

INSPIRATIONS

He swapped the family business for a life painting masterpieces. **CHRIS HIRST** on a new portrait of Stubbs

RENOWNED as the nursery for virtually every comedian you can think of, Liverpool was also the birthplace of one of the very greatest British painters.

Although his best-known paintings were set in Newmarket and he achieved fame in London, the great equine artist George Stubbs was born on Dale Street, Liverpool, in 1724.

Now transformed into a wide one-way thoroughfare, Dale Street was then a narrow lane leading from the centre of the old town to the River Mersey. It was the location for the Stubbs family business: the currying or treatment of leather.

Many have been quick to make the association between the grisly business of flaying hides and Stubbs's amusingly extensive exercises in horse dissection, which resulted not only in his incomparable paintings but also in his reputation-making masterpiece *The Anatomy of the Horse*.

However, in a fine new biography, *George Stubbs and the Wide Creation* (Pimlico £14.99), Robin Blake notes: "Currying was not anning and did not involve the slaughter and skinning of animals." The carrier transformed ready-tanned hides into luxury leather used on fine gloves, court shoes and the surface of desks.

It could be argued that Stubbs's early experience in his father's currying business, which moved to the Catholic enclave of Ormond Street when he was 10, helped him when portraying the shimmering flanks of Hambletonian, Whistlejacket and other supremely ended equine subjects.

In fact, Stubbs spent most of his time writing accounts, it seems currying held little appeal for the English Leonardo. At the age of 17 he left for Knowsley Hall, near Ormskirk, to begin raining as an artist.

If his artistic obsessions cannot be traced to Liverpool, Stubbs's lifelong overt sympathy for Catholicism and the Jacobite rebels certainly had its roots in the city.



Stubbs: A great painter of horses... and of himself

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Why home design is the height of fashion

As John Rocha turns his hand to property, **Dan Lee** reports on why Britain's fashion gurus have all got the building bug



From dresses to addresses: John Rocha with a model of The Orion Building

JAMIE JONES

HERE is a familiar property-marketing phrase: "Stylish contemporary design." It promises a lot, but often fails to deliver. Chris Lloyd, a 33-year-old chartered surveyor, was attracted by this sort of sales pitch when he bought his first-floor, two-bedroom apartment at Spectrum, a Manchester city-centre scheme by the developer Dandara, earlier this year. The difference is that on this occasion the sales pitch was accurate.

"The design has a very high-quality finish compared with other schemes in the city centre, even down to its walk-in shower," Chris says. "It also works well for me because I wanted to walk to work."

Dandara calls the homes in Spectrum, just off Deansgate, "concept apartments", replicating the designs seen on screen in *Friends* - a large central living area and panoramic windows. It's all part of an explosion of developer and buyer interest in more imaginative building.

"People are now more educated in things that look good and feel good to use," says Hugh McGuinness, Dandara's UK sales director. "Everything they touch has a fantastic element of design in it, from iPods to flat-screen TVs. It would be silly if their living environment did not get a similar amount of effort."

Urban Splash, often working with specialists such as Alsop Architects, is one of the leaders in this innovative field with acclaimed schemes in Liverpool and Manchester.

More traditional names are following suit. Design is central to Crest Nicholson's Copt Heath Manor apartments in Knowle, near Solihull, with a grand atrium entrance. At Sport City Living, East Manchester, Countryside Properties are building two cylindrical apartment blocks which architects Broadway Malayan view as "twin drums". So what's behind this late,

but welcome, conversion of Brit Build PLC from nostalgia and pastiche to progression and originality? David Shiers, principal lecturer in the department of real estate and construction at Oxford Brookes University, says, "A lot of this is an ongoing reaction to the top-down, monochrome schemes of the 1950s and 1960s, which were very unpopular, and a response to TV programmes such as *Grand Designs*."

"Increasingly, people have realised they can have contemporary, imaginative design solutions in their own homes and businesses to match their individual tastes and needs."

Buyers are becoming more

'DESIGN IS EMBEDDED IN MOST OF US - THE WORLD WOULD BE A BORING PLACE WITHOUT IT'

discerning, but there are other reasons too. "Grants for large-scale listed buildings, particularly in areas needing regeneration, now help developers put more into these schemes. Also, some local authorities are becoming stricter in requiring higher quality buildings."

It is a renaissance that is attracting people from way outside the building industry.

John Rocha, awarded the CBE for services to the fashion industry in 2002, has crossed from the rag trade to the building trade. Together with the architectural practice BBLB he is designing The Orion Building of 346 luxury homes in central Birmingham,

between New Street Station and The Mailbox, for the developer Crosby.

"The most important part of my work on The Orion Building was the creation within the apartments of living space which inspires people and the way they live their lives, whether they have bought a one-bedroom apartment or the penthouse," Rocha says. "This building is beautiful to see, sense and experience."

Rocha is not the only fashion-industry refugee to make an impact on homebuilding. Wayne Hemingway is chair of Building for Life, set up by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and the Homebuilders Federation to be the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. But he is probably better known to many people as the co-founder, with his wife Gerardine, of fashion brand Red or Dead.

Along with George Wimpey and Broadway Malayan, the Hemingways have embarked on The Bridge, a joint venture with landowners ProLogis and Dartford borough council.

"Design sells, it can help with margins and creativity," Hemingway says. "Design is embedded in most of us and, most importantly, the world would be a boring place without it."

Chris Lloyd agrees. He is sure he has made the right move, apart from one thing: "Contemporary buildings tend to have a many mirrors for me. I don't like seeing myself so much."

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