

# interior designer

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WOOL CLASSICS

LONDON

If you can imagine it, we can weave it



# dovetailing with sustainability

**SIMONE SUSS** CAUGHT UP WITH JADE TILLEY, AS PART OF A NEW SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS, COMMITTED TO DISCUSSING AND ACTIONING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN DESIGN.



**Reusing is something we don't really talk about in design.**

In terms of creativity and innovation, however, the idea of reusing and reconsidering designs could be the ultimate in creative endeavours, so why do we lean to the new so often?

Simone Suss has been super vocal in this last year, using her work, her studio and her presence on social media, to talk about her commitment to more sustainable design practices and how, by working with the BILD as a member of the Professional Practice Committee, she is taking steps towards auctioning change on an industry wide level.

**YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT YOUR PASSION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND HOW YOU'RE IMPLEMENTING IT IN YOUR OWN STUDIO ON SOCIAL MEDIA THIS PAST YEAR. WHY NOW AND HOW ARE YOU DOING IT?**

My passion for sustainability has always been there. I've always had an interest in the natural world. I love to travel. I'm at my happiest when I'm somewhere new, experiencing new culture but also connecting to the natural world.

Global warming has been part of the narrative for a long time but over the last few years it feels like it is really happening, not just in the Sahara Desert but in London, on our doorstep. Last year we had the longest amount of time with temps being over 40 degrees consecutively and the year before we had the highest ever temperatures reached in the UK. But, you know, even if it was 'just' happening somewhere further away, I feel that I'm of the generation where if we're not doing something about it then who will? My children can't do it themselves - I'm a mum with three kids and I want to be able to say to them, I tried. I am trying to make a change.

Having studied at the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership recently, which was perfect time for me during this transformative

time in the world, it really put a fire in my belly that actually we can do something. If we collaborate across industries with brands and companies, and as individuals making small changes, we can really cause a shift. We can't leave it another 5, 10 years. It'll be too late.

What I learnt at the institute was that if you want to have real impact, you have to change an industry. Then if you can change an industry, maybe that industry can filter out globally, that's an even bigger impact. You've gone from practicing sustainability in your own home to affecting something on a much wider scale. You start somewhere and who knows where it will end up.

I'm a member of the Professional Practice Committee at the BIID, and this came about because I mentioned to Harriet Forde (the then President) that I was focused on sustainability. She said 'well, join the committee then'. People can muddle over the idea of being more sustainable but actually, if you want to do it, go ahead and do it, take the lead.

That's how it happened with the BIID. They needed someone to sit on the Construction Industry Council and represent them, so I said I would do that too. Just say yes and see what happens. I've always been super interested in what Architects Declared do because that's a real grass roots level concept, so, I discussed it with another member of the BIID Committee and we decided that we would approach them about Interior Design Declares. We did and then that happened! It just goes to prove that if you want something done, do it yourself and put yourself forward. At the same time as all of this I was running my business and asking myself 'what are we doing as a studio?' If we're asking our suppliers to have a sustainability statement then we have to do better too. That's the thing about this subject, it's not a destination, it's a journey. You have to keep going.

#### HOW DID YOU ADDRESS YOUR STUDIO'S ETHOS?

You have to learn to be comfortable with the fact that not everything you do, as a business, will always be sustainable because you're always learning and developing. I decided to put a sustainability statement out for the studio to make me more accountable, which is good. If I'm going to be at the forefront in terms of how we're going to lead this as an industry, then I have to put my marker in the sand and say 'this is what we're doing.'

#### THE DESIGN INDUSTRY WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A BIG CHALLENGE, SUSTAINABLY SPEAKING. IT'S ABOUT NEWNESS AND REINVENTION AND IS CONSUMER HEAVY. HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE RE-USE MOVEMENT WORKING FOR DESIGNERS?

We start with the most challenging part, which is that consumption is the enemy of sustainability. We need to get to a place where we're not using things and throwing away, we need to shift to a more circular economy. We need to get away from the buy- use - trash model.

