

home sweet monochrome

Designers are exploring the high-definition potential of a classic black and white palette with dynamic furnishings combining the two colours, says **Nicole Swengley**



Clockwise from main picture: MisuraEmme black oak Gaudi table, from £4,254, and black oak Bertha chairs, from £700. Italian wool/silk Graystall rug, from £432 per sq m. Lee Broom stainless-steel Falcrum lights, £325 each. Lee Broom for Wedgwood chrome and Corian Drunken side table, £6,700

The crisp contrast of black and white is giving interiors a bold, graphic charge not seen for some time. Whether the desire for high-definition positivity is a response to global uncertainties, or just inspired by the recent art deco revival, one thing is clear: we're in the grip of a glamorous monochrome moment.

The look is particularly prevalent in fashion-conscious cities like London, Paris, Milan and New York. One of the hottest cocktail spots in Milan during this year's Salone del Mobile was the bar at the Mandarin Oriental, with its houndstooth-upholstered club chairs and geometric-monochrome patterned walls and pillars, while in London, a monochrome tile floor lends The Hari hotel's recently compiled Il Pampero bar and restaurant a crispy chic vibe.

For sheer glamour and drama, it would be hard to beat the eye-zapping monochrome interior designed by Casa do Passadigo for Italian fashion brand Aquazzura's first boutique in Moscow. "The right choice of patterns, geometry and balance allows you to go bold with a monochrome palette," says Claudia Soares Pereira, who, with her sister Catarina, runs the Portugal-based interior design studio. While the look is strikingly contemporary, Catarina also cites a wealth of historical references, from neoclassical marble floors and the neoclassical art movement to works by the likes of Jackson Pollock, Frank Stella, Victor Vasarely and Jasper Johns.

For those looking for less drama, a single feature wall can deliver a softer monochrome focus. Farrow & Ball's Lotus wallpaper (£112 for a 10m roll, pictured on final page) was drawn from 19th-century French archives and its Arts & Crafts-influenced design looks particularly striking in black and white. Equally, white leather seats contrast eloquently with stained black oak in MisuraEmme's slender Bertha chairs (from





Clockwise from left:
Devon&Devon granite and lacquered-wood Jetset vanity unit, £6,509. Lee Broom stainless-steel Carousell light, £3,260. Kelly Wearstler oak Hauser armchair, \$8,145. Lara Bohinc marble Constellation bowls, £480 each

pops of colour and glossy lacquer. The result is beguiling and very contemporary.

Another monochrome devotee is Los Angeles-based interior designer Kelly

Wearstler. "The tension between opposites is sexy and I've always loved the confident statement that black and white creates – it can be bold and graphic, or very quiet," she says. Her Optic collection of handpainted ceramics (vase, \$1,850, bowl, \$2,250, and catchall, \$1,295), from 2016, celebrated monochrome's stark contrast; new pieces, launched this April (shallow bowl, \$1,295, and vase, \$1,850), extend the range. "Quiet monochrome can be full of dimension, depending on how it's articulated," she says. Her furniture designs – the solid oak Hauser armchair (\$8,145, pictured above), with its alternating contrast of pale bleached and ebonised finishes, and the Pop commode (\$22,500) made from ivory hand-trowelled plaster embellished with blackened, stainless-steel spheres – exemplify the appeal of monochrome achieved more subtly. Miyar similarly softens the look by using off-white and soft black in her interior schemes. "I also like to add textural contrast for depth and interest," she says. "In a family home, I recently used a pair of side tables [price on request, pictured overleaf] by [Amsterdam-based design collective] Barn in the City that combine white Carrara marble with deeply distressed, fumed black timber. The contrast between the two has a natural quality that feels stylish but homey."

Architects Gianni and Paola Tanini, of Florence-based bathroom specialists Devon&Devon, know all about



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£788), designed by Carlo Marelli and Massimo Molteni, and pair well with the brand's elegant, stained black oak Gaudi table (from £4,254) by Ferruccio Laviani. A further counterpoint can be created with a bold monochrome rug such as the hand-knotted Himalayan wool/silk Grayskull (from £432 per sq m, all pictured on previous pages) from Illulian's Design Collection.

Contemporary homes are also championing the aesthetic, which can add precision and focus to a room. "Monochrome creates glamour and drama or a soft gravitas, depending on the materials and application," says interior designer Natalia Miyar, who launched her London and Miami-based interiors atelier in 2016, after five years at the helm of Helen Green Design, with recent residential projects spanning the UK, Ibiza and Miami. "The combination of black and white works wonderfully well on its own, but comes to vibrant life with the injection of one bold, contrasting colour gesture, such as cobalt blue."

"Black and white is a classic combination, but also utterly modern; it works with any colour palette and gives an edge to a space," says designer Lee Broom; witness his Optical collection of black-and-white striped lighting (pendant, £425, table lamp, £485, and floor lamp, £895), which went on sale at the London Design

Festival last September. During the Salone del Mobile in April, Broom presented an all-white fairground carousel to celebrate his company's 10th anniversary, displaying a decade's-worth of designs reimagined completely in white and limited to 10 pieces each (prices on request). Meanwhile, selected lights, including Fulcrum (£325, pictured on previous pages) and Carousell (£3,260, pictured top right), were instead reworked in black. "These designs are normally in polished brass or chrome," says Broom. "Presenting them in white or black really highlights their silhouettes and creates a simpler, more modern aesthetic. It's exciting to see them take on a whole new personality."

