



Interior Design

In the second part of her series on interior design, Susan Llewellyn talks about her love affair with Buenos Aires and the architecture and style of this fascinating city

Pimlico. Interior Design shop showing current trends and tastes

I am going to let you in to a secret. I have fallen in love... with Buenos Aires; The City of the Beautiful Air, set on the banks of the Rio de la Plata, or the Silver River. The Spaniards, when they first landed, hoped to find a wealth of silver. But that's another story.

I thought that I would whet your appetite and you too can share with me my enthusiasm for this amazing city. Architecturally and design-wise, it is diverse and eclectic in its taste. It is a place of contrasts, from the Spanish-colonial style, as in the simple unadorned church pictured below, to the vibrant colours of La Boca. When the Italian immigrants arrived from Genoa, they settled near the ports, building houses out of corrugated iron. They could not afford to buy paint, so asked the boat men to give them any discarded paint regardless of colour. There are also the high rise buildings for offices and flats that abound. In interiors, as well as in architecture, a recurring trend is one where the designs are bold, and there is a fusion of different styles, periods and tastes.



La Boca

Corrientes symbolises Buenos Aires for me. This 67m high Obelisk designed by the Argentinean architect Alberto Prebisch symbolises the courage, the power and the thrust into the future of this extraordinary city and country. These are an immensely strong people and if you are intending to do business with them, never forget this.

Buenos Aires society is extremely conscious about all aspects of design. Buenos Aires was declared design city in November 2005, by UNESCO. It means that it is a city that has made creativity an essential element of its economic development.

Creative industry makes up 3% of Argentinean GDP, 2% of employment and 7% of Buenos GDP and 4% of its employment.

I think that the obelisk in the middle of the Avenue 9 de Julio and Avenue

Argentina was at its peak in the 1890s when immense wealth was being generated



Spanish Colonial Church. The oldest in Buenos Aires



and huge mansions were built in the French baroque style by the wealthy. Many of these mansions are still in existence, cheek by jowl with contemporary and modern buildings. Pictured below shows the contemporary and traditional mix of the Four Seasons hotel. It shows the luxury and classic contemporary design, with marble entrance halls and smart furniture.



Four Seasons hotel lobby



Four Seasons Hotel room

Our visit opened with an invitation to the British Embassy to look around the magnificent house which has some of the best examples of antiques in the whole of Buenos Aires. The fine and beautiful antique furniture on display was a joy to look at. The following shows examples of the decorative antiques that are much loved at ►



Examples of decorative antique pieces held at the British Embassy



the luxury end of the market in Buenos Aires.

A friend of mine and member of the BIDA, Katrina Callow, has the wonderful task of decorating embassies all over the world and had finished the restoration and refurbishment of this prestigious Parisian-style mansion. Not only did she respect the original grandeur and features, but had to also comply with fire regulations and modern safety standards. I must say she has done an excellent job to maintain the elegant and stylish interior of the early 19th Century building. (See below).

The house is not only used for Ambassadorial functions, but is also available for private functions like weddings and special parties, and is a very vibrant and

active venue. It also boasts of a glorious terrace and garden which houses a wonderful sculpture by Elizabeth Frink. I have always admired her work and I had the honour of meeting her through her step-son. In this glorious garden setting, the sculpture is set off to great advantage and I can just visualise fabulous receptions happening in this location.

In contrast with the 19th Century Parisian grandeur of the British Embassy, we also visited Casa Curutchet de le Corbusier, the house that Corbusier designed for his Doctor

client. The very contemporary exterior provided a good comparison between the contrasting styles of the two buildings, although I personally was a little disappointed in the interior.



Garden at the British Embassy

We were also, from an interior design point of view, entertained handsomely by members of DARA who are the equivalent of the BIDA and have recently celebrated their 20th anniversary. They entertained us for lunch and a number of lectures and visits and I had the pleasure of giving a lecture on 'Trends in Interior Design', to an invited audience, together with the Dean of the American Intercontinental University in London, Axel Griesinger.

One of the members of DARA, Diana Palacci, invited us to her shop, which is



The British Embassy



The house by Corbusier

called Pimlico (see image on first page). It shows examples of the classic and contemporary interior design mixed with contemporary art and antiques, such as the antique parchment above the contemporary sofa on sale in her shop.

Hand-crafted metal and silver-ware are of the highest quality. We went to visit a silversmith who produces work of the highest quality and is commissioned by the Crown heads of Europe and people of great wealth.

So what is on offer and where can you source? My observation was that there are



Hand-crafted metal and silver-ware

bargains to be found. The best area to source antiques as a starter and beginner's guide, is to go to San Telmo. There is an antique market in the square there which offers small items like silver, glass, cutlery from the Edwardian to the 1950s and 60s. The surrounding antique shops offer a type and variety of antiques that are very much of the flamboyant baroque style and large in scale, but there are some wonderful quality pieces to be acquired at realistic prices, particularly turn-of-the-Century furniture and decorative items which could be used in less sumptuous or grand surroundings.

The quality of what's on offer from the market is good, not unlike Portobello, but probably less expensive than Portobello has become. I particularly liked a shop which ironically was called *Portobello*. It is run by a half-Russian and half-Italian, imposing gentleman. He had some beautiful pieces which were of high quality and certainly a good price. For example, a magnificent Baccarat chandelier which was extremely reasonable and I would love to have bought it myself!

I found, to date, that the Argentinean taste seems to be on a large scale, as the type of property in Buenos Aires where you would place the items were fairly large in scale. But I do believe, having done some research there, that there is a very real choice for quality, not only in the Baroque style or Art Nouveau, but also in Art Deco which is something we all



Houses and works of art are typically of a grand scale

enjoy and is very sought after in the European market at the moment. You will see from the pictures, that anything goes! You can place a baroque, Art Nouveau or Art Deco piece, surrounded by a contemporary setting. The mix between the old and the new seems very much the Argentinean taste.

Dining out is a real pleasure and there are some wonderful restaurants, in particular on the waterfront, which is rather like the area in London between Tower bridge and the Design Museum. As an interior designer, I noticed that the décor is very contemporary using materials like concrete and metal, enhanced by an unusual piece of art and it is

all extremely sophisticated. The food is of the highest culinary standard. The Argentineans are extremely smart and enjoy a meal out and café society. They are an extremely friendly, polite and welcoming people.

I will end by suggesting that you go to Café Tortoni (Avenida le Mayo 829 www.cafetortoni.com.ar), which is an Art Nouveau café and has great atmosphere. Two restaurants I highly recommend are Chila; they offer a particularly delicious wine - Rottini Sauvignon Blanc 2005 (Avenida Alicia Moreau de Justo 1160, www.chilaweb.com.ar) and Sucre (www.sucrerestaurant.com.ar).

I will leave you by tantalizing you with the fact that we haven't touched on the Tango, the very passion of the country and the people who are actually able to execute wonderful hand-crafted work, and the vibrancy of the country. But that is for another day. I am off now to Milan for a long weekend at the Milan Furniture fair which is a particularly important date in the interior designer's diary. I will tell you about my exploits there, in my next article. □



I particularly want my articles to service your needs, so any feedback would be hugely helpful and welcomed so that we can work together in producing what you want to know about interior design and the antiques world. Your suggestions will be greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

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A wonderful work of art: Combines beauty and engineering as it opens at dawn and gradually shuts during the course of the day.