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Low-Energy Country Homes Are Having a Big Moment, Says New York City Designer

Sarah Jefferys on homeowners' focus on sustainability, using color in surprising ways, and her dream home in Brooklyn

BY REBECCA BRATBURD | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON JUNE 6, 2022 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



Ms. Jefferys with her sustainable design projects.

COMPOSITE: COURTESY OF SARAH JEFFERYS; MORTEN SMIDT

Since starting her eponymous architectural and interior design company in 2001, Sarah Jefferys has watched interest rise in sustainable buildings.

Whether her clients embark on new home or commercial construction or renovations, Ms. Jefferys leads with [passive house](#) design and environmentally friendly building and furnishing materials.

With decades of experience in both interiors and exteriors, she enjoys personally designing every aspect of her company's projects from the architecture to the landscaping and the furnishings. Inspired by minimalism and globe trotting, bold hues have become the signature of the New York-based designer's modern interiors.

Mansion Global spoke to Ms. Jefferys about embracing locally sourced materials as supply chain disruptions continue to rock the **architecture** and construction industries. Luckily, she hasn't had to compromise on vividly colored paints, wallpapers or tiles, keeping to her bold and cheery approach.

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Mansion Global: In light of the many ways the design world has been interrupted since the onset of the pandemic, how has your work changed over the last couple of years?

Sarah Jefferys: Our projects outside the city have doubled or tripled in the last couple of years since people want houses in the country, if they're able to. People want a sustainable country home that uses much less energy. Clients are so much more aware of sustainable design. In the past, I was selling my clients on it, and now clients are coming to us, asking us to build a sustainable or passive house where they have very little imprint. That's been an incredible shift over the past couple of years. They're more conscious about materials and they want to use more locally-sourced materials, which the supply chain has influenced as well. They're thinking about off-gassing, and having healthy materials surrounding them.

MG: From the perspective of space planning in homes, how have your clients' priorities shifted in recent years?

SJ: People are approaching design with the idea that they may be on lockdown again. Up until a few years ago, everyone was getting rid of their home offices. Everyone said, "I don't need a bookshelf or an office. I'll just put my laptop on the kitchen table." Now the home office has come back. The den has come back. We're designing a lot of multipurpose rooms, whether it's an extra sleeping space or a place to work. Bookshelves have come back, interestingly. People are reading more, people are at home more and they want to store more things.

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MG: How did you get into the architecture industry, then decide to create your own business?

SJ: I like to be involved with every aspect of design. I see that architecture and interior design go hand in hand. Sometimes a lot of the bigger architecture firms only look at the architecture, and to me, the whole concept has to work together. I like being involved in the architecture, the interiors, the lighting, the landscaping—just all aspects. Having my own firm has allowed me to do that.

MG: With roots in New York and London, how do these cities influence your work?

SJ: Growing up in London made me fall in love with **architecture** and appreciate historic buildings. **Architects** are daring there, whether it's in additions or in contrast with other buildings. I have a degree in **architecture** and historic preservation, and while I'm a modern, minimalist designer, I have a real appreciation for the past and historic **architecture**. I love to highlight the history by putting in quite minimalist **architecture** in the contrast. I took that from my roots and having grown up in Europe.

New York has a beauty and daringness to it in a slightly more rugged way. There's the whole loft concept that I love, and the open plan. It's more about heights soaring into the sky whereas London tends to focus more on the interior. The modern and the traditional, and the loft-like concept of New York really has inspired my work.

MG: How else does your background inform your work in creating comfortable spaces for people to live and work?

SJ: Another great influence in my work is India. I lived there for a time, and I absolutely adore pops of color and the use of warm colors like reds, pinks and oranges. I think they're happy, joyful colors. In my design, I'm always trying to incorporate an element of surprise or a pop of color. My work tends to be minimalist and clean and at the same time, there's a lot of warmth, whether it's in the wallpaper, paint, a brightly colored couch or a faucet for an element of surprise.

MG: What are some ways as a designer you're able to meet the uptick in sustainable design interest?

SJ: For example, we're doing all these houses in Litchfield County in Connecticut. Cedar siding is very hard to get right now—and very expensive—so we're using locally-sourced pine siding. It doesn't cost a lot to transport and it's coming from local woods or local forests. It's easily grown and the trees don't take hundreds of years to regenerate. We're using manmade materials for countertops, like quartz, which uses a ton of recycled materials within them. We source it locally instead of having marble shipped from Italy. Traditionally, we've always used European white oak floors. Now we're using North American white oak because it's more locally sourced. We can take it to the next level by using all-natural cotton instead of chemically-dyed fabrics. Is it our hope to be 100% ecologically perfect? No, but I feel like more clients are thinking about that in their material choices.

MG: What are a couple of brands you're currently swooning over?

SJ: I adore Flavor Paper and the fantastic colors they use for their wallpapers. We use a lot of their wallpaper in our projects. Popham Designs is a tile company we're working with a lot lately to make custom colors and concrete tiles to make fabulous, very bold, fun bathrooms. Mixed with our modern, minimalist **architecture**, I'm loving working with these companies to bring elements of surprise and pops of color to the interiors.

MG: What does your dream home look like? Where would it be located?

SJ: I feel lucky because I live in my dream home. I designed and built my townhouse from the ground up in Brooklyn. My dream home is light infused, has huge glass openings to the city and blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior. The kitchen is hugely important to me. I love to cook for lots of people. I have three kids and tons of friends who I love to have over. I love an open kitchen at the center of the home and connected to the rest of the space. The overall home would feel serene, light and airy, and yet have pops of color dashed throughout with art and sculptures that I love. If I'm picking a dream home, maybe it would be on the Island of Capri in Italy. That would be more of a holiday home as opposed to a permanent home.

MG: What is your definition of luxury?

SJ: My definition of luxury is living with views and light. Having a view, whether it be your neighbor's garden, the city beyond or trees, just being connected to nature is luxurious. To have a wonderful view, to have a light-infused space. And also, to live with a good conscience is luxury. To live consciously, making sure you're living in an energy-efficient, sustainable way is luxury in this time and with the state of the world. To be able to be sustainable in your home and your design feels luxurious right now. So often we have those values, but a lot of people don't have the resources to actually make it happen. To be able to implement your values and live in that way is a luxury.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity

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