

Former Avoca owner Amanda Pratt: ‘Ireland’s connection to design is humble – it’s to do with our historic poverty’

From Stella McCartney to a Marrakesh riad and Nick Cave’s ceramics, the designer behind Amo & Pax lifestyle store talks about her favourite people, places and things



Amanda Pratt's designs for life *by Orla Neligan*

Favourite places: The Tuscan farmhouse our family has in Italy is my favourite place. It's a haven for three generations of the Pratt family. Rolling hills, history, surrounded by woods but near so many interesting places. Secondly, our garden at home full of plants that I look after keenly. And we have great natural helpers in the form of a beehive too. My dad is a great plants man, I wish he'd teach me more. Hint, hint, Donald.

Favourite hotels



The Eco Nubia Lodge

Because of the way they bring the culture and materials of their countries into their interiors, I'd have to go for The Eco Nubia Lodge on Bigeh Island on the Nile at Aswan (the opposite to luxury but what an effort!) and Riad El Arsat in Marrakesh. Luckily my twin girls and husband love these types of experiences too, so we often all go together.

Favourite shops



Merci in Paris

It would be pretty awful if I didn't think my own new shop was one of my favourites, otherwise what the hell am I doing? On top of that, Merci in Paris is daring and mixes the artistic with the prosaic. And, I like the name since it means 'thank you', so it reminds me to be grateful. The antiques market in Arezzo is fabulous, full of European objects from throughout history. I recently picked up a painting for the house in Italy, vintage buttons and a pretty ring. A deep connection to design is not as strong in Ireland compared to mainland Europe. I think it's to do with our historic poverty. We don't have a history of fine/high arts like great architecture, couture, elaborate interiors, classical music, painting etc.

Ours tends to be anything that could be created from nothing: a fireside song, a story, a stick and ball, a thatch... humble. These markets are full of items that represent where money was available to nourish the non-essential for life.

What I'm coveting for my home



Amanda Pratt. Photo: Barry McCall

I don't have a wish list. Serendipity is more interesting but, if I had to choose, it would be the Mathieu Challières bird lampshades that we've just got in. They bring the feeling of nature inside and create a really beautiful mood in a kitchen or elsewhere.

Favourite museum

Drottningholm Palace & Chinese Pavilion outside Stockholm. This place just blew my mind in terms of colour, architectural and decorative detail. Grand but somehow homely. And the Vasa (resurrected boat from early 1600s) is superb there too. The old Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo is also mind-blowing for me. I've been fascinated by ancient history since I was a child. The V&A in London is a superb collection that dips into all corners of the globe.

Favourite restaurants



Food from Dunne & Crescenzi

La Pieve in Arezzo. It's in a 13th-century church building and combines fantastic Italian food with an old-fashioned Italian atmosphere that I love. In Dublin for Italian food, Dunne & Crescenzi on South Frederick Street. I suppose that since they speak Italian, it's like going on a trip without getting on a plane. It's very authentically Italian.

Favourite design era

It's hard to say. I can be as enthralled by an ancient Irish terracotta pot in The Hunt Museum in Limerick as much as by an Ai Weiwei exhibition.

Brands that inspire me



A Nick Cave ceramic

I love Miuccia Prada's take as a female designer. Stella McCartney has a fantastic ethos. Nick Cave is a creative who inspires me with his words, dreamlike songs, his humanity through The Red Hand Files — and his flatback ceramics. I suppose any

creative who dares to be themselves is interesting to me. The world can skew the spirit, insisting on conformity, and it's easy for people to cave in, to think they are not good enough or worthy to show themselves out loud. The important thing is to have the courage to live life true to ourselves.

Favourite movie

Films come and go for me. Places, spaces, colours, songs and feelings stay in my mind.

Favourite drink

Good old Irish tea, with oatmilk as I don't really drink milk. Any cocktail that has cranberry in it.

Irish craftspeople I admire



IrelandsEye Knitwear

Our incredible machinist Colette Howlin who is making shirts and other garments on the floor in Amo & Pax. We worked together in Avoca for about 25 years and now we're both doing what we love once again. I cut the garments on my kitchen table and she makes up the clothes in the shop. And people can buy them straight off the machine. I think this is unique in Ireland. Colette and I both love designing and making ourselves. Slow fashion. Deliberately. Consciously. We are also mending people's clothes. I recently visited the IrelandsEye Knitwear factory. What Paul O'Sullivan is doing with his family's knitwear company is amazing. Brand new technology combines with traditional craft and wool and business acumen. We need things like this here.

A homeware item I can't live without



Market baskets

Market baskets in straw and other natural plant fibres. I hate 'forever bags' because, yes, they ARE forever, they will never decompose in landfill. All the plastic we have ever made still exists. Whereas baskets are useful, beautiful, will disintegrate back into the earth at the end of life, are respectful of the environment and of an age-old craft.

Favourite purchase for my home



Amanda's hare with amber eyes

An antique Japanese netsuke of a hare with amber eyes. My favourite book is Edmund de Waal's *The Hare with Amber Eyes* so I was very moved when I found this little object.

A family heirloom I've kept



Amanda's great-grandmother's wedding jacket

I have a lot of heirlooms. Beautiful things with a family history mean a lot to me. My great-grandmother's silk, hand-stitched and boned wedding jacket from c1880 hangs above one of my fireplaces. She was born in Bangalore in India, a country for which I have always had a fascination. A marble buddha from my grandmother on my mum's side is fantastic too, and Buddha's message from 500BC, as well as Jesus's, have had a big effect on my life. Two very wise, peaceful men.

Design advice



Art in Amanda's house

Good design must have something to say otherwise you're just adding to the noise. I like void juxtaposed with riot. I like mixing old with new. Bought with found. Design should fit a clear purpose. What is the space or object for and what are the reactions that we want from it? Both practical and emotionally. I use a very specific type of scrapbook, paper, pencils and glue to pull my thoughts together when I'm designing a building, space, garment or other. I'm pretty rigid about my process.