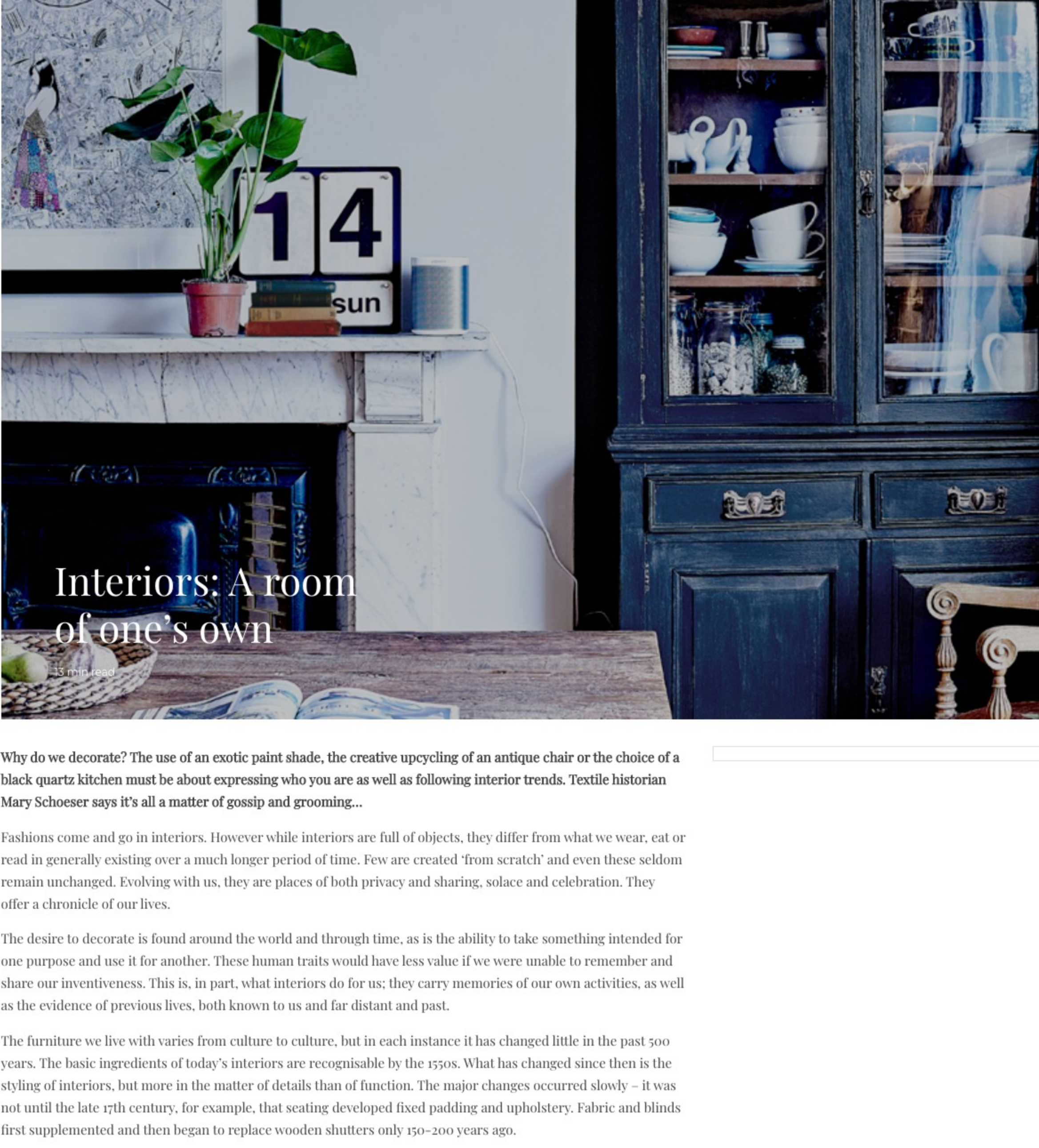




Interiors: A room of one's own

Why do we decorate? The use of an exotic paint shade, the creative upcycling of an antique chair or the choice of a black quartz kitchen must be about expressing who you are as well as following interior trends. Textile historian Mary Schoeser says it's all a matter of gossip and grooming...

