

# Verve

AUCKLAND'S  
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LIFESTYLE  
MAGAZINE

ISSUE 173

MARCH 2021

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# Veere Grenney Decorated

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Among the world's finest interior designers, Veere Grenney's honours include seven straight years listed in *House and Gardens'* Directory of 100 Leading Interior Designers and gracing *Architectural Digest's* Top 100. Sotheby's notes that the New Zealand-born, London-based creative has been hailed as "the greatest aesthete of our generation" and describes his rooms as "calm" and "beautiful" with an "exciting and unexpected edge". I begin by asking him if this would be a fair reflection of his character.



"I have always maintained that the qualities of taste and style can be acquired after years of learning. However, the master is the person that has inherent taste and style and then spends a lifetime honing their skill. Whatever qualities we're born with can only be manifested through years of hard labour. No one who is recognised for their artistry or skill has got where they have without working at their talent."



"Sotheby's words are most flattering, and I would like to think that they are a reflection of my personality," he says. "I have been crafting my art as an interior designer for a number of years which naturally gives me an external confidence. I love classical beauty, but the unexpected will always bring an exotic twist which I am hoping gives my work a unique quality."

"When approaching a new project, the architecture—or the proposed architecture of a new build—and the surrounding environment is vitally important. The great John Fowler always said, 'Appropriateness is the most important ingredient of our work'. In other words, if I am working on a beach house in the West Indies or New Zealand, the way we live in these places reflects inertly on how I decorate the house. The same applies in projects I have done in the Hamptons, New York for example. If I am working on a project in one of the great cities, the aim could be to house a great art collection. In which case, the interior decoration is pared back so the emphasis is on the art that is being displayed. Alternatively, if I am working on an English country house that stands within a lot of its own land, I am usually taking into consideration a lifestyle that involves hunting and shooting and so on."

Fascinatingly, Veere even takes into account the climate, whether the building will be prone to long winter evenings with short days, for example: "Giving a client decoration that is completely out of sync with the environment around them never works."

"I think everybody that works in a business which manifests beauty works in an artform."

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**How important is the architecture and surrounding environment in informing how you design an interior?**

**Do you consider what you do to be an artform?**

**Do you believe style and good taste are things that can be taught?**



When you left New Zealand, was it with the intention of working within the design industry, or were you simply wishing to travel?

Do you believe designers should have a particular style, or move with trends?

Do you still feel a strong connection with New Zealand?

Born in Dunedin, Veere was 22 years old when he left Aotearoa for London in the '70s. He navigated from dealing antiques on Portobello Road to working with leading London design firm Mary Fox Linton, and collaborating with one of his heroes, the legendary late designer David Nightingale Hicks, a time he recalls as "a baptism of fire, during which I spent years learning every aspect of the business". Later, Veere served as director at Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler, before establishing his own interior design studio. In 2018, he published design bible, *Veere Greeney: On Decorating – A Point of View*.

"Growing up I was always fascinated—bordering on obsessive—by architecture, interior decoration, houses and the way people lived. I only ever wanted to work in the world of beautiful decoration and antiques. However, growing up in New Zealand in the '60s, there was no clear path of how to establish oneself in this world. There were no courses to study anything to do with the arts and at a university level there was only architecture as a route towards the world of beauty. During my teenage years, London was the only place in the world where I wished to be, except perhaps Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. However, I knew that London was the epicentre of the world of cool, hip style and decoration so although I had a huge desire to travel the world, my ultimate destination was London."

Veere says that travel has always been a vital source of inspiration for his work ("if you keep your eyes wide open, there is inspiration everywhere"), but the digital age has made it even easier to discover new things.

"Twenty years ago, inspiration was only found through magazines and books, now your computer or phone can almost instantly give you a visual experience of beauty, or whatever it is that interests you."

"As an interior designer, I never had one particular style. I believe that as our work is a service industry, one should understand one's craft completely, and then move with trend and fashion. Most importantly interpret your clients' needs and show them a way to live."

Veere's wide-ranging portfolio includes homes in Mustique, Manhattan, a Swedish archipelago, and even on a Wyoming ranch.

"I have once or twice worked on wonderful late 19th century arts and crafts houses in England, where I find my creativity works overtime," he reveals. "I truly love late 19th century to early 20th century decoration." He recounts having "been in love" with an array of other historic styles throughout his career, including Georgian classicism—"to its colonial interpretation, the Georgian architecture of the Deep South of America"—modernism, and art deco.

"Possibly one of my most favourite forms of architecture one finds in the Regency period of 1805-1820," he continues. "Here you get the beginnings of a modest villa, with classical adornment. Growing up in New Zealand I became very conscious of arts and crafts decoration which was often very prevalent in the grand houses of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. In England, I discovered it may have been more sophisticated."

"I had a very happy childhood and life and am so proud and thrilled to call myself a New Zealander. However, my career and success on a large stage could only have been achieved by living outside New Zealand, in one of the great metropolises like London and New York. My family still live in New Zealand, so I still have an enormous connection and call it home. I visit whenever I can, sometimes once a year, sometimes every two years. And I still love it as much as always."

As well as his two homes in the UK (one in London, the others a "peerless 1760 fishing lodge in Suffolk" from where he loves to explore the countryside with his lurcher), Veere also has also built a place in Tangier "with views across the Mediterranean". A widely contrasting environment to England, I ask if that's part of the allure.

"I love Morocco," he says. "Climatically, and in terms of vegetation, Tangier is very similar to Auckland—by being on the sea with a wonderful view, and even the humidity is similar. I am very passionate about my garden there, where I have two-and-a-half acres and can grow everything that grows in Auckland. So, in a way, I feel like I could still be living in Remuera."

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