

HOUSE & GARDEN / FURNITURE

Jewel-like furnishings that light up the room

Coffee tables like diamonds, mirrors like brooches, chandeliers like necklaces - homeowners are making uplifting decorative statements with jewel-like contemporary furnishings. Charlotte Abrahams reports



Barovier & Toso Murano glass and chrome Chechi light, €14,880 | Image: Barovier & Toso

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A new house has recently appeared on the elegant southwest **London** crescent known as The Boltons. The creation of specialist property design and development company **Morpheus London**, this 8,400sq ft glass, black basalt and bronze property is named **Ashberg House** after the rare cushion-cut diamond. "It seemed a suitable name for a house that was, very unusually, granted planning permission in this conservation area," explains Morpheus's head of design Alex Isaac (Morpheus London was given the go-ahead because the **1960s** house that occupied the site previously was deemed unremarkable enough to be demolished).



Thomas James for Morpheus London diamond-inspired nickel, glass, bronze and leather coffee table, commissioned for Ashberg House, similar about £21,000 | Image: Julian Abrams

The associations between **jewel** and building don't stop with their shared rarity; Isaac and his team have used the gemstone as a recurring motif. There are lines cut into the plaster of the **pool**, for example, in patterns that suggest the refraction of light through a **diamond**, while the Ashberg's structure has inspired much of the furniture – most notably a specially commissioned **coffee table** (similar about £21,000) in the living room. The table's distinctive shape is formed from a nickel-plated metal frame. The top is inlaid with low-iron glass to mirror the clarity of a diamond (it is the iron content that gives the glass its **greenish hue**) and the corner facets are finished in dark brown metallised leather, creating a chiaroscuro-like palette which, Isaac says, is similar to that found on the face of a good-quality diamond.

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As a design conceit, the link works well, bringing both narrative and visual coherence to this new build, but the Morpheus team has also tapped into an emerging trend for furniture to reference the delicacy and ornamentation of **fine jewellery**. “Furniture is increasingly being seen as a highly individual item that not only performs a function, but also brings personality and ornament to a room similar to the way a **piece of jewellery** adorns a dress,” says **Gloria Cortina**, head of the eponymous Mexican interior design studio and the creative vision behind limited edition furniture series GC Ediciones.



Gloria Cortina nickel and brass Synergy bench, \$35,000 | Image: Cristina Grajales Gallery

Cortina has hit the right note with her new Synergy **bench** (\$35,000). Made from nickel and both polished and hand-hammered brass (craftsmen hit the metal repeatedly with a hammer, following a precise pattern drawn up by Cortina), this cubist bench is simultaneously monumental and delicate – simple in form but so richly textured that it becomes highly decorative. On a far smaller scale it would make a striking brooch.



Lindsey Adelman brass, porcelain and Ambrosia chandelier, price on request | Image: Lauren Coleman

Samuel Amoia's brass shavings and onyx console table (\$21,000) shares a similar aesthetic. The last collection created by Amoia, who works from a studio in **New York**, was very strong and masculine, so this pretty console is something of a departure. "As an artist, I am always evolving," he says. "I wanted to create something more feminine and refined than my last collection. Something more like jewellery with a real focus on the materials."



Larose Guyon copper Otéro lights, from £8,160

“I saw these shavings lying on the floor one day and was struck by how beautiful they were,” he adds. “They are usually just thrown away, but we mixed them with an epoxy resin and applied them, by hand, to the console frame. The onyx top adds another layer of richness.” Amoia’s new aesthetic has been well received, with collectors queuing up at [Design Miami](#) last December and Christian Dior commissioning several console tables for its stores in [Cannes](#), [London](#) and [Paris](#).



Reflections Copenhagen Eye of the Tiger mirror, from £795

Chris Turner, co-founder and joint creative director of CTO Lighting, has also noticed increased demand for more **decorative, feminine pieces**. The company started working with Montreal-based design duo Larose Guyon last year after seeing their Otéro (from £8,160) and Liane (£9,360) **pendants** at a trade fair. “The lights create something magical and embellishing for an interior,” he says. “They lift the space in the same way that a brooch or a necklace will lift an outfit. Customers are now looking for these kinds of statement pieces.”