Fashions come and go in interiors. However while interiors are full of objects, they differ from what we wear, eat or read in generally existing over a much longer period of time. Few are created 'from scratch' and even these seldom remain unchanged. Evolving with us, they are places of both privacy and sharing, solace and celebration. They offer a chronicle of our lives.

The desire to decorate is found around the world and through time, as is the ability to take something intended for one purpose and use it for another. These human traits would have less value if we were unable to remember and share our inventiveness. This is, in part, what interiors do for us; they carry memories of our own activities, as well as the evidence of previous lives, both known to us and far distant and past.

The furniture we live with varies from culture to culture, but in each instance it has changed little in the past 500 years. The basic ingredients of today's interiors are recognisable by the 1500s. What has changed since then is the styling of interiors, but more in the matter of details than of function. The major changes occurred slowly – it was not until the late 17th century, for example, that seating developed fixed padding and upholstery. Fabric and blinds first supplemented and then began to replace wooden shutters only 150-200 years ago.

This gradual process suggests not disinterest but rather satisfaction, tempered by the inventiveness of human nature. The slow pace of change also suggests that the rooms we inhabit today cannot be radically new. Yet there is an urge to create highly individual, even eccentric, interiors. It is as if we are looking for an interior reality to tame the alarming effects of globalisation. 'No', our interiors say, 'we are not all the same'. This impulse, though, again has roots in the far-distant past.

The universal message of interiors is that they are places to meet and create in. They also offer safety beyond the obvious physical barriers of walls and doors. Robin Dunbar is a developmental geneticist who argues that language emerged in humans to replace the grooming activity of our nearest relatives, the great apes. Grooming is their way of establishing bonds. Dunbar believes we use language in the same way, to develop the relationships and loyalties that bind together the 'small world' of people that we depend on. Everywhere our small world numbers about 150 people, which is also, interestingly, the average size of a four-generational family. But without kinship links of this quantity, how do we form our clans? What if objects also play a part in creating and remembering bonds? Then how we decorate takes on new significance.

The importance of the table and the visible signs of individuality in our interiors provide direct links to those important activities of gossip and grooming. The gossip, or informal, personal conversation about persons or incidents that forms alliances, seems to be more confidential when shared inside around dining room or restaurant tables. The grooming, a sensuous, touch-based form of bonding, is offered to family and friends in a ritual event each time they enter your home. After the warm greeting, the multitude of interior textures and colours take over, sending their clues to the senses. Friends and allies will respond positively. If you point out a new vase or a newly painted wall, their response will be to touch it. If others are content amid the contents of our homes, they are likely to be content with us, too.



