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KRISTINA GRIKAITE

Photographed by DAISY WALKER

‘Everybody knows that this strange moment in time will pass,’ says Vicky Charles. She is, of course, musing on the events of the past year, and whether or not they will have a long-lasting effect on interior design. ‘No one’s making radical changes so their interiors are more sanitised, or putting in extra sinks anywhere,’ she adds. ‘Nobody’s doing hand-washing stations. That hysteria is over.’

What she has always been interested in, and, she believes, more people are appreciating, is what she calls ‘the longevity of home’. ‘There’s more of a sense now of thoughtfulness in design, and how you use your space,’ she says. ‘There’s also a real push for less clutter, to make room for the more purposeful things. The whole world has been made to slow down and think. We didn’t have to consider things before in the way we’re being made to now.’

Slowing down must be an alien concept for Charles, 45. Having started out at Soho House in the late 1990s, she rose to become the group’s design director, overseeing Soho Farmhouse in the Cotswolds, The Ned in London and Ludlow House in New York, among others, before leaving in 2016 after 20 years with the group. Educated in Gloucestershire and Exeter, she has been living in New York since she moved there in 2002 to open the first US Soho House; she lives with her husband and their two children, aged 11 and nine, between their home in the city and a weekend retreat in Upstate New York.

She set up Charles & Co in 2016 with Julia Corden, 41, after the pair were introduced by Soho House CEO Nick Jones. London-born Corden, whose background is in TV production, talent management and PR, had taken time off to have children (she and her husband, actor and TV host James, now have three, aged nine, six and three), and handles the business side of Charles & Co. Her role, she says, is ‘to allow Vicky to be as creative as possible’.

Over the past five years, Charles and Corden have built up a super-high-profile client list on both sides of the Atlantic, including the Beckhams, the Clooneys, Emma Stone, Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis – and, reportedly, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. The close relationship Charles strikes up with her clients is key, as Amal Clooney testifies: ‘I felt she completed my sentences when it came to interior design. If we ever move, she will be my first phone call.’

Corden points out that for clients such as these, the experience of living through lockdown, certainly in terms of the limits placed on socialising outside the home, has not been so different from normal life. ‘It isn’t easy for them to go out at any time,’ she says, ‘so we’ve created a lot of social, club-like spaces within



At home *with the* LA A-list

A library by the front door, a recording studio inside, and a sprinkling of vintage everywhere – that’s what George Clooney,

David Beckham and Emma Stone trust interiors gurus Vicky Charles and Julia Corden to deliver *By Jessica DOYLE*



'You can't just knock off an aesthetic. A Cotswolds-style home in LA won't work; it's all about the situation'

homes over the past few years, and those are the homes that have really come into their own since Covid. They've got the bar and wine cellar, and somewhere for the kids to play or hang out. Those spaces are really valued now.'

Another essential element is a sense of separation between public and private spaces, even within the home. An office or library right by the front door is one of the first things Charles will factor in, so that her client will have somewhere to hold a work meeting or interview without their guest having to walk through the rest of the house. A recording studio where an A-list actor can, occasionally, work from home also helps. 'Being able to record a little voiceover without having to leave your house can make a huge difference, especially if you live outside the city,' Corden says.

Her own family home in Brentwood, LA (where the family moved when James took over as host of *The Late Late Show*) was the subject of a Charles & Co redesign in 2017, and is decorated in a relaxed Californian style,

with a soft palette that allows their eclectic art collection to shine.

Charles's signature is not a certain look, but her ability to create a feeling of sanctuary and ease within a room. Several clients have come to her after experiencing the rooms she created for Soho House, but the cookie-cutter, one-look-fits-all method is not how she operates. 'If someone wants to copy Soho House, they should call Soho House,' she says. 'I learnt so much from my time there, but you can't just knock off an aesthetic. A Cotswolds-style home in LA won't work; it's all about the situation.'

The design of a Charles & Co interior will respond to the building itself; but from there, inspiration for the decor can come from anywhere: it could be a fashion campaign, a client's art collection, or a trip to an antiques fair. 'I'm constantly buying stuff – vintage wallpapers, textiles, ceramics,' says Charles. 'I have an old car and I just stash it all in the back of that. I have an addiction to shopping; you never know when you're going to get inspired by something.' The biannual Parma antiques

fair is, she says, 'a never-miss', but she also shops locally to each project, working with antiques dealers to find interesting one-off pieces.

Her skill is how she puts it all together in a way that is geared towards comfort and liveability, as well as style. Her interiors couldn't be further from the slick, shiny, neutral-toned mega mansion often associated with the celebrity home. 'It's not necessarily the photo-ready room; it's how you feel when you enter it,' says Corden, 'that feeling that it has always been there, and it will always be there. That, and the quality of the materials Vicky uses, is what I think people are attracted to with our company.'

'It's about the imperfectness of it all,' adds Charles. 'It's how you respond around people: if someone's too perfect, you don't trust them. For me, there needs to be some imperfection in design, as in people, so that it feels real and trustworthy, and you can relate to it. That's part of the attraction, too: it's the imperfect house.' ●

charlesandco.com



OPPOSITE Julia Corden (on left) and Vicky Charles. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A residential project in Barcelona; interiors of the Alpaga hotel, Megève – both by Charles & Co