Broom admits to "flirting" with monochrome a lot recently. Optical and his Drunken side table (£6,700, pictured on previous pages) preceded a new monochrome collection for Wedgwood, which launched at Harrods in April. These eye-catching versions of archival Wedgwood jasperware exchange ornate details and a traditional matte finish for graphic stripes, vibrant

Clockwise from below: Barn in the City wood and marble side tables, price on request. Farrow & Ball Lotus wallpaper, £112 for a 10m roll. Bethan Gray for Lapidica marble and brass Herringbone dining table, £30,000



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monochrome's impact. The firm's vanities, in particular, are Chanel-calibre chic: Jetset (£6,509, pictured on previous page) evokes an art deco style with its black-lacquered finish and granite top, contrasting with three white (or black) doors. And Audrey (£6,112) has a black-lacquered timber structure with white borders (or vice versa), black surfaces and a black granite splashback, while its rectangular basin is available in white or black ceramic.

"Since classical times, architects have understood the power of the simple yet striking contrast of a monochrome palette," says Paola. "The combination speaks to our fascination with light and shadow. It works so well in bathrooms because it creates a pristine feeling, while its tonal clarity keeps an often complex and challenging space from feeling cluttered. Monochrome is also something of a blank canvas, so has both a calming and inspiring effect. It also conjures up Manhattan in the Jazz Age, or the glamour of Hollywood's heyday. There's nothing like the classical elegance of a traditional, grand-hotel bathroom to make you feel pampered."

London-based interior designer Tara Bernerd agrees. "Monochrome schemes are a great way to create attitude and impact in bathrooms." Bernerd employed this very effectively, using white rectangular basins on a white marble-topped console as a contrast to black marble walls and floor. "A key rule when using dark colours is to allow for balance," she adds. "Finishing touches such as a great mirror, or a mirrored glass wall, prevent smaller spaces from feeling overbearing, while spot-

lighting is essential for illuminating surfaces." The full-height, mirrored wall she installed in a bathroom at The Hari hotel in London, which reflects three black marble walls, white sanitaryware and crisp white towels, is a look that translates well, she says, to residential interiors.

Marble certainly maximises monochrome's potential, as seen in the furniture and accessories created by jewellery designer Lara Bohinc for stone specialist Lapidica. Her Lunar collection, inspired by the planets and their orbits, combines white Carrara with black Nero Marquina marble to stunning effect in the Half Moon mirror (£4,740), while the Sun and Moon coffee table (£5,995) and Half Moon dining table (£22,500) exploit the colour differential explored in her earlier, rotating Solaris table (£54,000). Single-colour accessories, such as the black or white marble Constellation bowls (£480, pictured on previous page) and Stargazer candleholders (£540), underpin the theme. "Contrasts define outlines and form an important frame for whatever is in a room," says Bohinc. "In my own living space, the walls are painted black, and I have a white sofa and lots of white lights and vases."

Another Lapidica collaborator, Bethan Gray, is equally mesmerised by monochrome. The top of her Herringbone dining table (£30,000, pictured above) combines Carrara

and Marquina marble in a crisp, eye-catching pattern, while Gray's own collection includes the handmade Band coffee table (£4,450) in two-tone lacquered marble. And her Alice collection of monochrome marble tabletop accessories – originally created as one-off pieces for the Wallpaper Handmade show in Milan in 2013 – are now available to buy bespoke (prices on request); they include a chopping board with a herringbone or striped pattern, and a cheeseboard with a clear glass dome and dartboard-style base (both pictured left).

"I fell in love with the graphic patterns of black and white marble when I visited 15th-century churches in Florence and Amalfi; I wanted to recreate that feeling on a smaller scale, which led to the Herringbone table and Alice collection," says Gray. She also cites the geometric patterns and forms found in Arabic design as inspiration. "Texture and finish are key. A black-and-white painted cabinet may look harsh, but if it's made from marble with the veins coming through, or a stained wood in which the timber's texture appears, it softens the whole aesthetic." Versatile, glamorous and modern: monochrome's magic is having a new moment in interior design. ✦

LITTLE BLACK AND WHITE BOOK

Barn in the City, barninthecity.com. **Bethan Gray**, by appt, bethangray.com and see Lapidica. **Casa do Passadiço**, casadopassadico.com. **Devon&Devon**, 77 Westbourne Grove, London W2 (020-7221 5137; devon-devon.com). **Farrow & Ball**, 249 Fulham Rd, London SW3 (020-7351 0273; farrow-ball.com). **Illulian**, illulian.com. **Kelly Wearstler**, kellywearstler.com. **Lapidica**, 533 King's Rd, London SW10 (020-3012 1000; lapidica.com). **Lara Bohinc**, 60 Golborne Rd, London W10 (020-7684 1465; larabohinc.com) and see Lapidica. **Lee Broom**, 95 Rivington St, London EC2 (020-7820 0742; leebroom.com) and see Wedgwood. **MisuraEmme**, www.misuraemme.it. **Natalia Miyar Atelier**, info@nataliamiyar.com; nataliamiyar.com. **Tara Bernerd**, 1 Hans St, London SW1 (020-7245 1658; tarabernerd.com). **Wedgwood**, wedgwood.co.uk.

ARTHUR WOODCROFT (D); BARNINTHECITY.COM; KELLY WEARSTLER