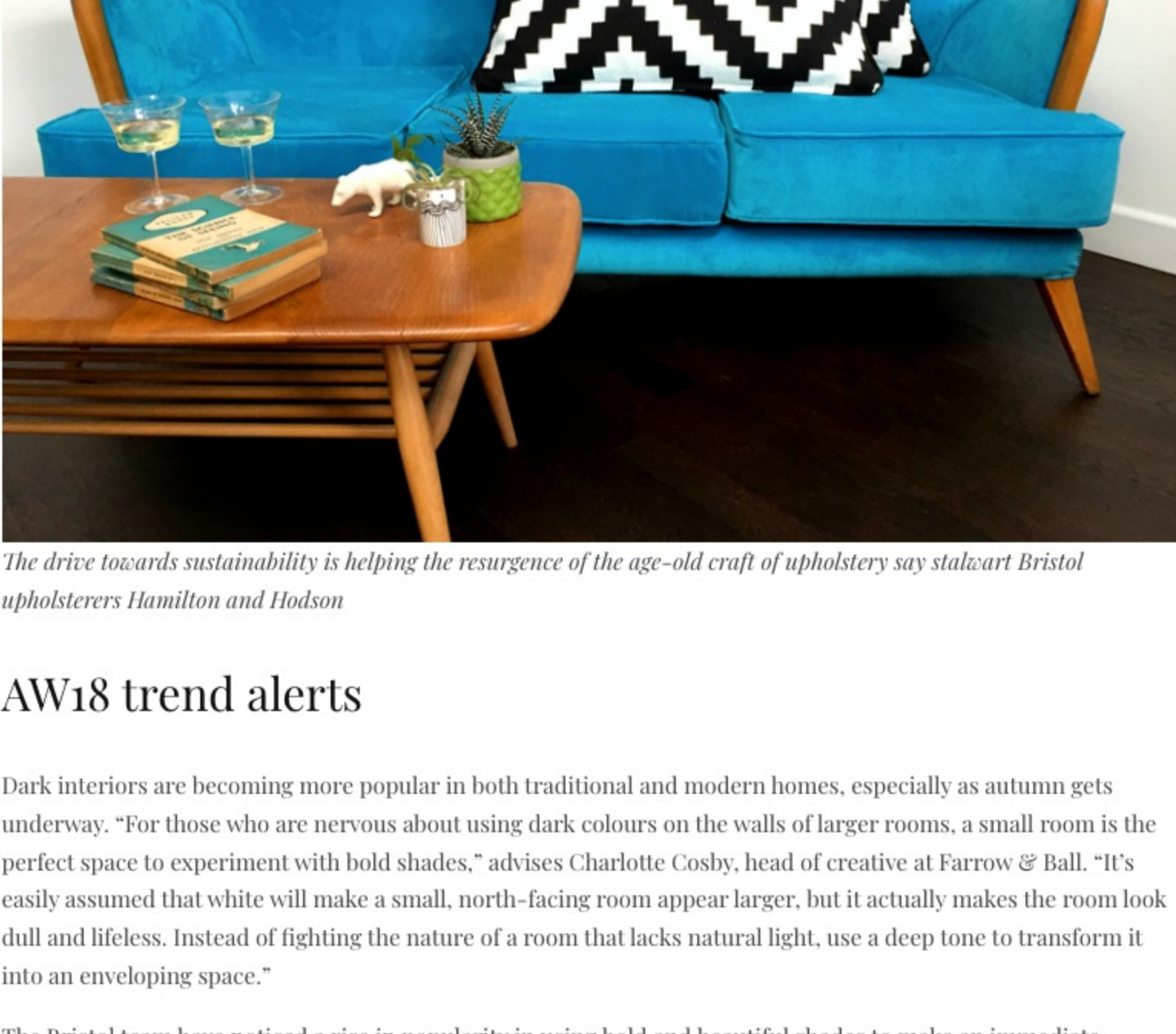
Living rooms are receiving a dose of colour with elegant, romantic pinks like Farrow & Ball's Rangeall No.296 (Traditional) 3

Decorating, then, is not a trivial pursuit. Representing the anthropologist's point of view, Mary Douglas declared that 'good taste' is an index of social connections, reproductive fitness and our ability to mobilise resources. My own view is that the way the index of good taste varies from place to place all over the globe is explained by the small-world theory. We need only understand and partake in the tastes of our own 'clan'; in decorating our homes we participate in preserving and adjusting that style. Doing so declares our allegiances. Doing nothing sends a message of disinterest in worldly connections, which is why the bare interior is rightly associated with hermits and religious orders. Clearly the common urge to make a room one's own is more than a decorative indulgence; it may be a matter of survival.

All in good time: decorating mindfully

There is often a sense of urgency and trying to 'get it all done' when it comes to decorating and design, especially in a new home, says Bristol stylist, designer and twelvemonthsalhome.com writer Emily Rickard. Taking your time and being mindful not only lessens the anxiety of making big decisions, it also helps financially. Here are a few Emily's top tips...

- Don't buy interim furniture. It can be wasteful, and often you'll end up settling for something that doesn't quite work. Leave a corner empty, or pile books on the floor artfully while you take time to find that perfect piece.
- Embrace the ugly and the unwanted. Instead of ripping out something you cannot bear, think about how you can design the room around it.
- Don't hang all your art on day one. Feel the empty space, see how it looks a few days later. Then start to plot out where art should live. If you rush, you'll no doubt be doing it twice. Lean some pieces in places you might like to see them, then live with them a little.
- If an item from your old home doesn't quite work, think about any minor adjustments you can make to it, rather than replacing it. A lot can be said for a lick of paint, a new piece of upholstery or re-framing a piece of art.
- Green is the new black. Decorate with house plants – they never go out of style and keep the oxygen levels balanced in your home. They are also known to clean the air and boost healing.



The drive towards sustainability is helping the resurgence of the age-old craft of upholstery say stalwart Bristol upholsterers Hamilton and Hodson

AW18 trend alerts

Dark interiors are becoming more popular in both traditional and modern homes, especially as autumn gets underway. "For those who are nervous about using dark colours on the walls of larger rooms, a small room is the perfect space to experiment with bold shades," advises Charlotte Cosby, head of creative at Farrow & Ball. "It's easily assumed that white will make a small, north-facing room appear larger, but it actually makes the room look dull and lifeless. Instead of fighting the nature of a room that lacks natural light, use a deep tone to transform it into an enveloping space."