Unfortunately, the industry has the odds stacked against that. A new build is zero VAT registered, so the system is built to encourage people to tear things down and start again.

Interior design is part of the built environment, which accounts for 38% of carbon dioxide emissions, globally. It's a really big part of the problem. This is why Architects Declares and Construction Declares are so good. We have to

look at everything that we're doing; what are we starting with? A new house, an apartment? Then ask, what can we re-use? Rather than just throwing out, sending to landfill, are there elements that can be reused and if not, what can we do with it to stop it going to landfill. Can we donate it to charity? Resell? Recycle? Someone somewhere will really want that discarded beautiful, perfectly good kitchen.

Such a big part of the problem is the stuff we throw out. Sometimes we come across pristine kitchens that have never been used, but we're removing it because of style choices and throwing away.

As an example, we worked on a recent refurbishment project where the client, a mum, wanted to take an old office/study room and transform it into a multi-level home school room as well as a nursery for her youngest. There was a large, old media unit in the space, very dark wood, and we took it and painted it a vibrant green and transformed it. Yes, the easier way to do it may have been to just throw it out and start again but we didn't want to do that. That's the kind of thing we're doing.

After we've discovered what can be re-used it comes down what we're specifying. I really don't like to specify fast interiors. Just like with fast fashion, you need to think about where it starts, the labour, and then the carbon that's used to get it here. The person making it is maybe earning 1% of what you're paying for it. It probably doesn't look right when you get it and certainly doesn't feel right.

Studio Suss is really into locally bought pieces;

something where thought has really gone into it. I'm always super proud when we revisit clients for projects and they haven't really touched the previous rooms we've done for them, years and years before.

Designing with a timelessness is key. Nothing we design is so 'of the moment' that it quickly becomes outdated.

I think paying attention to how and where you're buying from, speaking to artisans and developing relationships with them and buying things that are maybe more expensive now but will stand the test of time. Heirloom pieces. Made with craft and love by really skilled people.

#### WORKING WITH PRIVATE CLIENTS ALLOWS FOR THOSE CONVERSATION TO START TO ESTABLISH EVERYONE'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT, TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN DESIGN. WITH COMMERCIAL PROJECTS, IT'S VERY DIFFERENT. HOW ARE YOU LOOKING TO ADDRESS SUSTAINABILITY IN THOSE AREAS?

I'm not sure if this is just how I see it because I'm in my sustainability bubble, but I see it is a key driver for any commercial business, whether it's a hotel and restaurant or an office. I hope that they will want to be able to sell their sustainable credentials onto the end consumer. Certainly, when I'm looking at my own travel and tourism, I'm looking for hotels with sustainability statements because I want to know, as a consumer, that whatever money I'm spending is going to someone who cares about the world. It's a slightly different business conversation but overall, I think it should be nuanced and



embedded, it shouldn't have to be separate.

**FOR ANYONE LOOKING TO TAKE THE STEPS AND START CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR OWN CLIENTS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR RE-USING, HOW WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE DESIGNERS TO START THAT CONVERSATION?**

I like to be honest with my clients from the get-go. They'll meet me at the start. So much about the interior designer client relationship comes down to personality; we shout about it on my Instagram and my website, so clients know from me, this is what they're getting. Being authentic and not afraid to look at all different parts of the build. It might mean more conversations with our architects and builders, asking the questions so that we can find solutions together, but it's worth it. Even if I have clients who aren't as concerned with sustainability, I will show clients options of what they can have and it will include sustainable choices. They may not know that it's sustainable, but I'll explain why I believe in products and relate it to how we live. This is a pragmatic approach to sustainability. Thinking about all the elements that we bring together in design, it has to look and feel right it has to be functional and be within budget; sustainability is an element of all of these things, so I feed it in. It's there, and I'm aware of it and it's becoming more important to more people, but it's not the only buying decision that someone has and I won't just present sustainable options, but I will thoroughly research and present the best ideas I can. Know your stance on it and be able to sleep well with it, that's always my advice.

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