



# Sustainable design

## a chat with Elemental Studio's Laurence Katz

### Laurence, what brought you to London in the first place?

The challenge! I wanted to discover another culture, do some work and improve my English. London seemed like the perfect base for a year or two, before heading on to pastures new, but things didn't quite work out like that. I ended up marrying a north London boy and the UK has now been my home for 19 years. We've moved around a bit, with Notting Hill being as far south we ventured. It didn't take long for my husband to get homesick, so we're now living near Highgate. Seems like I'm the more adventurous of the two of us.

### You've had a fairly major career shift...

Almost unique. I spent the first half of my career working for BMW, concentrating on marketing and the brand. I'm still a big fan, but never felt that automotive was my true calling, so in 2011 I retrained at the KLC School of Design. That's where I learned more about interiors, spatial awareness and how to improve the way we human beings use indoor spaces – whether homes, offices or entertainment areas. I'd always felt passionate about architecture and design, but now I get to do what I love every single day. That's because Elemental Studio was born in 2016, six years after my daughter and three after my son. The past decade has been rather busy.

### Is there anything unusual about what you do?

Yes, and it can be summed up in a word: sustainability. It runs through everything we do and everything we source and use across our commercial and residential projects. I think a business that reflects your personal values is a better business; so as an architectural and design specialist, Elemental Studio bangs the drum for environmental responsibility and sustainability. We create thoughtful modern spaces, tailored to each owner, so everything is bespoke and we never reuse the same materials. We vet every supplier to ensure they share our values. With our clients, we follow a completely transparent process and communicate constantly. I can tell you, that's by no means common in the industry.

### Where do you get your inspiration from?

That's easy: nature. It's always been my greatest source of inspiration. Bringing the world into a building is so good for the heart and soul. I've always struggled with the hard surfaces and edges that most buildings display. It's why I love Zaha Hadid's architecture, for instance. There are no straight lines in nature, so why do we create so many objects that way? Instead, I feature different shapes and textures in my schemes, blurring the divide between inside and out.

### What do you love most about London?

Funnily enough, it's the same answer: nature. That may sound odd, since London's such a big city, but the capital is full of small villages and green spaces. It helped me adapt to the scale and pace of the place, since I don't come from a big city myself. I remember discovering Regent's Park and being amazed at so much nature within an urban environment. Since then I have discovered that each corner of the city has its own oasis. I visit Hampstead Heath every week for a long walk, but before the virus struck, we'd also escape to Scotland and Wales for long weekends.



### What frustrates you?

Waste. I hate it. I fight against the amount we waste at home and at work. My parents were always on at me and my brothers, telling us to switch off lights, get out of the shower and so on. I've turned into my parents, echoing their sentiments with my own children. Of course, now it's a matter of survival, not just economy. My industry is notorious for waste, often throwing things away that have barely been used, so I'm on a personal mission to put that right.

### What are you most excited about?

I spend a lot of time researching new products, new materials and new ways to create buildings and the spaces within them. More and more suppliers are investing time and money in developing new materials, recycling old ones and creating new ones in the process. Recently someone told me about fish scales being used to create new kitchen worktops. How wonderful is that? I write a blog on all things sustainable in the world of interiors and I'm never short of new subjects, products and ideas to talk about – that's wonderful and encouraging.

### If someone visited London, what would you recommend they do?

First, take a trip along one of the canals. Whether on foot or bike, it's a great way to discover a completely different side to London. I did it with my cousins when they came over and they loved it. Then go to Tate Modern or the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy. I go to the latter with my husband; we never buy anything but the sheer variety of artworks is always a joy. Unsurprisingly I gravitate to the architecture room, full of models for new buildings. They're works of art in themselves. Then make sure to visit Dishoom in King's Cross. I'm French, so of course food is important, but this place is also fantastic for its atmosphere and its interior decor. It may sound odd to recommend a dose of India when enthusing about London, but a visit is really worthwhile.

### Finally Laurence, as an Anglicised Frenchwoman... London or Paris?

Both! London for the variety, Paris for the flair.



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