The Bristol team have noticed a rise in popularity in using bold and beautiful shades to make an immediate impact. "As interior trends steer away from more neutral colour groups, people are becoming braver as they paint the rooms in their homes with a plethora of bright colours," Charlotte continues. "Greens are extremely popular at the moment – 'Calke Green', a deep sage hue, looks fantastic in bedrooms and studies while 'Breakfast Room Green' belongs in busy living spaces like kitchens and bathrooms. Living rooms are also receiving a dose of colour with elegant, romantic pinks like Cinder Rose and Peignoir."

"The trends for this coming year are, indeed, bolder and stronger, with more of the deeper colour palette," agrees Laura Reynolds at bespoke kitchen designer Fifteen Twelve. "But maintaining simplicity is key. Bristol habitats are still favouring the dark blue shaker kitchens with bright white surfaces and brass handles. This design sits beautifully in the local period properties – as something respectful of the era with a contemporary feel."



The gorgeous George sofa from Neptune in situ

Brooklyn to Bristol

This autumn/winter also sees the influx of a few New York design trends weaving their way across the Atlantic and into the homes of many in London, Bristol and beyond says Emily Rickard.

"Spa bathrooms: we used to only see these kinds of luxury bathroom ideas over in the States or in hotels," she says. "Marble flooring, luxury taps and brassware finishes in copper, brass or oil-rubbed bronze. Include bold statements such as luxury pendant lighting and feature mirrors. This is the year not to hold back with your bathroom renovation. According to Pinterest, we are now 268% more interested in spa-bathroom inspiration than ever before."

It's a similar story in the world of kitchens (see also p2). "Previous years have kept us all in the safe world of navy and charcoal cabinets, mixed with white. We have remained very British," posts Emily. "This coming year will see the re-introduction of boldly coloured kitchens, with high-end looking fixtures and fittings, and the integration of concrete, marble and stone."

Brooklyn is abundant with mixed metals, she tells us. "Taking design inspiration from the industrial areas like Dumbo and Gowanus, and with the constant gentrification of the whole borough, they're bang on-trend. Don't be afraid to mix – be it with lighting or fixtures or something more temporary like a combination of silver and gold picture frames for a gallery wall. Take it one step further with a dark bronze paint colour."

If you're keen to bring a little Brooklyn to Bristol, you could start with a feature ceiling – many of the borough's brownstones still have tin ones as part of their current design story. Recreate the look with a textured ceiling, or simply paint a darker colour than the rest of the room to make a statement, create a sense of vertical space and add a bold pop."

For a feeling of grandeur, even in the simplest of dwellings, you might consider making a library wall. "Create a wall of books and objects from existing cabinetry or simple flat-pack shelving," suggests Emily. "Many Brooklyn apartments boast shelves of colourful stylised books and the impact of curated books that are well thought-out is fabulous."

