

FINANCIAL TIMES

superior. interiors

A woman with her eyes closed, wearing a light-colored, floral-patterned dress with a sheer overlay, lies on a patterned surface. She is holding a large, textured, light-colored shell. The background is dark and textured, possibly representing water or a night sky. The overall mood is serene and elegant.

APRIL 12 2024

how to spend it special interiors edition

Clockwise from above: a P40 by
Waltz Design; brass Coral
handles, £262; Odevo brass
door pulls, £144 per
handle; Pops Impregio for
his brass door handle with
stained glass, from £25

When Edwin Heathcote gave up architecture in order to write (including, incidentally, for the *Financial Times*), he decided he still needed a point of contact – but one that was suitably small. “I missed the sensation of making something tangible, and the most manageable way I could get back into architecture was through door handles,” he says. “The thing seemed too big.” His solution was to launch a handle design and manufacture company for architects and interior designers – and increasingly, the public. He, which Heathcote founded in 2001 with Dave Trudshaw, is now a major player in high-spec door handles. Starting with a selection of metal creations by designing Kenneth Cramer, his company now offers pieces by several renowned international designers and



HOLDING SWAY

A door-handle renaissance is taking hold, with the latest designs displaying unprecedented wit, character and glamour. Jenny Dalton reports



Clockwise from top left: Studio Job's brass and chrome-plated brass handle bar, price on request, but dark-bronze bar designed by Utzon for the Ritz II, from £260. An olive-bronze brass handle by Utzon, £170. Ashley Miles' bronze door handle, £120. Ashley Miles' brass door handle, £120. Ashley Miles' brass door handle, £120. Ashley Miles' brass door handle, £120.

Designers became tired of the minimal bent-stainless-steel bar, or "D" handle, that began to appear on every single cupboard and door from Texas to Timbuktu

architect. Its latest items include a stainless dark-bronze lever handle (from £240, pictured top right) by the late Sir Peterchurch Lane and Fox, which she devised for her own house and always intended for production.

"We are a luxury product now," says Heathcote, rather than a niche architect one; the main buyers of his company's wares today are high-end interior designers. In previous clients included Casley & Casley for whom it created bespoke nickel-plated door handles for One Hyde Park, including fish designs (from £215), as well as rectangular section levers (from £300) and pull handles (from £300), all inspired by One Wapner's Viennese modernism. Other projects include Andrew Turner's curved door handles for One Hyde Park, including fish designs (from £215), as well as rectangular section levers (from £300) and pull handles (from £300), all inspired by One Wapner's Viennese modernism. Other projects include Andrew Turner's curved door handles for One Hyde Park, including fish designs (from £215), as well as rectangular section levers (from £300) and pull handles (from £300), all inspired by One Wapner's Viennese modernism.

It's success is part of a bigger story — that of a resurgence of interest in door hardware. House of Droju was launched in London in 1997 by lawyer and architect brothers Koj and Vitale Droju, and creates made-to-order handles featuring hand-stamped leathers and chunky dark metals. The brand is a favourite of interior designers. Mowry Smith used its Maudslayi round leather knob (£288 per pair), in a three-story apartment in Mayfair, while Tom Bernard & Partners used Bernard's own design for House of Droju — the orange and brown leather Tans II (from £294 per pair) — in a seven-story house in Mayfair, as well as its Mowry lever handles in contrasting bronze finish and brass (£228 per pair, pictured overlaid) in Bernard's own one-complexed townhouse apartment.

Bernard's, meanwhile, which was originally founded in 1860 in London, but was bought by Danny Vans and his family 34 years ago, is also riding the crest of an increasingly ornate and baroque renaissance. The company has grown almost tenfold in size over the past decade and now has a turnover in the millions. Its off-the-peg and bespoke artisan-crafted handles

designers bigger and bigger budgets for door handles now," says Vans. "If they're specifying a cabinet that's costing £30,000, then they'll allow three or four thousand for the handles. Because they are the bit you touch, and the design of them can make a big difference to the overall effect of the piece."

What has intensified the rise of the handle handle is a luxury design product. A couple of things, suggests Heathcote: a realisation that British

companies couldn't compete with the price of mass-produced stainless-steel handles coming out of Asia, and the fact that designers became tired of the super-minimal bent-stainless-steel bar, or "D" handle, that began to appear on every single cupboard and door from Texas to Timbuktu.

"Something that started one feeling like the pinnacle of perfect modern expression became somewhere less corporate and anonymous," explains Heathcote. "It's ubiquitous cause boredom." In their mindless quest for a reappreciation of vintage handle design — a trend that is still growing and percolating — and a desire for unusual bespoke modern handles displaying increasing creativity and wit. Last year, Studio Job designed a desk for Dutch furniture brand Lezuuk that featured a moulded golden case as a drawer pull (price on request, pictured top left). And Ashley Miles displayed his quirky, hand-crafted ironmongery handles at last year's Decorex design show, including the ornate Lord design (from £27, pictured above top left): a curved spring of circular



(example pictured above center, £670) — including a new range of chic vintage-style bar handles — are designed all over the world.

