

Press Information

INSIDE THE MERRION

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ALICE RODEN, DESIGNER

When Alice Roden was invited to design the interior of Dublin's most luxurious 5-Star hotel, The Merrion, which opened in October 1997, her brief was both simple and clear - "To create a space with sensitivity to the 18th century heritage of the building, with light and airy bedrooms." "It was a very challenging brief," says Alice, "but I am passionately interested in 18th century design, and I have a very good knowledge of it. My job was to create a contemporary environment, and to be sensitive to the wonderful Georgian interiors."

The Merrion, which stands on Upper Merrion Street opposite Government Buildings, was created from four magnificent Grade 1 Listed Georgian townhouses that date from the 1760's and a specially commissioned contemporary Garden Wing. The hotel is arranged around two private gardens which have been landscaped to recreate formal 18th century-style town gardens.

Alice Roden's career in design started with the discipline of hand-weaving. Her training began in Dublin in the late 1960's and continued in Sweden. She also studied the dyeing and weaving of silk at the noted Kawashima School in Japan. Alice's clients include The Bank of Ireland, and the Central Bank, Dublin. Her work has also been bought by the National Museum, Dublin, for their "Arts and History" section.

THE FIRST STAGE

From the start, The Merrion project demanded careful research and the highest standards. "I started by trying to create absence - a blank canvas - and to think about what these 18th century rooms are about," explains Alice. Her research took her to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, to Bath, to absorb its famous 18th century architecture and to the grand hotels of Paris.

In the Main House, the overall consideration of the rooms as public spaces, and how each one related to the next, was of paramount importance. This would be done through the use of colour and fabrics, taking into account the amount of light available on each level, and the natural hierarchy of the rooms. Alice points out, "18th century public rooms were always full of

pomp and circumstance, and the drawing rooms should reflect this - whilst being elegant and relaxed at the same time.”

THE GUEST ROOMS IN THE MAIN HOUSE

Alice used Georgian colours throughout the guestrooms in the Main House in a subtle palette ranging from light blue, turquoise, slate blue, sage green and cream.

For the fabrics, Alice’s own skill and knowledge of dyeing came to the fore. She designed the woven Irish linen check upholstery fabric, which was produced to her specifications in Northern Ireland. The colours in the linen are echoed in the curtains, made of *toile de Jouey*. The toile appears in a series of colourways, to tone with the walls: red/cream on the first floor and blue/cream on the second floor and third floors.

The bedside lamps are based on 18th century Delftware and were specially commissioned by The Merrion. Their design was inspired by 18th century illustrations of Irish buildings, elements of which have been reproduced on the lamps.

Bathrooms throughout the hotel have been designed using striking white carrera marble from Italy and contemporary chrome fittings.

THE GUEST ROOMS IN THE GARDEN WING

For the guestrooms in the new Garden Wing, Alice Roden chose a blend of fabrics whose colours and textures complement each other. The bedspreads, a linen and cotton mix, were commissioned in a neo-classical acanthus design. The curtains, designed by Alice, were woven in fine wool, in a subtle marled mixture of colours, they are lined with a small shirting check.

THE FRONT HALL

The elegant and spacious Front Hall with its original cornices and plasterwork, in the former No. 22 Upper Merrion Street, remains much as it would have been when the house was built in the mid-18th century. Its main feature is a series of murals for the neo-classical stairwell by Martin Mooney, one of Ireland’s foremost young artists. These depict mythical landscapes and buildings.

THE GROUND FLOOR DRAWING ROOMS

At the rear of Nos. 22 and 23 Upper Merrion Street, are three large interconnected drawing rooms, with French windows overlooking and giving access to the larger of the two period gardens. The rooms feature spectacular decorative plasterwork on the ceilings, and impressive carved doorcases.

Alice chose a subtle shade of yellow for the walls and a faded linen print for the furnishings. The coffee-coloured silk damask curtains were specially commissioned by the hotel. The carpets, woven by MacMurrays in Galway, are plain in design with decorative borders.

A highly skilled team of hand carvers was used to recreate the antique furniture in the public rooms. The furniture was inspired by 18th Century Irish furniture from stately homes such as Russborough in County Wicklow.

THE MEETING ROOMS IN MORNINGTON HOUSE

There are six magnificent private rooms, in the former No. 24 Upper Merrion Street, with their own entrance and reception. Designed to be used separately or in combination, they offer the advantages of the latest presentation, communications and business technology.

Alice chose to wallpaper these rooms using a hand-blocked 18th Century design. The richness of the wallpaper is echoed in the silk curtains. The carpets were designed using archives of 18th Century carpets. Specially commissioned furniture, completes the rich décor of these rooms.

Alice Roden concludes: "The Merrion should feel and look like a nicely run private house. If that is the effect the guests feel we have achieved, I will be happy!"

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