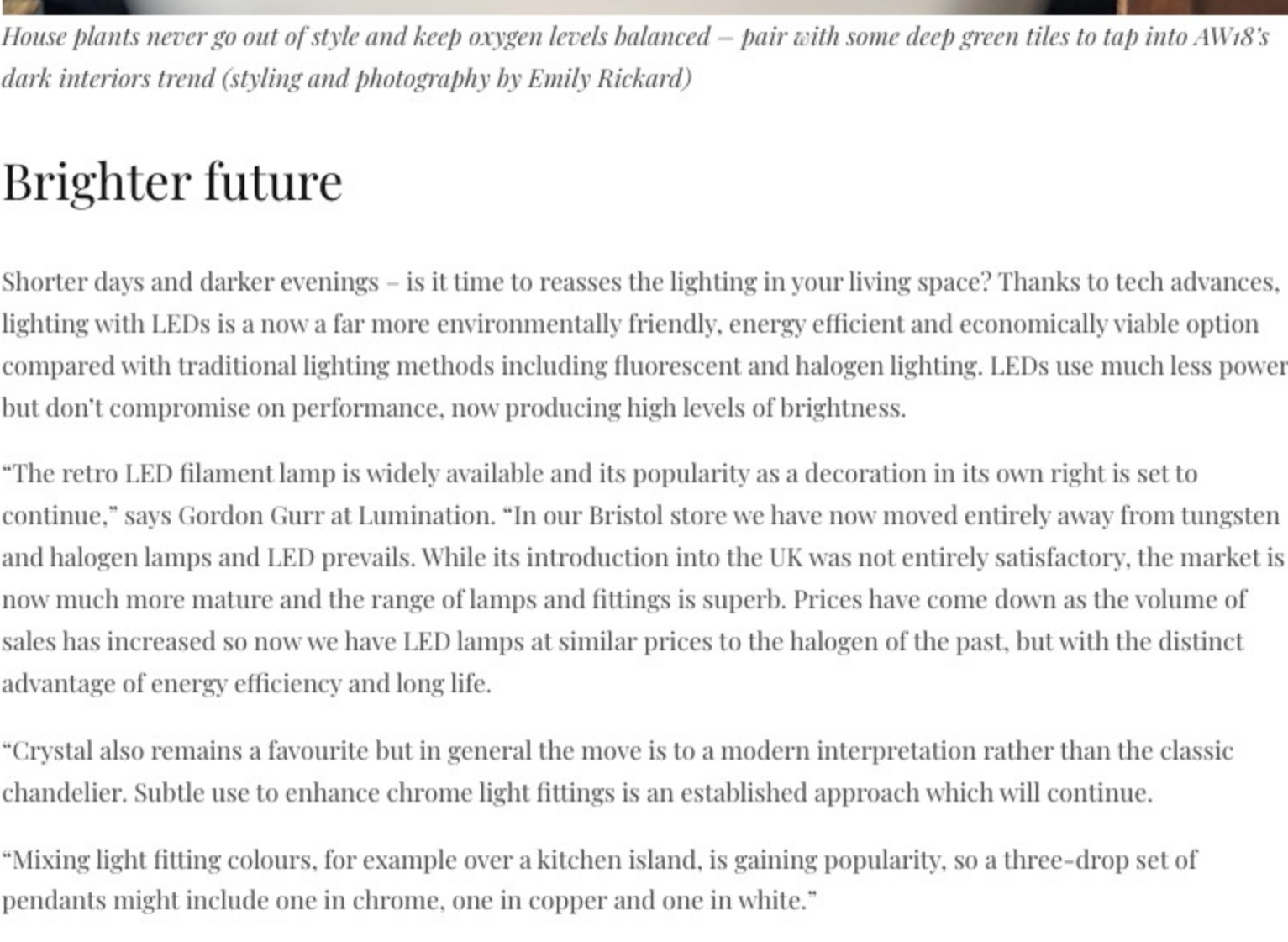
The shift to sustainability

Eco-consciousness is another big consideration for the coming season – and, of course, one that needs to stick around and become perennial. What's great is that now so many businesses are on board, sustainability no longer means compromising on style.

"When it comes to sustainable interiors my favourite thing is rugs and flooring," says interior designer David Hutton in Stoke Bishop. "I recently discovered The Unnatural Flooring Company which has become a staple part of my designs. I've used them on most of my projects since. What makes them special is that their flooring is made out of recycled plastic bottles, which is great, but for me it's the aesthetic – it looks like real natural flooring and is really practical as it's bleach cleanable so you can glug down that red wine with confidence! My favourite range is the New England which I've used for carpeting a holiday home in Devon and a city flat in Chalfont."

"We do as much as we can to protect the environment we live in – it's something we value and live by," says Charlotte at Farrow & Ball. "From the creation of our quick-drying water-based paints and wallpapers printed onto responsibly sourced paper, to raw materials, energy use, packaging and distribution, we are motivated by a desire to care for our environment. As a result, all our paints comply with the latest EU environmental legislation regarding volatile organic compounds content of paints."

Fifteen Twelve's Laura Reynolds feels the same as an increasing number of Bristol companies. "It is important to us that we use independent small and local businesses for all of our trade – ensuring we're keeping the supply traffic of all our goods to a minimum," she says. "Our bespoke cabinets are handmade and painted in Bristol, the stone worktops are manufactured at Marmobello in Bristol, range cookers come from Nuffin Electrical in Gloucester Road, and flooring is sourced from the Mandarin Stone tile shop in Clifton."



