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BRINGING WARMTH TO LONDON

A former Ralph Lauren staffer has become a designer of choice for wealthy migrants to the British capital; adding rich colors and luxurious fabrics



BY KRISTIANO ANG

HUDA COTRAN HAD what seemed like the perfect apartment: a 5,000-square-foot London flat in a Norman Foster-designed building that overlooked the River Thames.

Unfortunately, she hated it. "I hired a well-known interior designer who made the house gray and cold," said Mrs. Cotran, a Lebanese-British film producer. "It's already gray and cold in London and I wasn't comfortable at all."

To fix it, she went to a Ralph Lauren showroom whose décor she liked and asked for help. It came from an unlikely source: The showroom recommended Maurizio Pellizzoni, a former Ralph Lauren staffer who had no prior experience working on residences.

Since taking on Mrs. Cotran's project in 2007, Mr. Pellizzoni has made a name for himself as a decorator of choice for many wealthy, first-generation migrants to the British capital. His clients range from Middle Eastern lawyers to Russian bankers and British soccer stars.

Though Mr. Pellizzoni, the 39-year-old founder of Maurizio Pellizzoni Design, says each project is tailored to the client, his designs tend to share certain characteristics. The vast ma-



MIXING AND MATCHING Maurizio Pellizzoni in his London studio, where he displays signature touches such as luxurious fabrics, above left, and dark wood and whimsical wall accessories, above right.

jority of his work comes from customers referred from Ralph Lauren, who want to replicate the elegant aesthetic of the American brand.

Translated to interiors, this means extensive use of quirky antiques like masks and vases, set against what Mr. Pellizzoni calls "soft furniture"—mesh chandeliers and curvy seating fixtures in luxurious materials like leather and suede, against a backdrop of warm colors such as beiges and browns.

To bring warmth to Mrs. Cotran's austere home, Mr. Pellizzoni ordered suede ottomans and handsome dark club chairs from Ralph Lauren. (On average, he says, 80% of the pieces used come from his former employer, for which he gets a commission.) Fuchsia flowers and ornaments such as Chinese ceramic vases and a small sculpture of the Buddha are scattered over the property.

Another client, Lynne Choo-Choy, a

Lebanese-British lawyer, hired Mr. Pellizzoni to design her country house. "I wanted something that sits well in the country but looks as though you can transplant it into the middle of Mayfair," she said, referencing the tony London district.

In the hallway of Mrs. Choo-Choy's six-bedroom home in Godalming, a country town outside London, Mr. Pellizzoni placed a stag's head over a fireplace and mounted about a dozen masks, collected from her travels to India and Africa, on a wall. To give the formal areas of the house a stately feel, he installed black double doors, stained black walnut flooring, and blue velvet curtains.

When Mr. Pellizzoni moved to London from his native Italy in 1998, he was unable to speak English. He worked in the kitchen of a McDonald's restaurant and, as his English improved, shifted to selling clothes.

His first brush with interior design came when he studied interior architecture at London Metropolitan University. During his course, Mr. Pellizzoni freelanced for Ralph Lauren as a window-display designer. After graduating, he took on a job overseeing the label's homeware collections in Europe.

He attributes his ability to mix and match items tastefully to his three-year stint there. "At other showrooms, everything is from that brand," he said. "At Ralph Lauren, you learn to insert stuff from the outside world, to make it a real home."

In 2007, Mr. Pellizzoni founded his three-man firm. "Now I still work 24/7, but for myself," he said. One of his most high-profile jobs to date was for Carly Cole, the wife of the English soccer player Joe, who commissioned Mr. Pellizzoni to work on her townhouse in Chelsea, an upscale West



London neighborhood.

"I really like the Ralph Lauren look and Maurizio's look is very familiar," said Mrs. Cole, who has since commissioned Mr. Pellizzoni for another property. "Once I started, I didn't stop."

Mr. Pellizzoni takes the task of understanding customers' preferences seriously. Before designing a mansion in Scotland, he lived with his client's family in a bed-and-breakfast, interviewing family members for their input.

Mr. Pellizzoni's years with Ralph Lauren helped him establish links with many suppliers, allowing him to source otherwise obscure items.

For instance, for Mrs. Choo-Choy's home, he was able to pick up cushions from accessories manufacturer de Le Cuona that were not for sale. He typically charges a fixed fee and takes a 10% commission on all goods ordered.

This tends to mean projects never end. Mrs. Choo-Choy still calls regularly when she buys new accessories that she has trouble placing.

Mrs. Cotran hired Mr. Pellizzoni to work on the décor of her son's wedding venue. "I've worked with many interior designers, and afterwards, they don't want to know" how the design is working out, Mrs. Cotran said. "Maurizio is always there for you."



CHELSEA CHIC One of Mr. Pellizzoni's most high-profile jobs was the home of soccer player Joe Cole and his wife, Carly, above.



SCOTTISH FLING A Mediterranean-inspired home in Scotland.

Clockwise from top left: Dylan Thomas for The Wall Street Journal (3); MDP London; Felix Clay (2)

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American Chic Abroad



Dylan Thomas for The Wall Street Journal

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