

KIT KEMP

RATHER THAN PINE FOR ALL THE PLACES SHE COULDN'T BE, THE FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ACCLAIMED FIRMDALE HOTELS SPENT THE LOCKDOWN MONTHS REFRESHING HER LONDON KITCHEN.

The year 2020 became the year of DIY home renovation. What did you switch up?

Creativity at home has been fast and furious lately. You name it, we've done it – from making lampshades from scraps of material to collaging chairs in coloured felts, to painting the kitchen in brighter tones. Colour makes you happy and spices up life.

We redid the kitchen in our South Kensington, London, home last year, repainting it in Red Earth by Farrow & Ball below the worktop level, then Sudbury Yellow (also Farrow & Ball) for the cupboards above and around the architraves. The full-height, barrel-shaped cupboards are in Designers Guild Winter Morning Blue.

The kitchen is at the centre of the house; it leads off the entrance hall, drawing room and the dining room conservatory. We've also added our wing chair, collaged with felt flowers à la Matisse (we modestly say). It's the most-used chair in the entire house, and I would never do another kitchen without one.

Another book was also born of the tough year we've just had ...

Design Secrets is my fourth book and was published in Australia in May. The others were essentially coffee-table books but this is a "how to". I wrote it because people always ask how a certain design look is achieved.

I love individuality; sometimes people need a simple nudge to get going or to awaken a whole new way of looking at colour and space. *Design Secrets* is a fun masterclass of top tips, and meetings with the craftspeople and artisans I work with.

Firmdale Group has 10 hotels, plus eight bars and restaurants in London and New York, each individually designed and decorated by you.

How much will hotels change?

I see a bright future. We've all been leading "track-suit bottom" lives over the past 18 months. Life has become very provincial. Everyone is desperate for the re-emergence of style and something exciting and different.

Frankly, the only difference in our hotels will be no wonderful buffet tables filled with breakfast goodies. Also, no squashing into lifts. I love that tables in restaurants are further



apart. We're all much nicer to each other and more appreciative of the small things.

Key lessons from last year?

We've had to be super adaptable and I'm really proud of Kit Kemp Design Studio. We have been the only department in our company to make a profit during lockdown, thanks to our residential projects, collaborations and royalties. By being resourceful and not giving in we've made fantastic headway.

My collaborations with Annie Selke in the US designing carpets and bed linen has

progressed. There's also a new lighting collection with Porta Romana, and designing crockery and giftware for the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. And designing private residences has really kept us on our toes, of course.

It was lovely to spend more time with my husband Tim, our girls, and our many dogs. The latter loved lockdown most, with long solitary walks when staying at our country home in Hampshire's New Forest.

Have you travelled at all over the past 12 months?

We were in Barbados for the first UK lockdown. Apart from that I have not been able to leave the country. I'm longing to get to New York to our projects there, but it is amazing what you can achieve on Zoom.

Where are you hoping to go this year and next year - what's on your bucket list?

Top of my list is to get back to New York to our Crosby Street Hotel. I'm also longing to get to India to Udaipur to visit Richard Hanlon's beautiful Bujera Fort Hotel and go antiquing with him.

I can't wait to return to Biarritz in south-western France and see what they have done to the Hôtel du Palais. I'll catch up with my friend Mimi who lives there, so we can look at all her crazy artworks I love to buy.

I also love Il Convento di Santa Maria di Costantinopoli in Marittima di Diso in southern Puglia, which was owned by Lord Alistair McAlpine and his wife Athena. He was an obsessive collector and filled the property with some of the best Indigenous Australian art, Joe Tilson pieces and books.

You walk through the kitchen to get to the breakfast room, past all the preserves, fruits and vegetables, so you feel fully involved. The rooms don't all have en suites, so it's not everyone's cup of tea, but that didn't bother me one jot. The Tulsi Shop in town sells individually designed clothes and homewares.

Any new hotels - are you that brave?

Definitely. We're excited about our new venture, the Warren Street Hotel in New York's Tribeca.

Kit Kemp spoke to Fiona Carruthers. Her book *Design Secrets* is out now (Hardie Grant, \$50).