



Bringing nature's colours and textures inside

Pieces of me: Sasha Sykes's – the artist and furniture maker on her Dublin nest

Sat, Apr 8, 2017, 00:00



Sasha Sykes at home in Rathgar with "The Month of November" screen. Photograph: Eric Luke

Artist and furniture maker Sasha Sykes is best known for her use of resin to encase and encapsulate organic and found materials, from dried flowers, ferns and butterflies to thistles, gorse and birds' nests. Trained as an architect, she worked as a retail designer in London and New York before setting up her design company, farm21, in 2001, later returning to the family home in Carlow.

Married with three children, she now lives and works in Dublin and is currently completing a wild flower screen for a private client in Paris. She will also be showing some of her nest pieces from her Caliology (study of birds' nests) series at the Oliver Sears gallery at the Solstice Arts Centre in Navan this month for the Francis Ledwidge centenary. She will have further shows in London and New York in October and November.

Describe your interiors style

"Warm, fun and hopefully unpretentious. It's about materials because I work with good, honest materials. I use a lot of green for carpets and lots of colour on the walls. I like bunches of colour. Green is always a good base, though people are often afraid to use it because they think it makes a room cold, but it is how you use it and the shades selected and the light and texture. I like bringing the colours of the outdoors inside."

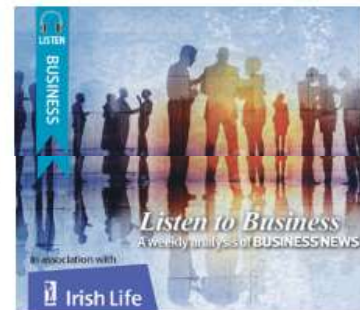


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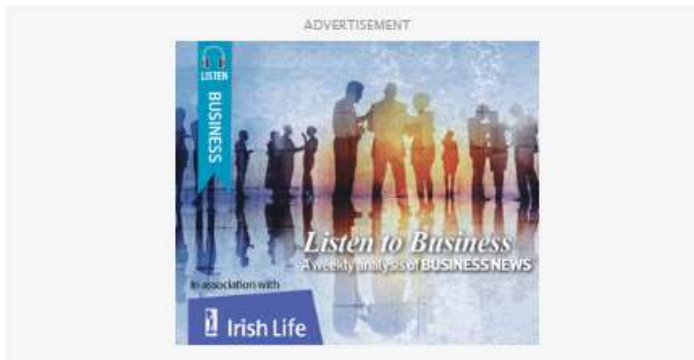
Inside Sean Dunne's Shrewsbury Road mansion



Sasha Sykes at in her favourite spot – by the window in her home in Rathgar. Photograph: Eric Luke.

What is your favourite room?

The sittingroom in Dublin with its massive late Georgian windows which looks out on a big birch tree, but in Carlow definitely the kitchen for its north and south light. It's a really lovely hangout space, more like a livingroom than a kitchen with parquet floors and a line of discreet kitchen units.



What are your favourite items?

A set of really beautiful Victorian dessert plates, white with gold patterning, which came from my great-grandmother's house and which date from the 1840s. They are one of the few things that I got from that house along with a fabric scissors, a huge big shears that is just amazing and still works. I have a couple of Japanese bowls that I love that were given to me by a Japanese friend when I was over there doing a show a few years ago. And some lovely French teaspoons, a French apple corer/peeler/slicer and a table that I made entrapped with baking implements from the 1840-1920s.



Japanese bowl gifted after a show in Tokyo in 2009. Photograph: Eric Luke



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Who are your favourite designers?

I am not very good at favourites, but I am loving the Memphis designers at the moment. I recently reinterpreted Shiro Kuramata's Miss Blanche chair from 1988 for a client. I have always been interested in that piece because it's so cool, but he did it with polyester roses whereas what I do (with real dried flowers) is so much more complicated. I also like the furniture of Zelouf & Bell and Herbie Van der Straeten because they always make me smile – and as I studied architecture I love the work of the Grafton Architects and that of Thomas Heatherwick who did the design for the Living Bridge across the Thames. And I admire the women of Front of Sweden and their work for Moroso.



Blackbird's nest in resin, alongside a blackbird's nest found last winter. Photograph: Eric Luke



Who are your favourite artists?



Yves Klein had such balls and bravado and completely reinterpreted how we see art. His aesthetic of the single colour was so pure – the intensity of colour is amazing and you are taken into that zone. The sculptor Lynn Chadwick for his abstract figurative work. I had the good fortune to stay in his house a few years ago which has a sculpture park at the back, but the most amazing thing was the bathroom in cast terrazzo with a stained glass rose window and sunken bath. It was so bold and fearless for the postwar period. I love David Hockney for embracing new technology and of course David Bowie who taught me how to embrace failure, how it was part of the process.



Pamela Drew painting with a resin book, alongside Sasha's art books. Photograph: Eric Luke

Biggest interior turn-off?

I really hate black leather sofas and can never see anything lovely in them. Minimalism with cheap materials and white walls – not being brave with colour. IKEA overdosing – if I see a Lack table on airbnb I won't go there but you can't get away from them. I can't stand kitchen islands either.

Travel destination that stands out?

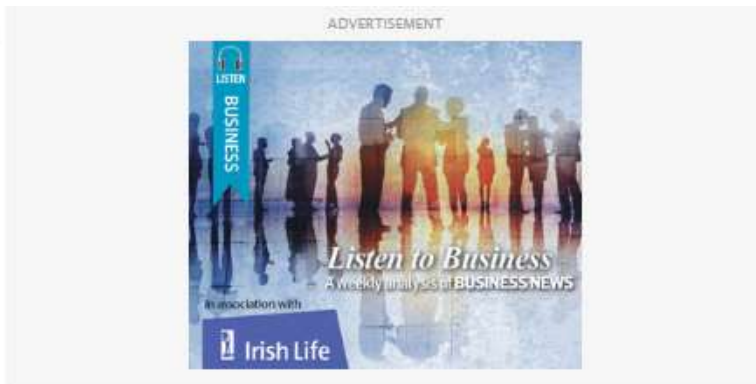
I really love India and have been three times, my first when I was 19 to Ladakh and Kashmir and then Kerala, and more recently Delhi and up to Rishikesh in the foothills of the Himalayas. Indians are funny and warm and have such an interesting history.



Sofa from Northern India, with paintings by Paul Mosse, and a Hockney print and Joy Gerard lightbox.
Photograph: Eric Luke

If you had €100,000 to spend on anything for the home, what would you buy?

A well-designed woodland sculpture garden, properly conceived and planted accordingly, like what they have at Burtown Gardens in Kildare where Lesley Fennell and her son James have created a wonderful setting. It is the perfect balance of the wild and controlled and the plants are incredible, as is the pretty awesome kitchen garden.



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