

INTERVIEW

Fashion designer Steven Alan's most recent foray into home decor is a capsule collection for West Elm, which debuts this spring.



Vanessa Holden

West Elm's creative director on smarter splurges and design for real life.

Text by STACY LEE KONG

Even before she was lifestyle guru-in-chief — or, more accurately, creative director and senior vice president — of West Elm, Vanessa Holden had a knack for finding beauty in the everyday. A native of Sydney, she started her career in the Australian magazine business, designing pages for *Vogue Entertaining + Travel* and *Marie Claire Australia* and cofounding *Donna Hay* magazine. Then, she made the move to New York with her husband, Simon Andrews, and their two kids, Yasmin and Harper, where her résumé grew to include a who's who of lifestyle mags, including *Real Simple* and *Martha Stewart Living*. Since she joined West Elm in 2011, the brand and its aesthetic have evolved, with the stores introducing a more diverse mix of product and ramping up the focus on handcrafted design. Here, Holden shares her best decorating advice and lets us in on what's hot for spring.

Q+A

How would you describe your decorating style?

It's very eclectic. Very personal. I don't buy anything that I don't really love. I don't like a "decorated" look; I go for a look that reflects my personality and the life I live. I love when people come into our house and say, "Wow — this totally looks like you guys!"

What's your favourite room in your house?

Definitely our living-dining room. We live in a loft, so it's an open, shared space that we can all be together in, and we're in there all the time. It has six windows, all down one wall. At one end, there's a sofa that my grandmother gave me in Australia when I was first moving out on my own, and the dining table is beside that, then another sofa across the way. We call it "TriBeCa Beach" because it's so sunny. It's even got its own hashtag. It's kind of like Sydney in TriBeCa.

What other cities get your creative juices flowing?

I'm interested in visiting smaller design hubs and seeing what cool stuff is coming out. I go back to Sydney to see family all the time. I was there to open one of our stores recently, and seeing the design community was exciting. I visited Birmingham, Ala., for the first time this year, and it was amazing. There are so many interesting people doing great things: artisans, designers....

Sydneysider Vanessa Holden finds inspiration in her hometown



INTERVIEW

One of Holden's favourite haunts (and a constant source of inspiration) is Reynard, the restaurant at the Wythe Hotel in Brooklyn, N.Y.



What's been inspiring you recently?

I'm loving going to hotels and restaurants and seeing spaces that are brought alive by people. The Wythe Hotel in Brooklyn is a great spot. It's designed to make people feel at home when they're not at home.

What trends are you seeing right now?

We've been seeing a lot of warmer metallic accents in furniture. Grey continues to pick up. It's a neutral that's neither cool nor warm, so it can go either way. We're also seeing more warm colours, oranges, reds and corals.

Are there any trends that you're over?

A pop of colour. It's more interesting to layer in colour than having a neutral room with one big, colourful thing. When I see a "pop" of colour, it automatically feels a bit dated.

What do you think is the most important thing to remember when decorating a home?

If you can get dressed, you can pull together a room. You just have to think, "Okay, what are the jeans of this room?" Often, that's the sofa. Also, decorating never ends. You know when you move into a new place and think, "Oh, I'll just do this room by room, and then it'll be done"? We should actually accept that our homes are going to evolve over time. Furniture isn't bolted to the floor — it's made to be moved around. If we understand that, we can be much more experimental.

When you're pulling together a room, what items are worth the splurge?

Lighting and a rug. They are really how you identify a space within a room. And sofas! There's definitely a moment in everybody's life when they're looking for something cheap because they just need somewhere to sit. But you should buy the sofa you love because you are going to sit on it a lot. And nap on it.

OUR PICKS FROM WEST ELM'S SPRING COLLECTION

Artisanal and homey, with a splash of sophistication.



Slope leg dining chair, \$232.

Lily candle-holder, 9" h., \$28.



Nook console, 48" w., \$580.



Kisanii pillow cover, 18" sq., \$57.



Watercolour glaze vase, 10" h., \$63.

JOIN THE CLUB

Design partnerships are part of West Elm's ethos. Here, Vanessa Holden's picks for spring.



WHO: Furniture designer James Harrison
KNOWN FOR: Clean and contemporary designs, nods to traditional techniques

WHAT'S NEW: Stylish seating with mid-century modern details, including a budget-friendly take on the classic wingback.



WHO: Fashion designer Steven Alan

KNOWN FOR: Vintage Americana, edgy, updated classics
WHAT'S NEW: A textile-heavy collection with a handcrafted bent, including vases, bedding, rugs and papier-mâché tables.



WHO: British designer Sebastian Conran

KNOWN FOR: A love of colour, good design evangelism
WHAT'S NEW: The perfect weekend bag, from the spring expansion of his eponymous line for West Elm Market.

Photography courtesy of Wythe Hotel (Reynard)/West Elm (designers, products)