Kaia Lighting brass RIO In and Out Suspension light, £7,020

Liane is formed from a curved brass bar softened by a length of copper-coated chain wound along its mid-section and left to hang as a decorative fringe. Otéro is almost all hand-assembled chains, and the beauty of the piece comes from the way each hangs in a soft, parabolic curve. “The chain is delicate,” explains Turner, “but the pendant itself is voluminous, and the LEDs set in the brass fixing emit a filtered, almost sparkling light.”



Samuel Amoia for Delorenzo Gallery brass shavings and white onyx table, \$21,000 | Image: Paulsta Wong

If Otéro and Liane are reminiscent of necklaces, Venetian lighting specialist Barovier & Toso's Chechi light (€14,880) conjures images of pearl earrings. The 12 "pearls" are made from opalescent blown glass fitted with LEDs and are encircled by transparent, twisted rings made from solid blown glass. The ceiling mount these "jewels" are hung from is set with LED spotlights so the whole piece is lit from above, multiplying the effect of reflection and refraction.

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Gloria Cortina believes that the move towards a more decorative style has echoes of the art deco movement of the 1920s and '30s. That period's confident mixing of modernism with ornamentation is certainly analogous to this new aesthetic, but the links go beyond the surface. Art deco grew out of a rise in the status of the decorative arts, and its proponents placed great emphasis on craftsmanship and the use of exquisite materials. Today craft is enjoying a real renaissance, with designers, manufacturers and consumers alike recognising that much of the value of a piece lies in

the richness and quality of its detailing. As Alex Isaac remarks, “Ornamentation highlights a skill set of craftsmanship, and that adds value.”

Lindsey Adelman’s Ambrosia **chandelier** (price on request) is certainly rich in crafted detail. Consisting of multiple handmade porcelain petals inset with glass oil-lamps and held in place by a net of brass chains, it forms part of a new collection of objects that **blur the boundaries** between art, design and jewellery.

Danish duo Julie Hugau and Andrea Larsson also make category-defying designs under the brand name Reflections Copenhagen. “The idea is to create pieces that add some decorative embellishment to a space,” says Larsson, “so we designed a collection of handmade **mirrors**. Our homes, like our clothes, are a way of defining who we are, and just as we may select a brooch to add interest to our clothes, people hang a mirror on their walls as **a way of adding a special element**.”

Their art deco-inspired Eye of the Tiger mirror (from £795) would certainly be a smile-raising focal point. Constructed from carefully cut pieces of 4mm faceted mirror glass – silver for the white of the eye, bronze for the iris and black for the pupil and extravagant lashes – it is a piece of light-reflecting theatre. Eye of the Tiger is proving popular in both **Denmark** and the UK – particularly within that sure-fire barometer of future trends, the hotel market. “We’ve had this quite serious look in our interiors for some time now,” Larsson says. “People are ready for **something more playful**.”

Manuela Szewald, CEO of UK/Austrian brand **Kaia Lighting**, has also noticed this shift in tastes. “There is a trend for more decorative elements establishing itself globally,” she says. “I think in Austria we are following the US and UK, where interior design has always contained more decorative elements.” The company’s RIO In and Out Suspension light (£7,020) was inspired by the white rings that appear around the sun or moon when light reflects and refracts through ice crystals in the atmosphere. The lower ring is made from solid brass embedded with LEDs and is suspended, on barely there wires, from a smaller inner ring also made from brass. The effect is nimbus-like; RIO In and Out (the name refers to the fact that the LEDs are placed on both the inside and the outside of the ring) casts sculptural shadows on the ceiling and makes the surrounding space sparkle.

Gloria Cortina believes that the design world’s current interest in ornamental detail is far more than just a passing trend. “This is a whole new design language,” she says. That is an exciting prospect – after all, furniture and lighting that is proudly decorative as well as **sophisticated, considered and well-made** has the power to enrich the aesthetic lives of us all.

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