

Web design

The explosion of interiors blogs is providing instant inspiration for amateur decorators — and reducing our reliance on the pros

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Five years ago, they were thought of as hobbyists with too much time on their hands and an unhealthy fascination with upholstery fabrics; now the interiors bloggers and tweeters are being taken seriously by the interior-design industry and amateur home improvers alike. Their addictive feed of insider data, dispatched from international design fairs and private homes, and laced with gossipy personal insights, is changing the way the professionals work, challenging the authority of the interiors magazines and making DIY decorators feel connected to a global network of informed, opinionated friends.

Bright Bazaar, subtitled “because beige is boring”, is the name of Will Taylor’s blog. Irresistibly upbeat, it’s an easy read that has become surprisingly influential during the three years it has been going. “The blog gets half a million hits a month now, a higher circulation than some of the glossies,” says Taylor, who is still only 25.

Last year, he gave a talk to a group of interior designers on using social media and online resources, and saw many have a light-bulb moment about the value of blogs. “Because bloggers tend to have such distinct personal styles, if you are doing a project and

you have a good knowledge of the blogosphere, you can instantly go, for instance, to a Scandinavian or mid-century one,” he explains.

Taylor’s is one of a handful of must-read British blogs. Americans tend to do it better, possibly because they had a head start. Jaime Derringer, of Design Milk, has been blogging since 2006. Her vivid tweets from the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, in New York last month, made her 500,000-plus Twitter followers feel as if they were viewing the launches alongside her.

Other American blogs specialise in “real home” stories. One of the first and best known, Apartment Therapy, started in 2001 as an email newsletter and now has 5.6m readers each month. Its founder, Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan, says he has seen online resources influence interior design during the decade: “People are now enjoying decorating projects that are basically by their neighbours, as opposed to design professionals staging them for magazines. This is a huge change.

“While style used to trickle down from the top of the profession, I see it also trickling up, from the web community and from all the passionate amateur designers out there, who are now able to share their projects.”

The blogs and tweets have opened up new sources of inspiration, but the platform that has the design industry truly hooked is Pinterest. This online pinboard allows members to collate and share scrapbooks of pictures from anywhere on the internet. To early adopters in the trade, it’s quickly become both a professional tool and a guilty pleasure.

Debra McQuin, an interior designer based in London, says Pinterest has revolutionised her way of working.

Graham and Helen Powell run two blogs, covering interiors and ‘obsessionistas’

“I used to get tons of magazines and pull pages out,” she says. “Now I collect all those things on Pinterest. You can pin things you see directly from an iPhone. I follow a couple of design sources on Twitter: they use Instagram to post photos, and I can transfer the pictures to Pinterest direct.”

She follows other design bloggers who have already amassed more images, filed in folders in categories such as “joinery” and “pin 100 new images a day” she says. “I like seeing my followers going up. I think they like my style.”

Though Pinterest might seem to engage a professional with its pinboard, in the main, it’s tweeters tend to discourage using interior designers. “Thrifty amateurs, tends to

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Blogs is providing amateur decorators a voice on the pros

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She follows other designers and has already amassed more than 3,000 images, filed in folders including "colour schemes" and "joinery". "I could easily pin 100 new images a day if I had time," she says. "I like seeing my number of followers going up. I think, 'Ooh, somebody likes my style.'"

Though Pinterest might tempt you to engage a professional with a handsome pinboard, in the main, bloggers and tweeters tend to discourage us from using interior designers. Their focus, as thrifty amateurs, tends to be on low-cost, big-result DIY decorating. Arianna Trapani, an interior designer, stylist and blogger, launched the online magazine Heart Home in September last year and now has 100,000 readers. "Our aim is to give people a chance to create great interiors without spending too much," she says.

Trapani believes the online interiors community has forced professional decorators to reconsider their USP. "Before, the interior design trade kept its suppliers top-secret. Now people on the web

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are telling you where you can get every single piece — and what it costs."

Not content with treading on the toes of the professional decorators, the online crowd are usurping the influence of the traditional interiors magazines, with their long lead times. Jo Casley, marketing manager of the online interiors boutique Mydeco, says: "The woman who is redecorating her bedroom won't just buy one copy of a magazine — she will use all the free online sources. We go through 100 or so design blogs on a weekly basis. They're

Will Taylor's Bright Bazaar aims to banish beige





Blog on

■ **apartmenttherapy.com** The granddaddy of interiors blogs, set up by Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan and subtitled "Saving the world one room at a time"

■ **ariannainteriors.blogspot.co.uk** Take inspiration from Arianna Trapani's very English look: pretty colours and cosy interiors, as well as supersmart design

■ **brightbazaar.blogspot.co.uk** Will Taylor's brilliant blog: fresh, poppy colours and a chatty tone

■ **decor8blog.com** Holly Becker's site is subtitled "Fresh finds for hip spaces". It covers everything from stationery to sofas

■ **www.designhunter.co.uk** One of the British writer Helen Powell's two blogs (don't miss obsessionistas.co.uk, which she runs with her husband, Graham). Pared-back design with vintage pieces mixed in

■ **design-milk.com** Jaime Derringer and her crew offer fresh news from the front line of design. Art, architecture and technology also feature

■ **designsponge.com** Updated six-eight times a day, this influential American blog offers design goodies, tips and before-and-after pictures of readers' homes

■ **dezeen.com** An indispensable online magazine, founded by Marcus Fairs. Covers architecture, interiors and design projects from around the globe

■ **emmas.blogg.se** Based in Stockholm, this is the first stop for any fans of Scandi design

■ **passionforpattern.com** A must for fabric fanatics — Giles Kime, deputy editor of *Homes & Gardens*, posts anything patterned that catches his magpie eye

not all great, but they are nimble. The magazine shoots are done six months in advance, but blogs and Pinterest can be instant."

What the bloggers and tweeters have achieved, Casley believes, is to widen the style horizons of British home improvers. "People don't just accept what they find in John Lewis when there's inspiration from all over the world. At Mydeco, we're looking at boutiques in Europe, America and Canada to see which pieces we can bring over. America is a hot spot for really great, affordable design, and we're trying to crack how you ship it and keep it affordable."

Similarly, high-end retailers are using sites such as Pinterest for trend intelligence. Jennifer Earp, senior buyer at Achica, a members-only online luxury lifestyle store, says: "The mood boards are revolutionary. We can quickly bring in products that seem to be trending online."

It's easy to imagine blogs, tweets and Pinterest boards becoming booming businesses in the near future. Bloggers such as Holly Becker, of *Decor8*, and Grace Bonney, of *Design Sponge*, have expanded their writing into interiors books. The American blogs carry advertising, as do some of the more popular British ones, and all are bombarded with press releases and samples from firms hoping for a free mention. Yet one British blogger, Helen Powell, warns that allowing these sites to become too commercialised could be counterproductive.

Powell began blogging three years ago, writing *Design Hunter*, her "daily edit of design and lifestyle news, finds and inspiration", and, together with her husband, Graham, collating the delightful *Obsessionistas*, a site about collectors and their collections. She is happy to feature affiliate links and sponsored posts to cover running costs, but says she will never mention a product she doesn't "genuinely love".

"The relationship between a blogger and their readers can be one of trust and loyalty," she says. "Readers like to feel that they are connecting with an individual, rather than a brand."

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