



Like a ROLLING STONE

Interior designer and man-about-town Nicky Haslam launches an eco-friendly palette with Paint the Town Green

Words: MADELEINE HOWELL

Nicholas Ponsonby Haslam ('Nicky') is the founder of the London-based interior design firm NH Studio Ltd. The notorious 77-year-old social butterfly was educated at Eton College, and famously shared a flat with fashion photographer David Bailey before going with him to New York, where he mixed and mingled with the likes of Andy Warhol and Marilyn Monroe, as well as throwing the odd party for The Rolling Stones. Recently, he was named as The Andrew Martin Designer of the Year, an accolade fêted by *The Sunday Times* as the Oscar of the interior design world. His dalliances with Jagger et al are

referenced in the title of his new collection of organic paints, *The Stones*, which he has created in collaboration with Phil Robinson of eco-friendly painters and decorators Paint the Town Green. The new collection features earthy, neutral shades inspired by gemstones and minerals. To give you a flavour, there's the vibrant mustard tone of Tiger's Eye ('like the sheen on brown silk velvet') and the stylish grey of Diorite, which has just a hint of mauve – Haslam describes it 'a sort of feeling of grey flannel, a soft, quiet sensation.'

Known for his outlandish sartorial style, Haslam has a distinctive aesthetic. 'The point of decoration is to make people look prettier,' he says. 'That's what it's all about really, and these are very flattering colours.'

'They're perfect backgrounds for people and things,' he continues. 'They are colours that pull the room in together. They're embracing.' They sit comfortably alongside Robinson's signature collection of 36 colours, and match their range of vibrant and exclusive bespoke

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lampshades by local designer Marie Holt (bymarie.co.uk).

Haslam lovingly describes Robinson's ethos as 'gentle and good', and the third strand of the collaboration is their work with the Harrison's Fund, a charity to which a percentage of profits will go. Haslam described trustee Karen Morris as inspirational, and shed a tear as she spoke about the charity at a breakfast launch at Paint the Town Green's showroom on Allfarthing Lane.

Morris's nephew, Harrison, has a fatal muscle wasting disease called Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, and the Harrison's

Fund seeks to raise money and awareness to find a cure, or at least a treatment. 'It affects one in every 3,500 boys worldwide and at the moment there's

no real hope for them,' she says. 'I'm really pleased to be part of this and I hope that it's really successful. It all just fell together – almost like serendipity.'

Robinson himself describes Morris as instrumental in bringing it into fruition. 'The charity also hosts an annual ball,' he adds. 'It really is great fun. So, having bought hundreds and hundreds of litres of *The Stones* collection, if you want to support the charity further, do get yourself a ticket,' he jokes. Seriously, he tells me, he is 'thrilled, and very excited' to launch the collection, born of a partnership which has evolved as naturally as the fume-free, non-toxic paints he is so passionate about.

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5 MINUTES WITH NICKY HASLAM

What made you want to launch your first paint collection?

I've always thought about it. The colours are the colours I've always loved and used all my life, but I've never found them available commercially. I leapt at the chance to work with Phil and Paint the Town Green. I love the fact that they're organic and from Iceland – I can imagine them being brewed in volcanoes and thrown into glaciers to cool.

What was the inspiration behind the colours themselves?

Well, Phil's other collection is named after all his favourite songs – and a lot of them are by The Rolling Stones, who I know. And I wanted to go for stony, earthy, natural colours – so I thought, let's call it *The Stones*.

Looking back, what have been the highlights of your career so far?

Oh my, it's been quite a career. It was good winning that award this year. Not before time, I might say. But it was rather nice that it was on the anniversary of Andrew Martin's 20th year. Other highlights have been meeting wonderful people and wonderful craftsmen, and being excited by decoration, rather than just doing it by rote.

What's key to the creative process?

Intuition, and getting to know my clients. It's why I'm not really as good at commercial stuff. Designing for too many people at once ends up being too corporate to get the real feeling. Even hotel rooms – I've done them, but I never feel satisfied. I like the personal involvement.

How does that shine through in your work?

People get to trust you, and you end up with wonderful working relationships. About six of my clients are my closest friends. Someone once said to me that decoration is 90% charm and 10% talent – but you mustn't print that.



Every project is different – the latest project is always the most exciting

Which projects stand out for you?

There was a mews house in Denmark built in the 1500s, which I loved – but every project is different. The latest project is always the most exciting.

Would you say that you follow the trends?

Oh, I think I set them – they follow me. Some people go to other houses with run-of-the-mill stuff – but I go beyond what's expected. But in a funny way, I think brown furniture is coming back. Not too much of it, but enough.

What about when it comes to your personal style and dress sense?

Well, you know, I try to stay up-to-date.

