

By necessity, designers are shapeshifters, vacillating between projection, translation, and a kind of quiet submersion of self. It is in this liminal space between self and other that David Hicks has built a career.

THE SPACE BETWEEN

Words Saskia Neacsu

An early bloomer in the interiors world, David Hicks has persevered through a three-decade tenure within the industry, twenty-five of those under the weight and freedom of his eponymous studio. He now speaks with a calibrated self-awareness. "I see in all my past projects the attention to detail and craftsmanship that I always imbue," he comments. "Some of the finishes and detailing may be different. However, the core of what I create is there."

While Hicks' design identity cannot be confined to an era or style, he describes his influences as layered rather than linear: French modernism, Japanese detailing, Italian vintage, antiquities, and Persian rugs – the list goes on. "I do not feel I am designing between identities, rather amalgamating them into a new one: mine." For Hicks, design is not about chasing the ephemeral – it is an acute instinct for what resonates and what endures.

Across thirty years and an amassed oeuvre of national and international projects, Hicks has established a distinctive design

language. Unlike residential work, where intimacy is negotiated directly with the client, commercial design means interpreting an identity for an audience who may only occupy the space for a transient moment. Effectively, Hicks' commercial projects amplify the recurrent gestures shaping his design vernacular, resulting in the lyricism he brings to his brand collaborations.

His formative and impressionable years as a child in Malaysia continue to echo in the way he envisions and conceives a project. "My work tends to reference minimal spatial arrangements, which could be an impact of growing up in Malaysia where the architecture was more open. There was a blurred line between inside and outside living," Hicks reflects. "Culturally, Asian design is more streamlined, balanced, and has certain spaces allocated for certain tasks and occasions."

Pushing this concept to its extremes, Hicks is able to oscillate between fashion houses and hospitality, pared-back tailoring





and theatrical layering. “The thread that connects the work is the underlying handwriting that comes from our practice, one of precision and attention to detail,” adds Hicks.

If we are to use Bar Bambi as a guide, Hicks channels the desirability of a mid-century Milanese brasserie through a palette of walnut timber, green marble, velvet banquettes, and recessed brass coves. The graciousness of the design is an amalgam of resolved planning and comfortable organic lines that punctuate distinct areas. For example, the curved brass alcoves along the back of the bar

mirror the recessed ceiling coves and highlight the centre of the bar.

“The feeling when in the space is of being transported back in time to a glamorous Italian supper club,” as Hicks tells it. “We installed a custom brass handrail based on a 1950s theme, mid-century Murano wall lights, patterned green carpet and olive velvet, all providing nostalgia, while 1950s-style dining chairs were used in a soft pink and a pink neon was used for the signage within the space.”

The Calibre stores, conceived as bespoke European tailors, harness a masculine material palette and a touch of eclecticism.

Previous: David Hicks. Photo, Sam Bisso. Above: Bar Bambi. Photo, Mark Roper. Opposite: Alannah Hill. Photo, Shannon McGrath.





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"We used simple base selections in the materials but layered with more decorative elements, such as plush fabrics, custom carpets, textured wall panelling and polished timber veneer," Hicks notes. "Over this we often implemented vintage lighting and furniture to emphasise the custom nature of the brand that is rooted in a European aesthetic."

At Perri Cutten, the feeling of an illustrious home has been composed through a grand entrance area with a red lacquered bamboo table, vintage Italian feature lighting, silk wall panelling and lustrous dark marble with organic veining. "The customer is a discerning one, thus we kept the clothing within individual wardrobes that we designed from steel framing and metal mesh," says Hicks. Juxtaposing masculine and feminine overtones, the materiality is subtle, with nuanced textural shifts that convey the signature clean-cut lines with a whimsical twist.

The Alannah Hill store was created at the height of the flamboyant designer's popularity. "With such a large persona and strong

aesthetic, we found a way to convey this whilst toning the shopping environment down," elaborates Hicks. "We then added more outrageous gestures such as the lipstick red carpet and aqua blue upholstered walls to give a punch to the interior, solidifying that the space was unapologetically Alannah Hill."

Design often begins with ego – a shorthand we rely on to delineate our approach, taste, and voice. But perhaps design that stands the test of time rarely allows for such singularity. Even with a signature style, you are not just making a space, but interpreting someone else's story. The framework is already there – literally – and the challenge lies within shaping it. Then, there is feeling – that intangible read you get from a place that makes sense without trying. For Hicks, "It is difficult to explain feelings in a space, as every one makes you feel differently. It affects the subconscious, and you do not think about it, you feel it."

davidhicks.com

Opposite left: Alannah Hill. Photo, Shannon McGrath.

Opposite righttop: Domain. Photo courtesy David Hicks and Domain. Opposite right bottom: Bar Bambi. Photo, Mark Roper.
Above: Calibre. Photo, Shannon McGrath.