and after that got my first job as a fashion assistant at Elle Girl. I was working on the styling and editorial side of things.

Post-Elle I went freelance and set up my own shop on Marylebone High Street. It was a kind of emporium of beautiful things. It was very successful and was recognised in the industry for its individual products and uniqueness. That was what steered me into interior design, it felt like the most natural use of my skill at that point, the most organic transition.

I owe a lot to Living etc... they featured my

bedroom which I had designed and they gave it a whole spread. A woman got in touch with me and asked to commission me for her own projects. She had seen my bedroom and had carried the magazine around with her in her bag for months, she was completely captured by the design of it. It was strange for me because when you design something so unique and personal to you, you cannot imagine that anyone else would want it for themselves but she did. Her home was a Pied-e-Terre in Notting Hill. The lady was a makeup artist and really connected with what I had done, so I set about transforming her space for her. It was just me and my one builder on site to do everything.

This was the point at which I decided to launch my own company. Originally called Matrushka, the company had a very folksy veneer and was completely eclectic and true to my own style. It has evolved beautifully and more recently I decided to make the transition to calling it Jo Berryman. With the growth of my team as key players in the business, it felt appropriate to go through this change and move with the evolution of the company in a natural way. Jo Berryman is a stronger expression of who I am now; we are trying to be more commercial so it also makes sense for the Jo Berryman aesthetic.

We're always evolving and moving, I have moments of 70s and 90s vibes, which I'll totally

pull into my work, it changes all the time but this is what keeps it natural and real and free-flowing.

#### WHAT ARE THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS YOU LOOK FOR WHEN BRINGING NEW TALENT INTO YOUR STUDIO?

I have a tech savvy team, we're slaves to EstiMac, it manages all of our projects, so technological understanding is always a plus, but it can be learned.

There's an edginess that I look for in people. I like people with a sense of mischief and I'm always attracted to those who speak with conviction. As a designer you have a vision and with that vision you should have a conviction for your work and a belief that it will work and will be brilliant. As the Creative Director, all creative vision is led by me, but it is underpinned by a brilliant team and held together by my fantastically organised studio manager. There is so much admin it's unbelievable. Interior Design is such a multi-layered business, it's important to keep all aspects in check, if one fails, the others inevitably fall apart as well.

Aside from my in-house team I also have my go-to architect and those who I call on from outside the nucleus; those who I trust implicitly. These creatives are brought in when we have the need so as a team, we expand and contract when we need to, to fulfill the needs of the client.

## Designer Profile

### WHAT KIND OF DESIGNER DID YOU ASPIRE TO BE?

I have always been drawn to the idea of rule breaking, I wanted to make marks and break rules. I've also always been fascinated by rough luxe, faded grandeur, all underpinned by fun, rock and roll and glamour, although not the glamour in the incarnation we know it as now. Glamour as a word and an idea has so many facets. I believe glamour to be an enduring functionality as a must, but with theatre and substance. It has longevity and timelessness at the heart.

Having said that, I work on a lot of family homes and the spaces always have to work for the client. Function is the key, combined with the client's personal sense of style and wit.

### WHO ARE YOUR DESIGN INSPIRATIONS?

I'm inspired by artists like Rose Uniacke. I love her aesthetic and really trust her brand. Rose has such a knack for finding the 'ultimate' in each piece of design, the ultimate bar stool or the ultimate lamp. And she brings a brilliant architectural perspective to her work.

Deborah Turbeville the fashion photographer, had this incredible gothic dreamscape applied to her work. It's story telling, it's theatre, and it filters through all of her photography.

Then there is my absolute obsession with River Phoenix from when I was younger. The film *My Own Private Idaho*, by Gus Van Sant, starring River Phoenix, is a point of reference for me.

Vivien Westwood is another inspiration because of her enduring ability to create and recreate with a sense of fun care-free abandon. It is mad-hatter, it is punk, it's essentially timeless because of her ability to keep reinventing. Westwood also cares deeply about the world and this fits perfectly with her abilities as a creative. She doesn't take her work too seriously but she takes the world and her contribution to it very seriously.

### WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PROFESSIONAL DESIGN COMMISSION?

The two-bed Pied-a-Terre off Westbourne Park Road for the makeup artist was my first big commission. I love this project because of the way she found me. She had been collecting ideas and my bedroom was one of them. I love the way people collect and hoard things and the beauty of design is that it can be translated into something new for the next person. My client, because of her career as an artist, was not adverse to colour. It was quite bijoux so we had to make the best of the space by designing clever storage on wheels that could be brought out and then concealed. During this period we would wake up at the crack of dawn to go down to see antique dealers and get the best pieces. We found some amazing things, old Chesterfields, that we restored etc... it was a wonderful experience.

After that project I received a call from someone called Danielle (married to Gary Lineker), she loved my work and wanted me to design one of their homes. They're basically patrons of my business now, I've done all of their homes, both here and in the USA.

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST DESIGN COMMISSION TO DATE?

The biggest is probably 42 acres, an 18 month long boutique retreat in Somerset. Bertha Foundation and Documentary House on Cavendish Square is another major renovation project of ours in the commercial arena. A Georgian listed building with big scale renovations needed.

### WHERE IS THE MAJORITY OF YOUR WORK BASED AND WHAT SECTOR WOULD YOU SAY YOU HAVE BECOME KNOWN FOR?

At the moment we are all over, from London to Somerset and over to LA, but mainly London. LA is great and I would like to work there more.

### HAVE YOU EVER WORKED OR LIVED ANYWHERE ELSE?

I spent the first eight years of my life in Hong Kong, a crazy, frenetic, chaotic, cultural place. There's a wonderful dichotomy and I must revisit soon. My father still lives there and my mother is from the Philippines, so I have roots over there. It's such a melting pot and full of artisans. I have a friend who works in Philippine fashions and she is always telling me to go out there and get stuff made and how amazing the fabrics and textiles are.

### HOW HAVE CLIENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF DESIGN AND DESIGNERS CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

It is much less transactional now. I wouldn't dream of imposing my style ideas onto a client, whereas, some time ago, that's what you would have been hired to do. Now it is so collaborative, you learn and know so much about people, you understand the relationships and the needs of each family member. I guess design now is much more holistic and enduring.

I'm not a developer, as a designer, you can't really apply a template to the job because it varies so much. We should treat houses as precious things and mutually nourish the relationships between designer and client.

Designing for people is a dance. You have to have boundaries to a certain point because people need to know what they're getting and have structure when you're invading their space to create something new, but at the same time, you cannot be too rigid if you want to create the best for each client.

### IF YOU HADN'T BECOME AN INTERIOR DESIGNER WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

A karaoke singer by night - I love it so much, and then a wannabe writer/painter during the day.

[www.joberryman.com](http://www.joberryman.com)

