

MOVING FORWARD

Transport designer PAUL PRIESTMAN has a passion for sustainability that isn't just confined to design; he's also rebuilt an old farmhouse and planted a 120-acre wood in Northumberland

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You may not have heard of Paul Priestman but, unless you're a confirmed home bird, you're probably among the millions who travel through, on, or in one of his designs every year. Paul is the leading transport designer in Britain, maybe even the world. As he leads me on a tour of his unobtrusive, cluttered studio in Marylebone, there's barely room for all the models and drawing of planes, trains, and boats the 44-strong Priestmangoode design team have created over the past decade for clients on every continent.

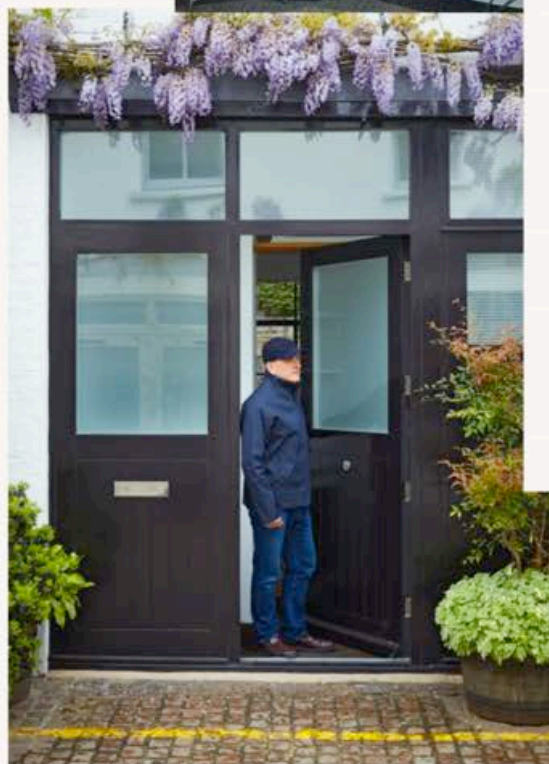
Among them are meticulous space-saving interiors for manufacturers such as Airbus; branding schemes for Lufthansa, Thai and Turkish Airlines; sleek high-speed train concepts for China, Saudi Arabia, Argentina and Britain's HS2; cruise liners for Norwegian and Royal Caribbean and, closer to home, the interiors for Heathrow Terminal 5. Paul is even visualising the interiors of the spaceship for the Inspiration Mars mission scheduled to blast off for the Red Planet in 2018.

If he were an architect, Paul Priestman would be a household name. But the jovial and engaging Londoner seems cheerfully indifferent to fame. 'Our work isn't about jumping up and down shouting, "Me! Me! Me!";' he grins. 'Our satisfaction comes in doing big projects for big business, and creating every little detail from the aircraft interior and the fabric on the walls to the way people navigate the space.' Paul's also a keen supporter of 'Green design'. In a Design Museum lecture earlier this year, he floated two such Green ideas. 'Moving Platforms' proposed an integrated and enhanced twenty-first-century rail network in which local trams connect to a network of non-stop high-speed trains, thus cutting back on both wasteful station infrastructure and unnecessary short-haul flights. Another concept, 'Walk Lines', dispensed with vehicles altogether, proposing the establishment of ▷



LONDON OFFICE

Paul Priestman discusses new tram designs with his team in his Marylebone offices (top left and right). Paul lunches with co-director Nigel Goode (above), and speaks to colleagues Sophie Hughes and Felix Haeffner (above left)

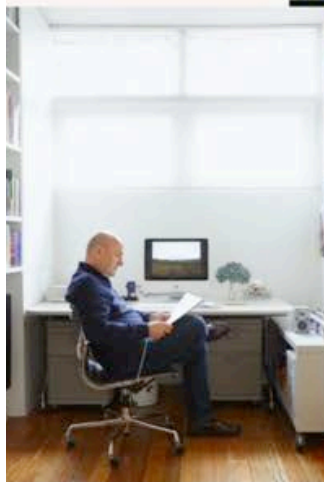


LONDON HOME

Paul leaves his mews house in Notting Hill, which he shares with his wife, Tessa

LONDON HOME

Paul works in his modern study (below). An outdoor area was created by shortening the roof and adding a glass wall (right). Mid-century furniture, such as the 'Series 7' chairs by Arne Jacobsen (bottom) complements Paul's collection of industrial antiques such as the miniature Japanese outboard motors (centre right) and a model of the *Queen Mary* ocean liner (bottom right)



walking networks across major cities.

