

at home with the makers of style

grant scott and
samantha scott-jeffries



Thames & Hudson

**harry
allen**

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Education Allen was awarded a Masters in industrial design from the Pratt Institute, New York.

Career Allen began working for Prescriptives Cosmetics designing counters and point-of-purchase displays. Taking the ideas he had developed there, he opened a studio and designed a line of furniture called 'Living Systems', which he showed at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. Allen has achieved recognition for his interior design work such as the Moss Gallery in New York's SoHo district. He is also involved in product design and has designed an extensive range of home furnishings and lighting, often using new and uncommon materials. His work has spanned many design disciplines, including graphic design, window displays, merchandising displays, logos, packaging, labels and shop graphics. **Awards** In 2000 Allen won the Fashion Group International Third Annual Rising Star Award in the area of interior design, the Brooklyn Museum of Art/Modernism Young Designer Award and the Interiors George Nelson Design Award. In September, 2003, his Aveda Uruku lipstick packaging won the International Package Design Award. **Clients** include Habitat, Dune, Magis, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Warner Brothers, Eastman Kodak and Ikea. **Further information** Allen was featured by *House and Garden (USA)* magazine in 2001 as one of ten people in the design world to watch. In 2002 three of Allen's pieces were selected for the 'US Design 1975-2000' exhibition organized by the Denver Art Museum in Denver, Colorado.



**“Design is meant
to be sold.”**

A redeveloped undertakers and mortuary on a main street in Manhattan's Alphabet City is where you will find Harry Allen's first-floor apartment. The entrance hall retains the original marble floor and walls, but upstairs is very much the home of a sophisticated New Yorker. Filled with his own work, design classics and pieces from close friends, Allen lives with his partner John and their two basset hounds.



Above left The oval table in the foreground is by Charles Eames and the large abstract painting on the wall between the windows is by Hale Allen. **Above right** Allen designed the seating covered in a rich blue Maharam. **Opposite** Allen's apartment consists of one long, open space with a fitted seating area at one end and the kitchen at the opposite end, linked by a vast table designed by Allen and constructed from an engineered wood product called Parallam. The central ceiling light above the table was also designed by Allen as was the multi-functional upholstered grey folding chair/table.

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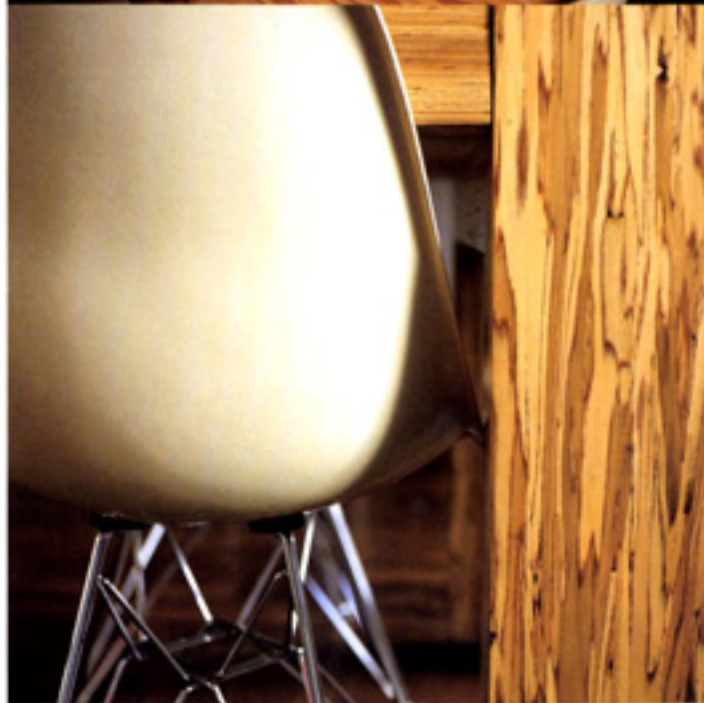




Opposite A Donald Judd wooden chair sits on top of the marble-topped sideboard; the sculpture is by Sol LeWitt. The framed digital print of a moth was taken by the American photographer Joseph Scheer. **Right** Allen seated in front of a shelving system he designed himself. On the table are three candlesticks, also by him, which were cast from found objects. **Below right** Detail of an Eames chair for Herman Miller with an Eiffel Tower base.



“I like light and organization.”



harry allen

Where do you live?

My partner John and I have an apartment in the East Village of New York City and a house in Bedford, New York State.

How did you find your home?
I bought the building.

How long have you lived there?
Six years.

What was the starting point for its design?

I started out living in the apartment alone and at that point I was concerned with only a few things. I wanted a really functional kitchen in which to cook, a large dining table to seat all my friends, a large sitting area to retire to after dining, a place to sleep and a place to bathe. For every project I employ my design sensibility, but I also try to make sure I reflect my client. In this case I am applying my design principles to my life. Much of the art in the apartment was given to me by friends

and family. I have designed or collected much of the furniture. Most importantly, it is alive, it changes almost daily, we re-hang the art, we get new things, we get rid of the old, we re-arrange, we try things out. That is the fun of it all.

Which room do you feel is most successful?

The main room, which incorporates a dining and living area, is the most striking. The apartment was created with friends and entertaining in mind: an industrial kitchen, a table that seats twenty and a couch that fits equally as many.