House plants never go out of style and keep oxygen levels balanced – pair with some deep green tiles to tap into AW18's darker styling and photography by Emily Rickard

Brighter future

Shorter days and darker evenings – is it time to reassess the lighting in your living space? Thanks to tech advances, lighting with LEDs is a now a far more environmentally friendly, energy efficient and economically viable option compared with traditional lighting methods including fluorescent and halogen lighting. LEDs use much less power but don't compromise on performance, now producing high levels of brightness.

"The retro LED filament lamp is widely available and its popularity as a decoration in its own right is set to continue," says Gordon Gurr at Lumination. "In our Bristol store we have now moved entirely away from tungsten and halogen lamps and LED prevails. While its introduction into the UK was not entirely satisfactory, the market is now much more mature and the range of lamps and fittings is superb. Prices have come down as the volume of sales has increased so now we have LED lamps at similar prices to the halogens of the past, but with the distinct advantage of energy efficiency and long life."

"Crystal also remains a favourite but in general the move is to a modern interpretation rather than the classic chandelier. Subtle use to enhance chrome light fittings is an established approach which will continue."

"Pendant light fitting colours, for example over a kitchen island, is gaining popularity, so a three-drop set of pendants might include one in chrome, one in copper and one in white."

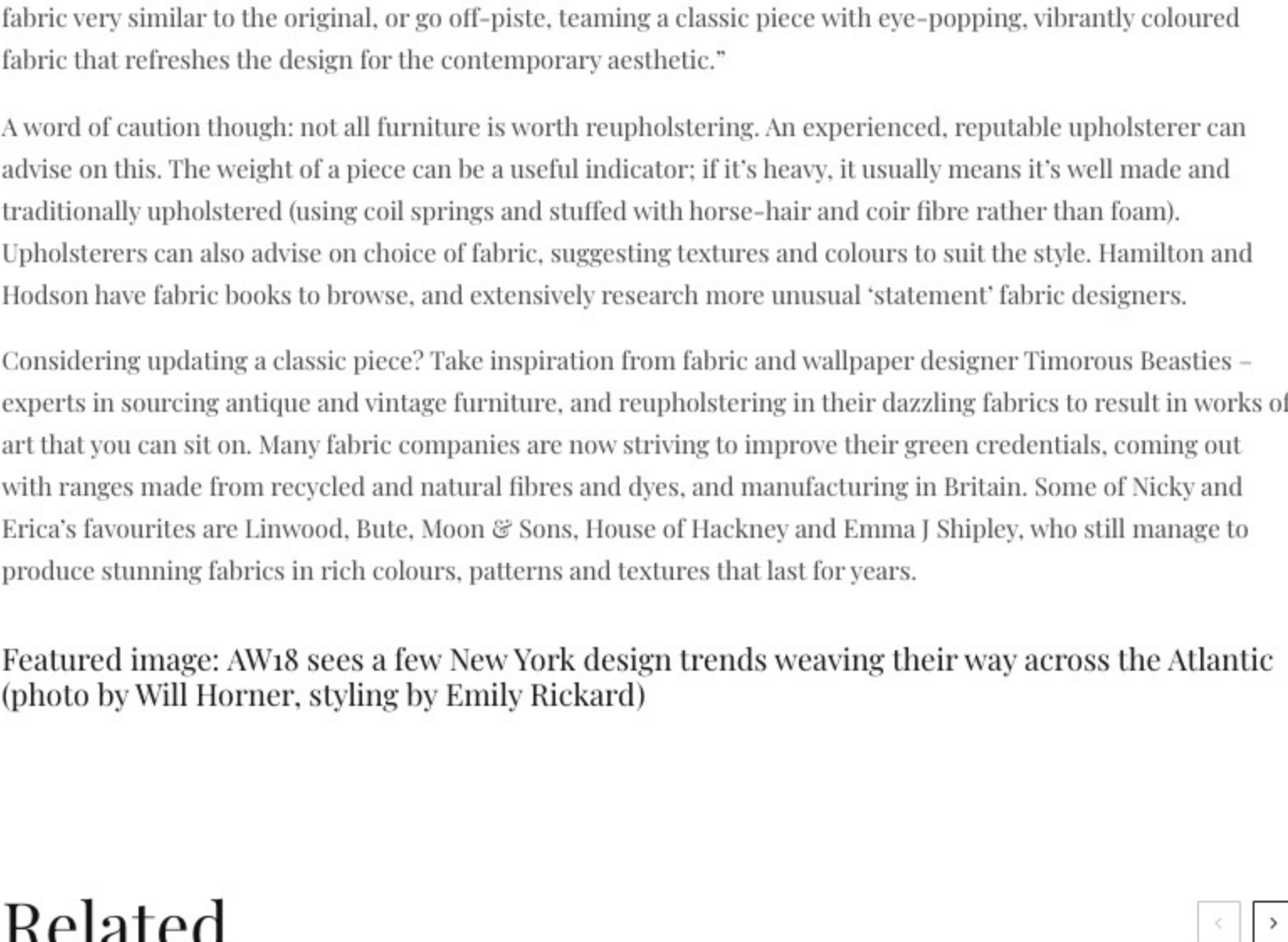
Working with what you have

The drive towards sustainable living is helping in the resurgence of the age-old craft of upholstery; which has great eco-friendly credentials as restoring rather than replacing reduces the consumption of natural resources such as wood and reduces pollution (with less electricity consumed and minimal transport costs). "In an era of brand new furniture bought on interest-free credit, where you're likely to find your exact sofa in your friend's house, the investment of reupholstering classic pieces is so worthwhile," say Nicky Hamilton and Erica Fredricksson at Hamilton and Hodson, one of Bristol's oldest upholstery companies.

"Furniture from the key design periods, such as the Victorian era and mid-20th century, was built to last by highly skilled craftspeople. It was often produced in small-scale workshops that demanded attention to detail and people would save for years to buy beautifully crafted pieces that could be handed down from generation to generation. Even furniture made 20 years ago, before manufacturers were forced to cut corners with mass-produced items, is generally better quality than its modern equivalent and, by today's standards, a custom piece."