The notion of a conservationist transport designer might strike some as a contradiction in terms. Aren't airlines among the most profligate users of fuel and polluters of the atmosphere? Paul prefers to see his insider status as a positive. 'The biggest problem is the car. Beijing was once all bicycles and now it's all cars,' he argues. 'If I can get millions of people out of personal vehicles and back on to public railways that's got to be a good thing.'

Now 52, Paul has been honing his pragmatic, hands-on vision of design for four decades. A born designer – his mother Jane was a designer and his father and brother are both architects – Paul was already making and selling pottery models he designed to school-mates' commissions by the age of eight. 'I'm lucky that I always knew what I was going to do,' he says.

The sense of purpose is matched by a considered set of values. You might expect all modern designers to concern themselves with the new. But

'It's only worth designing something new if you can improve on what's there'

Paul admits his instincts draw him to older things. What's striking about the simple mews house in Notting Hill he shares with his wife Tessa – a painter and graphic designer – is the collection of mid-century industrial antiques that have pride of place: miniature Japanese outboard motors; a refitted butcher's bike; even an eccentric collection of industrial tools. Paul buys his lights from Skandium, the contemporary Nordic furniture retailer round the corner from his office in Marylebone High Street. He also likes RE, an eclectic vintage homeware shop based in Corbridge, Northumberland, which now has a concession at Liberty. 'I like things with a sense of history that have proved their value through longevity,' he says. 'It's only worth designing something new if you can improve on what's there.'

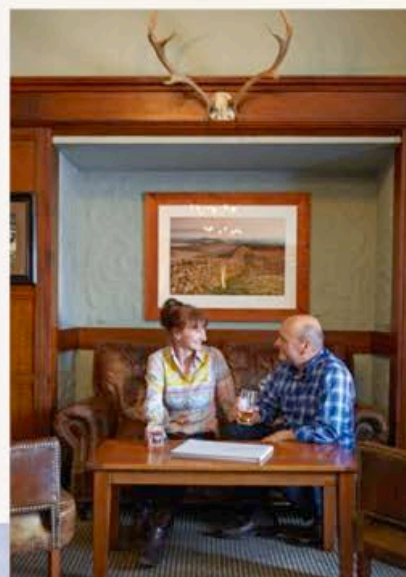
The rigour, the passion for problem solving and the obsessive attention to detail that he acquired early on have all stood Paul in good stead since he left the Royal College of Art a quarter of a century ago to set up shop with fellow product-design graduate Nigel Goode. The company put itself on the map with products such as 'Hot Spring', a witty reinvention ▷

of the traditional radiator, and the 'Waterpebble', a clever little alarm that alerts shower users when they've used too much water. Priestmangoode got its break into transport a decade ago courtesy of Richard Branson, who was so impressed with Paul's lie-flat Virgin Atlantic bed that he asked the company to design his new train. A dream commission followed from Airbus, to create the interior of its revolutionary A3XX aeroplane. The rest is history.

Yet there's no danger of Paul resting on his laurels. As we talk, a restless desire to improve the world that surrounds us surfaces constantly in references to the 'ridiculously fragile' nature of hand-held electronics or the 'outrageously poor' facilities provided to wheelchair users on aeroplanes. 'I'm constantly frustrated by design's shortcomings,' he says. 'So much could be done to improve things.' It's clear this is something that also preoccupies him when it comes to sustainable design.

You can't deny Paul's willingness to underwrite his Green vision with hard cash of his own. In 2007, he set about doing his own bit for Britain's environment by planting 60,000 trees on 200 acres of moorland in Northumberland, close to Tessa's family home in the rugged Cheviot Hills. No mere carbon-offset sop this, but a highly considered experiment. 'I love a project,' Paul enthuses. 'The idea was to remove the sheep, replant the original 20 or 30 varieties of native trees, bring back the flowers and animals, and to restore the land to the state it was in before man even set foot there.' The presence on the site of a farmhouse that had lain derelict since the Second World War provided the chance to add a built dimension to the project in the form of a holiday let, giving select visitors a chance to see the new wood. 'We wanted the building to be a model of low-impact development, using local architects, craftsmen and builders, and the Greenest possible technologies,' Paul explains.