How have your design principles influenced your home?

It works both ways. My design principles influence my home and my home influences my design principles. Necessity is the mother of invention after all. For instance, the renovation process was

an exercise in reduction.

It is all about carving out a rational space. As far as decoration, I am a collector really. I like to use my designs, but I also like art, design history and just beautiful objects. I believe that if you assemble a group of beautiful, interesting things all together they will become a beautiful, decorative scheme and will speak of the inhabitant, the collector. I don't really subscribe to the whole pattern and colour-matching system of interior design.

What is design?

I look at it as imposing rational order.

How have your views on design changed since you began your career?

I have matured. Life stepped in and taught me a few lessons. In the beginning I was working in a vacuum and I created some very good stuff there, but I have been exposed to a great

variety of people, projects and places. You can't just walk in and apply this very rigid perspective. You have to learn, adapt and experiment. Through that process your perspective changes – you find new creative ground. You keep all the criteria you started with and just keep on adding to that. It gets harder to satisfy all the criteria, but when you do you get really great designs.

What have you learnt?

People want things that work. People want comfort. People like wood and warmth, familiar materials. You don't have to re-invent the wheel every time you do a project. One must leave tolerances – what works on paper does not always work in real life. Everything should be level and square before you start work.

Who are your heroes?

I've got a very broad base of interest and I don't

always look to design and designers for inspiration. As an American designer, I must acknowledge Ray and Charles Eames. And I love the work of George Nelson and Henry Dreyfuss. Contemporary designers would be difficult, but would definitely include Konstantin Grcic, Jasper Morrison and Ali Tayar. Architects would include Tadao Ando and Rem Koolhaas.

Where do you seek inspiration?
Art, History, Nature, Engineering and Travel.

How do you begin working on a project?
I listen. I observe. I think. I sketch. And usually there is a flash of inspiration, the first thought about a project, which should always be honoured and pursued.

What do you prefer to work with? Computer? Pencil? Pen?
All of the above. I really only sketch these days and I am not very particular about the medium. My amazing staff then take it and make it look real, either via hand renderings or the computer. And all the technical drawings are done on the computer.

How do you reconcile design with consumerism?
Design is meant to be sold, or to sell. It is a marriage of art and industry, or culture and commerce. There is no need to reconcile design with consumerism, because in its nature design is commercial.

What is the one thing that every home needs?
Thought.

What could you not live without?
No family? No food? No soap? Unqualified, this is a scary question, but I will concentrate on material goods. Perhaps it is my bed. It is king size, but since this is an exercise in reduction, I could manage on a queen. I'd love a Dux, but I will settle for a Sealy.

What kind of environment do you like working in?
I like light and organization. I currently work in a completely open space, but it could really use some division.

How does it differ from your living space?
Only functionally. Home is about eating, sleeping and bathing. Work is about work. Aesthetically there is not much of a difference in philosophy.

Describe an average day.
Every day is so very different – and I like it that way. I am a pretty early riser – 6 to 7 am, maybe a bit later if I can afford it or I have been out the night before. Breakfast and newspaper with my boyfriend John. Commute one and a half hours from the country/one minute in the city, work work work, lunch, work work work. Stop at about 5 or 6. Dinner with friends or at home, or a movie. But really, there is no average day.

What is important?
I was just in Frankfurt for the housewares show and it really made me want to puke. All that crap, so much of it, people buy it and we burn up the world to make it. I really want my life

to be filled with love, culture, good food and drink, friends and family, nature, exercise, thought, music and a few good things. I aspire to collect the best things, not many, but just a few of the best and to make the rest.

What are we getting right today?

In respect of design I think some examples of companies that are getting it right are Prada, Aveda, Apple and many of the fashion brands. Even mass-market retailers, like Target, are making great design available to everyone. However, I think the US lags behind in areas of design and design education. Having said that, I like the ecological consciousness that permeates the design community; I like the art-based, conceptual direction of design; I like the humble, functional aesthetics that continue to be developed in many areas of design. Experimentation with new materials and methods, such as digital media and robotics, are things that we are getting right today with a view to more conscious quality living.

Nature or nurture?
Nature.

Should a home be 'a machine for living in'?
If you think about it every home is really a machine in that it serves some function, it serves our lives.

What is taste?
Education.

What's your favourite material to work with?
Whatever I am working with

at the moment. There are only potential favourites.

How do you feel you've made your mark?

I like to think that I will take a place in design history – just a few more ideas that mark an era and maybe move culture forward a bit. I hope I have inspired a few younger designers to push the envelope even further. I think my early materials work was pretty important; at least it has been collected and is in a few museums. But I have so much more to design so it might not yet be time to be talking about my mark. Doesn't that all get sorted out after you die?

If you were asked to give the world a single piece of advice, what would it be?
Take down your Christmas lights after New Year's Eve. No, really, it would be to conserve energy, resources and just conserve in general.

What will the house of the future look like?
I am by nature drawn to rational architecture. It seems that designers and architects are just so happy that they finally have a tool that enables them to build anything, that they build anything. With the maturation of computers people stopped thinking about what was appropriate. I think all this blobitecture and amorphous form is a bit ridiculous, like the cars of the fifties. I do not like design that screams 'look at me'.

What's next?
For me, reality. I have been making products whose forms are cast directly from life.