

## Nice Projects

*Known for creating welcoming spaces, this duo favour global crafts and natural finishes in their rich interiors*

**Who are they?** Based between London and Sydney, Nice Projects is a global studio that creates 'sustainable, memorable' spaces with an eye for comfort, longevity and humour. It was founded in 2020 by Singapore-born Sacha Leong and Australian native Simone McEwan, who met while working at the renowned Studioilse (Leong as head of design, McEwan as project director). Both are trained architects and have stellar CVs: Leong also led projects at Universal Design Studio, including London's Ace Hotel, while McEwan was Soho House's first ever design director. They began working together spontaneously during the Covid pandemic. 'We have a fantastic dynamic - I'm more pragmatic; Sacha is the creative brain,' says McEwan. The duo's interiors are confident and contemporary, with a focus on eye-catching materials - their cabaret venue The Cockatoo at London restaurant Bistrottheque, for example, features sofas wrapped in translucent green polyester panels, and a ceiling festooned with 250 metres of fringing. 'We love making spaces that are full of character and have a strong sense of materiality,' says Leong. 'We also love collaborating with other designers and makers to create something unique to each space.' >



### The little black book

**Vintage** Paul Bert Serpette is our favourite area in Paris's famous flea market Les Puces de Saint-Ouen. We recently found some Andrée Putman hooks, which came from an old hair salon. [paulbert-serpette.com](http://paulbert-serpette.com)

**Ceramics** Troy Town art pottery in east London is a great place to find ceramics. Founder Aaron Angell's community-focused studio operates on a not-for-profit basis and sells tableware and vases by various artists. [troytown.org.uk](http://troytown.org.uk)

**Homeware** La Trésorerie in Paris sells all kinds of well-designed, functional objects for the home. One of our favourite buys was a set of Sori Yanagi black breakfast bowls. [latresorerie.fr](http://latresorerie.fr)

**Japanese design** Aeae in Singapore is a great source of Japanese crafts and vintage Japanese furniture by a variety of brands. It's also a meeting place for the local creative community [and ships internationally]. [aeae furniture.com](http://aeae furniture.com)

**From top** Simone McEwan and Sacha Leong of Nice Projects; a welcoming colour palette and bespoke joinery for beloved objects in a recent private project in Belgravia for clients with an impressive art collection - the brief was for 'warmth and sophistication'



**'We love making spaces that are full of character and have a strong sense of materiality, and working with designers and makers to create something unique'**



**What are their recent projects?** The studio has restored a historic Georgian townhouse in Sheffield Terrace, Holland Park, for an artist. 'We wanted to create a home that celebrates the beauty of Georgian proportions, while using materials that will stand the test of time,' explains Leong. 'The design had to be a neutral backdrop that would showcase the client's art collection without overwhelming it. The home demonstrates Nice Projects' ability to seamlessly blend old and new; one highlight is the art studio in the attic, which is flooded with natural daylight and has views of the surrounding gardens.'

In Singapore, the duo have unveiled Somma, an Italian restaurant inspired by the timeless beauty of Puglia. 'It's housed in the old library of a Modernist school building,' says McEwan. 'Natural materials such as Italian stone and leather were selected for their organic profile and ability to age well.' The venue features a dramatic 14-metre-long bar in Travertino Rosso stone and a wall clad in 230 handcrafted tiles by Italian ceramic artist Vincenzo Del Monaco. The studio also commissioned a

WORDS: AMY BRADFORD. PICTURES: DAVID THOMPSON, JEFF HAHN, LISA COHEN, TOMMANNION

Puglian weaving collective to create textural rugs for the lounge.

**What are they currently working on?** A Modernist family villa in the tropical rainforest of Singapore with 'a very restrained material palette. It was an opportunity to think about what a contemporary house in South East Asia could look like', says Leong. In Kyoto, the studio is designing a headquarters for The Artificial Life Institute, or ALife, within a refurbished teahouse in the city's old quarter. 'It's a creative research lab for scientists exploring artificial life; we've collaborated with local craftspeople and used some unique materials to express its innovative nature,' adds McEwan.

**They say:** 'We are nice people wanting to make nice projects... Our interiors can be dramatic or subtle, uplifting or soothing, familiar or unexpected. They always work, they always feel friendly and they are always memorable.' [niceprojects.work](#)



**Opposite, clockwise from top left** Charred wood panelling lines the walls of Odem, a Korean makgeolli (rice-wine) bar; Georgian architecture is paired with modern furniture in this London townhouse; colour brings an air of comfort to this former dairy barn in Hertfordshire. **This page, from top** Rattan, bamboo and steel in Singapore restaurant The Coconut Club; Somma's interior, inspired by Puglia

**Expert advice**  
*Nice Projects on the global craft details that make a space stylish and sustainable*

**Using tactile natural materials really adds to the experience of a space** – we choose finishes for their longevity as well as their beauty, and love playing with custom patterns. For example, when we designed a Korean rice-wine bar in Singapore, we created charred-wood panelling with a distinctive pattern, inspired by the burnt-timber barrels in the breweries. **Combine materials in unusual ways so they are seen in a new light** Our Singapore restaurant The Coconut Club celebrates the weaving patterns of South East Asian craft – we worked with Indonesian cane workers to create a bespoke banquet, attaching it to a brushed-metal structure we hadn't seen before. We enjoy challenging craftspeople to do something different. **Tiles are unique to each maker and are so versatile** We love the fact that ceramics are found in almost all cultures; they evoke a sense of place and add a lot of personality to an interior. For The Coconut Club, we created a design vocabulary using patterned encaustic tiles to reference local weaving techniques. **Another way to practise sustainability is to upcycle vintage furniture – and do it locally** For the private dining room of our Somma Puglian restaurant, we sourced a large pine table salvaged from an early-20th-century monastery; it came from a dealer in the town of Cisternino. **LD**