

# KENT LIFE

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# A decade of commanding DESIGNS

Clare McDonald's Design Command has been creating interiors that stand out and inspire for the past decade

WORDS: Lindsey Furby

**D**esigning spaces that stand out and inspire people is just what's being achieved at Design Command. Creative director and founder, Clare McDonald, started the interior architecture studio specialising in hospitality design in 2013. As Clare and her team celebrate 10 years in the business, with lots to look forward to, how did it all begin?

'I have been interested in art and design from an early age. I remember changing my bedroom layout and the colours as often as the change in seasons. As I started my degree in interior architecture at Griffith College, Dublin, I was introduced to the work of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe and fell in love with modernism and post-modernism styles.'

'For my final degree project I combined these styles and modern technologies to a historical building putting to use the true essence of interior architecture to completely re-configure an interior in one of Dublin's historical buildings.'

After graduating with a BA honours in 2006 Clare moved to London and worked in several architectural and design studios on a variety of projects including five-star hotels, restaurants, and residential developments.

She says it was always her 'dream to have her own business' and after gaining experience in restaurant and hotel design it made sense for her to begin by specialising in these sectors.

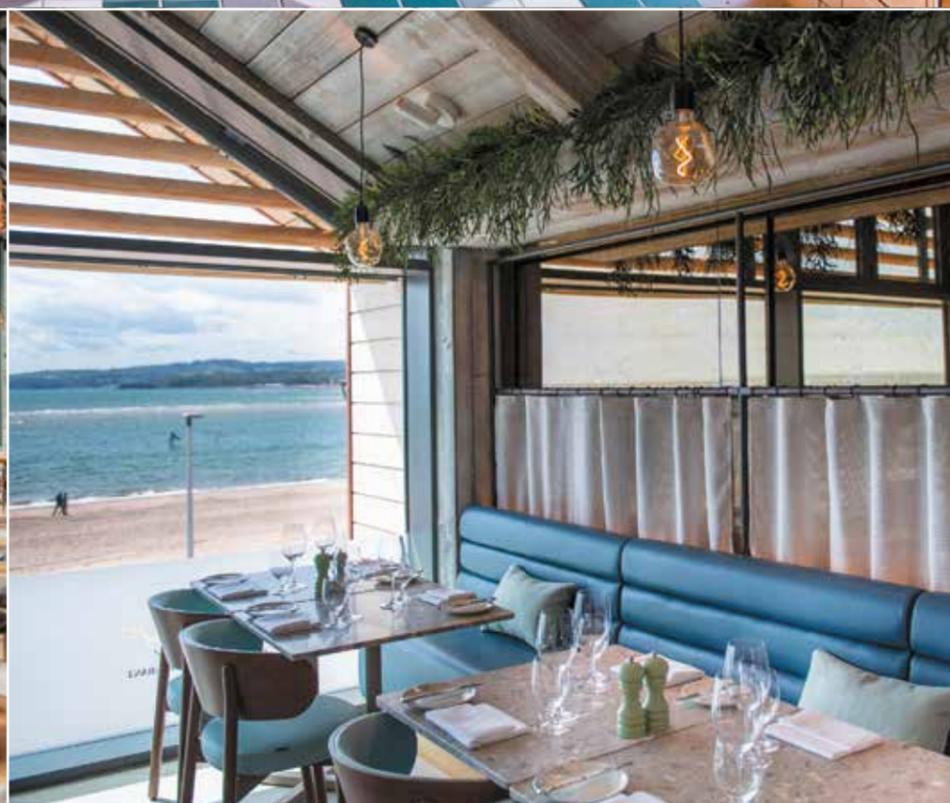
She adds: 'Over the years we have worked on projects within multiple sectors applying the same design ethos to each space which is to stand out, inspire the people who occupy the space but equally be functional at the same time. We have also worked on workplace design and luxury residential developments.'

'Now we are a multiple award-winning interior architecture studio specialising in hospitality and residential design. We offer all stages of design from concept right through to handover.'

'Since its inception, Design Command has quickly grown, with our designers working on bars, restaurants and hotels across the UK and Europe.'