Six years on, the project is beginning to bear fruit. The saplings – among them oak, hawthorn, alder and ash – have ▷



COUNTRY HOME

In Northumberland, Paul has planted up 200 acres of moorland (left) with native trees. Paul examines an alder (bottom left), and speaks with woodland manager Will Massey (top left). Tessa and Paul have a drink at The Angel Inn in Corbridge (above). Paul speaks to owner Simon Young at interiors shop RE in Corbridge (below)

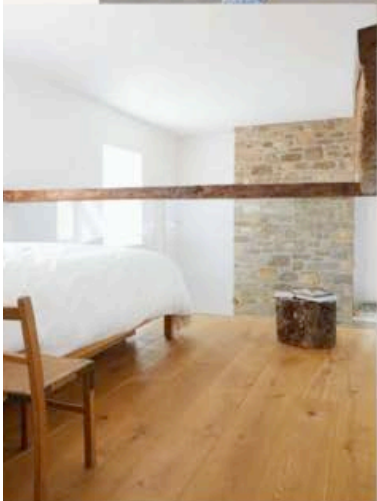
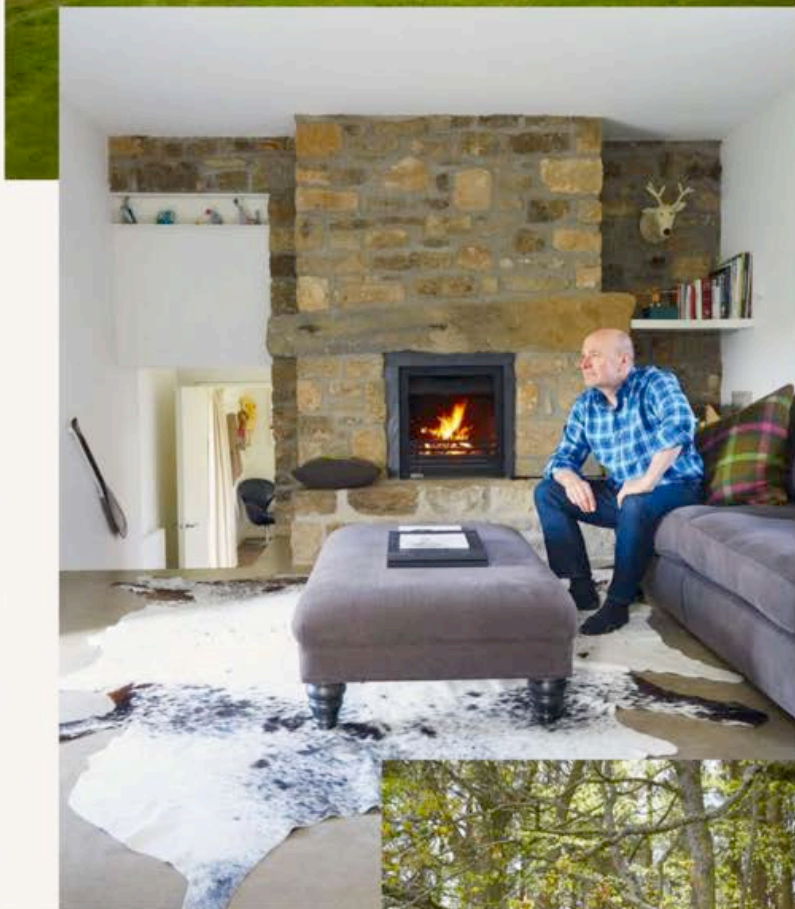


COUNTRY HOME

The farmhouse interior incorporates reclaimed materials, such as the five-metre table, made from reclaimed oak.

OPPOSITE The chimneypiece lintel in the sitting room is an old stone gatepost (centre), bedrooms have reclaimed-oak floorboards (bottom left) while the kitchen sink is a stone trough (bottom right). Tessa and Paul stand in the woods (bottom centre) behind the farmhouse (top)





grown and 20,000 more trees have been planted to make a substantial 120-acre wood. Meanwhile the farmhouse has been entirely renovated, complete with a newly bored well, wood-burning Rayburn and solar panels. 'It's now self-sufficient, which gives me huge pleasure,' says Paul. 'In fact, we're generating more electricity than we need.'

As for character, the farmhouse has emerged as a case study in quirky and homely recycling. Chimneypiece lintels are made of old stone gateposts. There are cowhide rugs and reused oak benches, while a focal point is the kitchen table, a five-metre recycled-oak piece, set on a stainless-steel structure,

The farmhouse has emerged as a case study in quirky and homely recycling

which Paul designed and has plans to produce. His favourite piece is a sink made of a stone trough, its surface polished to a fine sheen over the years by the necks of countless cows.

Paul and Tessa stay in Northumberland as much as they can, although Paul's continent-hopping lifestyle means that's not as often as they'd like. But then occupation was never the main point of a venture, which, according to Paul, has a less obvious payback. 'There aren't many things in life where you don't expect any sort of return on what you put in,' says Paul. 'Yet of all the places that spring to mind when I'm off around the world, it's Northumberland that I think of most often' □

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