"You can strip back a sofa to its frame and if the stuffing is horse-hair, this can be washed by hand to regain its softness, even if it's decades old," advises Nicky. "A wing armchair from the 1800s often only needs new fabric every 15 to 20 years, with normal wear and tear." She has seen a significant increase in demand for new services as more people opt to preserve what they have rather than buying new, and is often commissioned to reupholster something that holds sentimental value. "If you want to update a much-loved piece to suit the style, Hamilton and Hodson have fabric books to browse, and extensively research more unusual 'statement' fabric designers."

To find something special to have restored, take a look around your parents' or grandparents' houses – you never know what they may have tucked away in a corner or gathering dust in the attic. Another great source for interesting pieces and great bargains is auctions. However, when buying at auction or online, try to ascertain the condition of a piece; you may find yourself paying for unforeseen repairs that are not obvious through photos and could be quite costly. Finding pieces by a well-known designer but in need of some TLC can be a good investment. And spending money on a quirky piece that you love, but not by a noted designer, is also worth doing.



See Bancha No.298 (Modern) 2 from Farrow & Ball's brand new collection

"With pieces from design periods like mid-century modern, you can go two ways," Erica says. "Reupholster with a fabric very similar to the original, or go off-piste, teaming a classic piece with eye-popping, vibrantly coloured fabric that refreshes the design for the contemporary aesthetic."

A word of caution though: not all furniture is worth reupholstering. An experienced, reputable upholsterer can advise on this. The weight of a piece can be a useful indicator; if it's heavy, it usually means it's well made and traditionally upholstered (using coil springs and stuffed with horse-hair and coir fibre rather than foam). Upholsterers can also advise on choice of fabric, suggesting textures and colours to suit the style. Hamilton and Hodson have fabric books to browse, and extensively research more unusual 'statement' fabric designers.

Considering updating a classic piece? Take inspiration from fabric and wallpaper designer Timorous Beasties – experts in sourcing antique and vintage furniture, and reupholstering in their dazzling fabrics to result in works of art that you can sit on. Many fabric companies are now striving to improve their green credentials, coming out with ranges made from recycled and natural fibres and dyes, and manufacturing in Britain. Some of Nicky and Erica's favourites are Linwood, Bute, Moon & Sons, House of Hackney and Emma J Shipley, who still manage to produce stunning fabrics in rich colours, patterns and textures that last for years.

Featured image: AW18 sees a few New York design trends weaving their way across the Atlantic (photo by Will Horner, styling by Emily Rickard)

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