Having injected her creative flair into various projects this past decade – including Wildwood Restaurant in Canterbury – Clare says for hospitality and residential developments the main inspiration comes from a combination of the building's architecture, site location, client's vision, and the operator's requirements.

'For private residential it is slightly different as the space is an extension of the clients' personality and an opportunity to showcase their design flair to family and friends.' Echoing her standout and inspire philosophy Clare says: 'In commercial environments this could be applied using bright colours or designing a cool ceiling feature.'



**main:** Wildwood in Letchworth Garden City. Photo: Lucy Young.

**far left:** Stunning work at the Grissini Restaurant in Cologne. Photo: Hyatt.

**left:** Mickey's Beach in Exmouth with its beach view. Photo: Kirsten Holst

**inset:** Clare McDonald. Photo: Lucy Young



‘In commercial environments this could be applied using bright colours or designing a cool ceiling feature. In residential design the same methodology can be applied in a slightly different way using clever joinery detailing or showcasing statement pieces’

‘In residential design the same methodology can be applied in a slightly different way using clever joinery detailing or showcasing statement pieces.’

When asked about a favourite project, Clare admits it is a difficult question to answer as they are all so different and it’s almost impossible to pick one.

‘We designed a beautiful beach bar and restaurant for Michael Caines MBE in Exmouth called Mickeys Beach which won Best Restaurant Design of the Year at The Society of British and International Interior Design (SBID) awards.

‘This was such an amazing project and a particular favourite moment over the last year. More recently we worked on a pitch for some luxury apartments in London, taking inspiration from the local area and its arts and crafts movement history which was a really interesting one.’

**top:** Wildwood Liverpool by Design

Command. Photo: Holst & Young

**left:** Wildwood Brentwood. Photo: Holst & Young

Having worked with some big restaurant brands and also being a finalist for Interior Designer of the Year 2021 at the Hotel Designs – Brit List Awards, Clare adds: ‘We feel incredibly fortunate to design for some amazing restaurant groups and chefs.’

Collaborations are also crucial when it comes to sustainability... something that’s on everyone’s lips from locally sourced food to recycled materials.

Again, Clare and the Design Command team are doing their bit to ensure that sustainability is kept strongly at the forefront in the industry.

Clare says sustainability is: ‘Extremely important and finally getting the recognition it deserves.’

‘A lot of our suppliers are producing sustainable products now and we try to use reclaimed / recycled materials where we can. A good example of this was undertaken at Mickeys Beach.

‘Due to the proximity to Exmouth beach and its recognition as a place of outstanding natural beauty, it was imperative that Mickeys celebrated this notion through sustainable design choices.

‘As such, environmentally low-impact products are used throughout. The tiles are made from 98 per cent recycled material and reclaimed timber cladding has been used for the restaurant’s showcase ceiling and sunbeam feature wall.

‘It was of equal importance to utilise local businesses in the sourcing of design elements, with many of the lighting features, planting areas, table caddies and interior artworks all produced in the area.’



Having just been announced as 2023 Top ID Winners by NEWH, it looks like another busy year for the team.

‘We are currently working with Accor on two hotels in the UK and also working on a new restaurant in London that has a mid-century feel.’

A decade on, every new project is just as prominent as the last, and Clare’s favourite part has, and will always be, the client and operators’ satisfaction on the successful completion of projects.

‘Seeing how happy the clients are to see the finished product makes it all worthwhile.’ ●

[designcommand.co.uk](http://designcommand.co.uk)

Facebook: DesignCommand

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## MORE ABOUT CLARE

### Her home

‘Surprisingly, my own house is mainly white as I fell for a character cottage, so it is more about making the most of the character it has. One of my favourite things about the house is the original herringbone floor and the arts and crafts history behind it.’

### Her interior tips

‘It’s not always about following trends, as a starting point inspiration can be found within the building, its location, your own lifestyle and interests. We believe that unique design can be created by combining these elements.’

### Plans/aspirations?

‘We are looking forward to working on new restaurant and hotel designs. I began my career in hotel design and am excited to bring that passion full circle.’

**top:** Sleeping in style.

Photo: Mount Anvil.

**above:** Design Command luxury living space. Photo: Mount Anvil.