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Soho House's Longtime Designer on Antiquing, Rome, and Other Favorite Things

By Michael Kaminer Jan. 10, 2024 1:38 pm ET



Vicky Charles is designing her first luxury condo project: the Villa Miami, left, in the city's Edgewater neighborhood. (Villa Miami, Binyan Studios; Vicky Charles; Charles & Co)

Vicky Charles, after 20 years as global head of design for Soho House—known for its trendy, members-only properties—decided to strike out on her own.

Interiors firm Charles & Co. launched in 2016, and from its offices in London, New York and Milan, she has built a glittery roster of clients including the Beckhams, Clooneys, Harry Styles, Meghan Markle, and Hollywood couple Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis.

This year, Charles is designing her first luxury condo project: the much-buzzed-about Villa Miami in the city's trendy Edgewater neighborhood. It's a partnership between Florida developer One Thousand Group and New York hospitality crew Major Food Group.

"The inspiration for Villa Miami comes from all my travels in European cities and towns on the water," the U.K. native tells *Penta* from her home in Millerton, in upstate New York. "The old materials and craftsmanship that we're using will play out in a contemporary setting."

Rather than claim a signature style, Charles lets her clients' lifestyles guide her.

"I'm in a luxury/champagne-problem business," she says. "What's the reason for your change? It's expensive and takes time. It's about dreams of things you want to fix, and what's not working in your current environment."

The 20-person firm's new assignments include "a big, beautiful ranch in Montana, a London mews house, and a hotel in Cortina, Italy," says Charles, 48.

From her home office in upstate Millerton, NY, Charles shared a few of her favorite things with *Penta*.

My style inspiration is... [British interiors and furniture designer] Ilsa Crawford. I had the opportunity to work with her briefly at Soho House, in a mentorship. Her approach to emotions in rooms were inspirational. It was about all the things you don't see in a photo, but you feel when you're actually in the space—elements like the seat height in relation to table height, and how you actually live in the space. Ultimately, if that doesn't work, then choosing red or blue or green doesn't matter.

On my playlist at work, you'll hear... [Ohio folk trio] Caamp radio. Lots of yacht rock, easy listening, Fleetwood Mac—it lightens the mood. And you'll hear podcasts. I'm addicted to [comedy podcast] "SmartLess," like the rest of the population. I love [BBC history podcast] "The Rest Is History," and [business podcast] "The Knowledge Project."

On my bookshelf, you'll find... I just got this incredible, red, 1970s Italian metal bookcase. I'm unpacking books to put on it, including boxes of *World of Interiors* magazines from the 1980s to today. I'm also geeking out on [Peter Attia's longevity guide] *Outlive*. It's medicine 3.0—not about living longer but maintaining health as you age. And I just started *The Fraud*, Zadie Smith's new novel about a 19th-century trial.

My favorite hotel in the world is... Hotel Villa Cipriani in Asolo, Italy, near where we have an office. It's old-school Italian.

The one thing everyone should have in their home environment is... Something that makes you smile, something ridiculous. I have a gear stick from an old Fiat. It could be something you collect on vacation. Curated shelves done by a designer are quite sad. Shelves should create memories.

My secret sources for design are... My local antique shop, Montage Antiques in Millerton. People should shop local. Get offline. Feel things. See things. I love getting out and working with people. Talk to the people who are out there buying and collecting.

My perfect day in London is... Start with a coffee at Monmouth Coffee in Covent Garden, then walk to the top of Primrose Hill to take in the view. And I will always have time for a stroll through [luxury department store] Liberty.

When I'm in Rome, my favorite things to do are... Early-morning runs in [Rome's second-largest public park] Villa Ada, which is beautiful and not so touristy. Getting lost in Via Margutta, Rome's design district. A glass of red wine in a local wine shop—my favorite one is [Centro Storico bar] Il Gocchetto. Wandering around Sunday flea markets: Porta Portese and Borghetto Flaminio are the best. Late-night walks when there are fewer people out, especially in Piazza Navona.

My favorite restaurant in the world is... Pianostrada Laboratorio di Cucina in Rome. It's women-run, and the focaccia is unbelievable, heaven on earth.

My favorite place to look at art is... Any antique fair, anywhere in the world. But my favorite museum is the [archaeological and anthropological museum] Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. And I used to live opposite the Met in New York. I'd be in there every week just to stroll through. Making a museum or gallery into a destination is intimidating. I prefer going in for a walk.

A secret spot in the town where I live is... I've lived in Millerton, New York, in Dutchess County, for 10 years. We are constantly discovering new walking trails. The walks and

Mother Nature provide the secret spots. It just keeps on giving.

If I wasn't living here, I would live in... That's easy—Rome. It's got incredible beauty, and the weight of history. And it's their approach to life. Working in Italy is like banging your head against the wall. It's never a no or a yes, always "maybe." It's frustrating and amazing because of that, and a beautiful place to live. Rome's been preserved for centuries because it's so hard to do *anything* there.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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