

Blogging for business

by Adrienne Wyper

As social media is increasingly part of everyday life, architects and interior designers are using it to get a new angle on their work

IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, the blog has evolved from its original form as a diary-style log of other web pages, usually links the writer wanted to share. And the change has not been in name only - blogs have become an essential part of a modern design practice's marketing operation. We talk to four established industry bloggers about how they use it for business.

Kia Stanford, owner of award-winning London company Kia Designs, which specialises in stunning personalised residential interiors, has been blogging for about 10 years.

Gilly Craft is currently president of the British Institute of Interior Design (BIID) and has been a blogger for three years - as part of her role as director of Koubou Interiors, an architectural design practice based in Berkshire which offers services for residential, commercial and medical clients.

Jordan Cluroe and Russell Whitehead, of 2LG Studio in South East London, specialise in residential and commercial interior design, consultancy and styling services and began blogging about three years ago. The pair are civil partners and the name 2LG stands for "Two Lovely Gays", a jokey reference to their previous postcode.

Reaping the benefits

It's accepted that blogging highlights your expertise and adds a personal angle to a business, as well as boosting search rankings, driving traffic to your website and offering you a way to engage with potential future customers.

Craft believes blogging builds a stronger relationship with clients, allows more informal communication and is another form of creative expression, adding: "It shows you have something to say and that you know what you're talking about". She says blogging is probably essential for interior designers now. "Although I probably wouldn't have said so before I started doing it," she admits.

"It is wonderfully beneficial. It builds deeper relationships, for sure, but the blog is less about finding new clients and more about sharing process and inspirations that help to deepen the understanding of our design work," Cluroe and Whitehead say. "It is another creative outlet as we had lots of lovely pics to share and wanted to share the journey of our designs." The duo cite a sense of connection as important. "The new digital age is about transparency, intimacy, connection, sharing of ideas," they say. "It is fun to be a part of a wider community."

For Stanford, it is also a good way to educate clients. "A lot of the time we'll be having similar conversations with different people, such as what you need to write out a Heritage Statement," she says. Being able to refer clients to technical info is convenient and saves time, as "we're not having to rehash things over and over". Once researched and written, this material acts as a useful reference for her and colleagues.

And there are more unexpected advantages. Stanford sees her blog as a way to record her work - "it can be a really useful tool to make sure it's not just all sitting in your head" - and was understandably affected when her first two years of written content were wiped by a technological glitch. "Having lost everything is devastating, as blogging is a nice way of remembering everything you did," she says.

Sharp focus or broad range?

The underlying theme is obviously design, but there is plenty of scope within that.

"We try to keep it true to us and personal," say Cluroe and Whitehead. The duo run "design crush interviews" on up-and-coming creatives, or insight into the process or personality behind established names, as well as the travel aspect of events and festivals. They also love to share their home refurbishment, "cooking in our new kitchen or prepping for a party and how we make it look beautifully designed, hopefully".



2LG's staircase features carpet with a recreated historic pattern matching the property's age.



Jordan Cluroe and Russell
Whitehead from 2LG Studio



"I normally set Sundays aside for writing. I sit in my study at home - not the studio - and I've probably made notes during the week or torn something out."

Gilly Craft, BIID president and director at Koubou Interiors

"We try to be organic and post when we have something to share rather than finding content to post," they say. "We write a weekly column for the Metro, too, and try to have different content for each."

Conversely, Craft chooses to post magazine features she's written and also writes about events such as "Clerkenwell, Design Week, or a talk I'm giving" - but says she is willing to cover "anything and everything: Continuing Professional Development, the BIID presidency..."

With a blog divided into categories such as "Business 101" and "Sneak Peek" (project behind-the-scenes), Stanford also likes to share products that couldn't be included in the final spec. "There's a lot of frustration so you get it out of your system and you still have that beautiful rug that you really wanted on the website. It's nice to be able to offer that up to other people so it's still going off into the world possibly to be used."

Time and timing

Good blogging takes time - something all of our interviewees highlighted.

Weekly seems to be the desired frequency, although all the designers go for a flexible approach, writing more or less depending on how busy they are.

"Initially we blogged monthly, then for a long time it was weekly and we posted like clockwork, but we now post more organically," Cluoe and Whitehead explain.

"There used to be a correlation between success and regular posting, but now there is so much noise online and so many people making content, it is no longer necessary to be so frequent and far more important to write what you love when you love it."

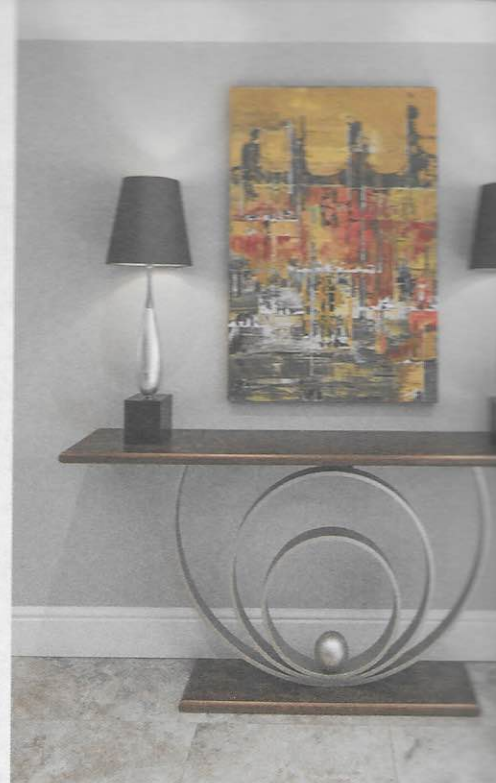
Blogging is a two-stage process for Craft, as she has a dedicated marketing assistant - Hannah - who gives her a list of topics to write about at monthly meetings.

"I normally set Sundays aside for writing," says Craft. "I sit in my study at home - not the studio - and I've probably made notes during the week or torn something out."

Scheduling a date for a blog to go live, rather than immediately, allows for writing in advance. "If there's lots happening for a couple of weeks and I've got five or six in the barrel, Hannah will drip-feed those out until there's something else happening that I can write about," says Craft.

Preparing posts ahead of time is a tactic Stanford also likes to use. "We often have posts for the next two or three months, so that if we get swamped with a big project that needs all our attention we're not feeling 'Oh I haven't blogged this week' pressure," she explains. "It helps to know that you're ahead of schedule. You can start it today; it doesn't mean it needs to go out today."

So blogging may add to your workload but, when done well, it's rewarding - and as



Top left: Gilly Craft, director Koubou Interiors.

Top right: Koubou console table.

Above: Koubou Interiors designed Our House, a day centre for disabled children and their families in Wokingham.

Left: An accessible bathroom designed by Koubou Interiors.

interiors by Kia Designs.
Stanford (right) blogs
about finished projects
as well as what's going on
behind the scenes.



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Kia Stanford, owner of Kia Designs

