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Made to ORDER

AS TAILOR-MADE INTERIORS INCREASE, DESIGN BECOMES A PERSONAL MATTER.

WRITTEN BY MARY JO BOWLING

Fashion designer Michael Kors once said, "A man in a well-tailored suit will always shine brighter than a guy in an off-the-rack suit." With customization on the rise, many designers could apply the sentiment to homes outfitted with bespoke elements—including Achille Salvagni, principal of his eponymous international architectural and design practice. "In the last 10 years, my clientele has increasingly sought out homes that are one-of-a-kind," he says. "In many ways, looking for a designer is like looking for a tailor that can make a dress that fits your body perfectly." He cites a client who recently hired him to create a highly custom home in Mumbai, India. "She wanted a living room that was a portrait of her family," he explains. "After interviewing

the family members, I created furniture that represents the qualities of each. A sofa embodies the personality of the father, the table is inspired by the daughter—together, all the furniture tells this family's story."

Maria Apelo Cruz, who co-founded the decorative arts studio MJ Atelier with her husband Mike Jovanovic, also sees an increase in customers seeking one-off wallcoverings, furnishings and lighting. "We are riding the wave of designers who want to bring their ideas to life," she says. "Today's clients are looking for conversation pieces that no one else has." An example is the wallcovering they made for an inveterate video gamer that includes symbology from classics including Zelda, Pac-Man and Pokémon.

Cruz says that bringing a designer's creations to life requires finding the right craftspeople, and that's challenging. "Many aspects of quality craftsmanship take a lifetime to master—so by the time you've perfected your trade, it's time to retire," she says. "Traditionally, a lot of information was passed down through families, but these days, some of the offspring of contemporary craftspeople are pursuing other things." To keep those skills alive, she and her husband have started

a teaching guild—and to the couple's delight, they are discovering an eager audience. "The stereotype of a millennial is a person staring at a computer screen," Cruz says. "But we've found many young people who want to learn how to paint, draw and gild."

That's not to say there's no place for computer screens in today's customization climate. In fact, technology is facilitating even higher levels of tailored details. "These days, we have old-world techniques and modern tools living together—you'll find an anvil next to computer-driven cutting equipment," says Paul Verbecky, the general manager at Hammerton Custom. "Computer modeling is enabling us to do things we couldn't have imagined in the past—we recently created a model showing a 6,000-pound fixture that's 25 feet at its widest point. It's the easiest and fastest way to show how a piece like that would look in a space."

But custom design takes longer and is more expensive to produce—so why are more consumers seeking it out? George Matouk, Jr., CEO and president of the linen company that bears his family's name, believes it's the

personal aspect that makes the effort and expenditure worth it. The company offers their products in bespoke sizes, colors and fabrics. "Every person has a different idea about what makes the perfect design elements. What could be better than picking your own fabrics in the color combination to make something just for you? Customization is the ultimate expression of luxury."

Custom designs take the form of personalized wall treatments, such as the one shown on the previous page by MJ Atelier. Other examples include Hammerton Custom's one-of-a-kind lighting fixtures (top, right); interior furnishings by Achille Salvagni (center); and personalized linens by Matouk (below, left).