Vans says that the handy piped-in pop in the market for something historical and contemporary "as a time when there were very few handle things UK-made, high-quality handles. There may have been plenty of shops that sell handles, but they seemed to rely on the same five or six manufacturers, so everyone ended up with the same product. And not a lot of the handles were made in the UK. Although it may be more expensive to make them here, in our view they are much better quality."

Bernard's has also recently specified handles for the One Hyde Park penthouse, each costing each corner on average between £100 and £400, with its most expensive design coming in at a cool £12,000. "Clients are giving

aggress of metal (£125), and the extremely pretty Coral (from £47, pictured above bottom right and centre), a piece of ocean-themed decoration as glamorous as it is practical. All are hand-cast to order in Sussex and come in finishes such as antique bronze, gold, or any colour to mix or contrast with a cupboard or door. The Thompson's recent collection for his, in seaweed, includes one replica of found niches, stones and pieces of broken bones (example pictured on previous page, from £215). In Australia, the award-winning architect Kathryn Robson, of modern architectural practice Robson Rak, has a number of favourite handles that, she says, "have appeared over the past five years, as designers have moved away from treating the handle as a more functional item to viewing it as an object with detail and character. They're more in tune with the current

STYLE MODERNE

SAMUEL HEATH

SINCE 1820

DESIGN CENTRE, CHELSEA HARBOUR
SAMUEL-HEATH.CO.UK

MADE IN ENGLAND



Left: Home of Grazianna
The 14, 15 and 16 handles
Mirror handle, £235 per pair

desire for exploring the romance of craft and the handmade."

Robson favours the Olivast range of Italian handles (from £38) by well-known designers and architects, but also loves a recessed cast-concrete creation in a building by Peter Zumthor in Cologne. "It's amazingly subtle," she says. "I love the fact the handle is conceived as part of the architecture, not an additional add-on." Private homes she has recently worked on feature a white zinc-oxide G8900 bronze-door handle by the Japanese brand Ochiai (AUD \$1,200, about £944), and a hand-sculpted and welded bronze design by artist Susie Staated (price on request), made up of mashed-together objects selected to represent each family member and tell the story of the house's occupants. "This is a highly individual handle with its own tale to tell and is a nod to the great Art and Craft movement," says Robson. "It brings individuality and personality and adds to the experience of the building through touch."

Many clients have contacted product designer Philip Wynn of Philip Wynn Design after spotting his "no remote" handles – such as the 1.7m-long Jewels vertical pull (from £518), the 1m-long sculptural Coral (£382, pictured on opening page), or the elegant Leaf design (from £127) – on the doors of their favourite establishments. All the handles can be finished in brass, iron or aluminium. "What has changed for us is the coming over of non-domestic markets, where high-end consumers are extremely sophisticated and demanding so much more," says Wynn.

Buyers of his designs include Eric Johnson, Ian McMillan and a number of racing drivers – clients he is looking for "a 2m statement piece or a set of glass eagle wings. We are here for that". So much so that the handles side of Wynn's commercial interior-design business, which includes renovation and bar renovations, has grown to be a significant part of the company's turnover.

Similarly, as interior designer Lawson Ebbitt, Akr Robson claims a new reputation for richly ornated or ornamental handles in clients' private homes. "People have come to understand just how much they can add to a room or a piece of furniture," she says. "Used these have seen

glassless handles in situ, more as a statement of what a difference they can make. But once they do see, they start to notice them again and again, because it's one element of design that they come into direct contact with on a daily basis."

Robson's choices are well-creating, as the market continues to grow.

A number of her recent favourites include Promenade's handcrafted glass and bronze Mirano handle

(only available as

part of a furniture commission); these Ditch Jewels-like 24k gold-plated handle (£590 per pair), which was used in a show apartment at The Laureston in London (Robson refers to the brand as "the crown house of door knobs"); and Ochiai's striking cast-concrete shafts made from brass, as featured on a wardrobe with a metallic, chiselled frame (£166, pictured on opening page).

"Ten years ago handles hardly registered for most clients embarking on designing their home," says Robson. "But the majority of our customers have international lifestyles and are exposed to innovative and high-end design around the globe. There has been a new ball enter and handles now have a significant role to instruct."

Certainly designers are making the opportunity to be creative with their architectural detailing. As Mendocino says: "They can be a relatively inexpensive and flexible way for architect to customize a building, and because they are a very simple product, there's a constant wave of new discoveries of what you can do with them – or what has been done in the past that can be revived. Handles are a very human part of a building; they set up all your expectations for what's inside." ■

PULLING POWER

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