



**SHOCK OF THE NEW:** Clair Strong, main picture, was enlisted to bring a contemporary feel to a Georgian property in the Circus, Bath  
 PICTURE: Sam Farr



# A modern take on tradition

**B**ATH is famous for its exceptionally beautiful Georgian buildings. The Circus in particular is an iconic part of our fair city and tourists and locals alike have admired the Roman Colosseum inspired buildings since they were completed in 1768.

The typical Georgian houses were dominated by burgundy or sage green walls, distinctive trefoil patterned wallpaper, darkly stained floorboards lifted with an Oriental rug or two, and littered with decorative objects such as screens and fans as well as porcelain and lacquerwork from the Orient. The houses would have needed a bevy of staff just to dust the place on a daily basis.

Of course, much has changed since these buildings were built, as have the lifestyles and tastes of the modern occupier of the desirable Georgian homes. How then do you marry a modern, fast-paced lifestyle with a 250-year-old building? Born and bred in Bath, designer Clair Strong, 39, who currently lives with her partner Tim in Walcot, seems to have the answers.

A year ago Clair set up a new design company, Clair Strong Interior Styling,

Laura Rowe talks to a master of the careful act of balancing contemporary interior design with Georgian settings

Sourcing and Staging, in the city and has since transformed some of Bath's older interiors.

"Bath is a great place to live. I love the architecture and it's a cosmopolitan city. A lot of people here are interested in their homes and interior design," says Clair.

It seems her passion for designing has been a long-running family affair.

"I come from a family where everyone shares this interest. My grandparents designed and built their home themselves with the help of my mother and aunt. This was in the 1950s, long before this was considered a normal thing to do."

Although Clair is enthusiastic about more contemporary styles her business caters to the needs of the client.

"I like period and rustic, as well as very modern and minimalist. I think what's important is to be in sympathy with the building. What's key is to be versatile and not just have one style that fits all, but to help clients express themselves."

Her latest client, Ben Cook, had bought a traditional Georgian flat in the Circus but had a preference for contemporary interiors.

The flat was gutted by an incendiary bomb in the Second World War so that it burned from the inside out. The Georgian façade was left intact but the inside was destroyed, leaving a blank canvas for Clair, Ben and the architects to set to work.

Ben owned some great pieces such as an original Bond poster for the film Thunderball which inspired the modern design.

"The poster had wonderful pop art colours such as lime green, magenta and orange and Ben wanted these as a main feature. We decided to put them in the living room and I used the colours as inspiration for the style downstairs. Ben wanted a gentleman's club style upstairs, so I did a modern take on that using leather, hides and wood," says the ubér confident designer.

But how does such a fresh and bold design work in a 250-year-old building?

- Clair highlights what's making waves in the interior design world right now:
- Curvy furniture in kitchens and living rooms
  - Bright colours from the 70s and 80s
  - Panels of wallpaper and fabrics
  - Keeping it light, spacious and simple
  - Counteracting and softening the starkness of minimalism with ornamentation, texture and colour
  - Rubber, resin and concrete furnishings
  - Strong focus and awareness of ecological issues

"It worked fantastically well. Georgian buildings have lovely proportions, so even though it's a contemporary interior, we still made use of the original features of the buildings that have pleased people for generations and which still fit well with a modern design, such as the height of the rooms and the big windows which allow a lot of light in."

"It is fun and funky and yet still in keeping with the building – good quality and elegant. It is striking and Ben was pretty daring and he trusted me, for example I persuaded him to buy a huge pink sofa, which he now loves."

So, modern and bold designs can work in traditional old buildings and according to Clair it is easy to recreate at home.

"For a contemporary style mix textures and use high-gloss furniture – particularly white. You can introduce a contrast with ornamental features such as a striking light or a strip or a wall panel of paper or panel of material. Don't be afraid to experiment."

For the flat pictured Clair sourced everything from Bath, from blinds, sofas and desks right down to the cutlery.

So there you have it, the careful act of balancing modern life in a traditional setting.

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