

# insider NEWS

LIZ ELLIOT steps out to find the inside stories



## DESIGNER PROFILE

# Joanna Wood

Some designers become so established within the industry that we no longer wonder how they got started, let alone question the secret of their continuing success. Joanna Wood – over twenty years in the trade – is one such name. She runs a team of forty, and heads four businesses: her international design company; Lewis & Wood fabrics and wallcoverings; Lawson Wood furniture; and her eponymous Pimlico Road shop. So what keeps her inspirations fresh? 'I'm very driven,' she says. 'I'm always looking for the next big thing.'

She began designing after brief spells in book publishing, estate agency and a plum job as PA to the UN's Chief of Personnel, who would dispatch her to the airport to escort the likes of Idi Amin. Then, with 'more guts than sense,' she launched her company. Her first commission was a friend's house off Sloane Square and, as word-of-mouth recommendations grew, she found herself, at twenty-five, with starchy clients ranging from Wayne Sleep to Lady Rothermere. Grand property developers such as Grosvenor Estates followed, 'which allowed me to experiment wildly,' she remembers. Two decades on, she defines her style as 'new traditional, with wit and modernity'.

She says she'd be bored without a broad span of projects, which is lucky,

given her impressive list of worldwide commissions. Currently, there's the renovation of a French *bastide*, on a nail-biting twenty-week schedule, which Joanna defines as 'modern meets Louis XVI', and a seafront house in Connecticut, destined to be furnished in pared-down Georgian style with crewelwork, linens and 'a dollop of silk'. There are projects in London and English country houses in progress. Listening to Joanna, you can understand her client appeal. As well as boundless enthusiasm and humour, she has the knack of talking a design concept into a visual feast, what she terms her '3-D vision'. Lest clients need practical reassurance, her designers always supply fabric-laden sample boards, with easily comprehensible floor plans.

It's clear that Joanna's success lies in her ability to focus entirely on the task in hand – be that sketching a custom-made piece of furniture or overseeing the redecoration of a property on a restricted budget. But these days, her sights are fixed on the architectural 'bones'. 'I want to create rooms that have strength and purity, even without the soft furnishings,' she says. With her three-dimensional vision at work, here's a designer who makes even empty rooms sound appealing. **JUDITH WILSON**  
Joanna Wood (tel: 020-7730 0693, website: [www.joannawood.com](http://www.joannawood.com)) >



'New traditional, with wit and modernity', is how Joanna Wood (top) describes the interiors she designs (above)