

This Interior Designer Ditched His Neutral-Only Aesthetic for a Life of Color

The cotton candy pink kitchen ceiling is just one bit of evidence

By Morgan Goldberg • June 21, 2023

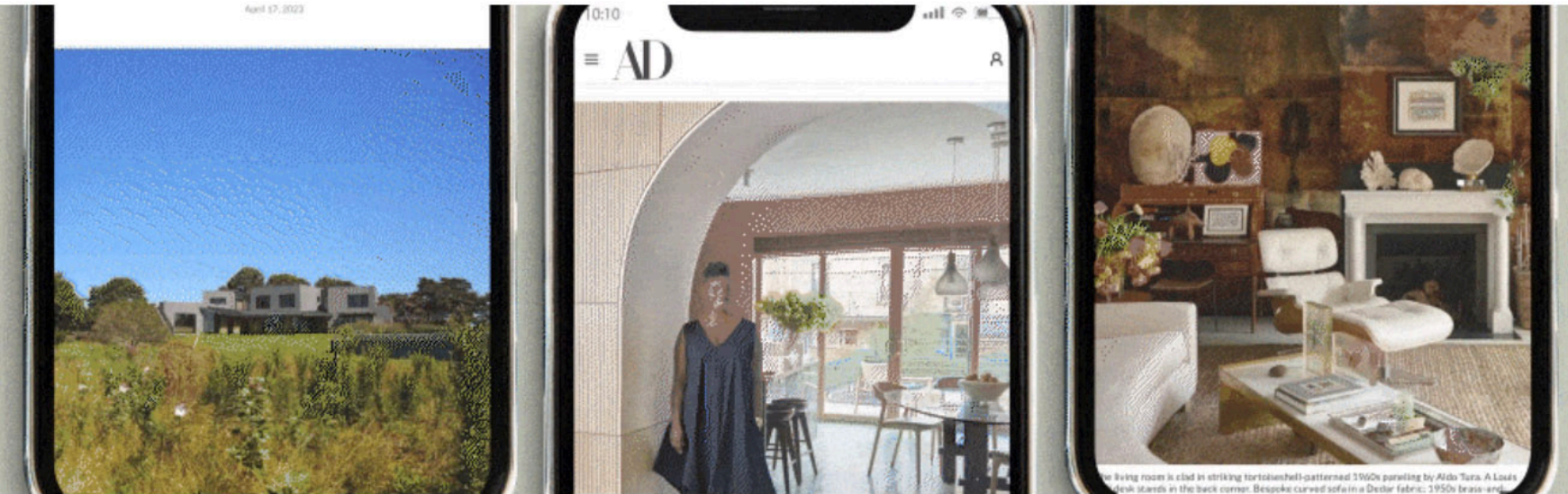


Berry hues dominate the living room decor. Gieves Anderson

[Justin Charette](#) used to live in black and white. The New York City–based interior designer was never against color per se—he is covered in a rainbow of tattoos, after all—but his [former Gramercy apartment](#) was completely devoid of it. When he and his husband, lifestyle photographer [Alexander Atkins](#), got an offer for their home that they couldn't refuse, they moved to a different unit in their building and rethought their limited palette.



"I just wanted to try something that feels more cheerful," Justin, an [AD Pro Directory member](#), explains. "And we don't have a great view, so I think it's interesting to have more to look at and to have more energy within the space. But I still wanted something that's neutral enough that we could switch directions again at some point if we decided to."



To strike this balance, Justin used classic, natural materials for anything permanent, like the oak hardwood flooring he installed to replace the engineered wood. Likewise, he opted for timeless finishes like Nero Marquina marble, white subway tile, and walnut slatted paneling in the newly updated and expanded bathroom.



"I don't like to see a sharp difference from a bright color directly onto a white ceiling, so I like that the wallpaper starts black and goes up to white, so it blends into the ceiling instead of creating a really hard line," Justin says.

Gieves Anderson

Justin also stuck to his tried-and-true white wall paint [Benjamin Moore Chantilly Lace](#) nearly everywhere except the kitchen ceiling, which received a coat of cotton candy pink for festive flair, and an accent wall in the living area, which he covered in a [black-to-white ombré Calico Wallpaper mural](#) for visual interest.

"Once you start adding so much paint color and wallpaper, you're kind of pigeonholed into that one aesthetic unless you do a ton of work to change it," he reasons. "And I always think, especially as a designer, it's fun to be able to discover a fabric or something else that inspires a completely different look."





A colorful, queer-focused piece by Berlin-based artist duo [Greif Lazic](#) brings out the light pink ceiling in the kitchen.

Gieves Anderson

"I love using walnut because it gives you a little bit of that midcentury warmth," Justin says.

Gieves Anderson

That's why he continued this prudent approach while furnishing. He maintained a few staple elements from his old apartment, like his [BassamFellows](#) black leather sofa and gray [Stark](#) area rugs, while integrating bold, colorful art and decor that packs a serious punch—but is also simple to swap out.

The pale rose, deep red, and royal blue accents that Justin chose to pepper throughout his home were pulled from a [Rrres Studio throw](#) he bought in Mexico City. The cotton blanket now sits on his [Design Within Reach Parallel Bed](#), with drawer fronts he had spray-painted lilac to match. A nuanced gallery wall, with works by [Joanne Freeman](#), [Cynthia Rojas](#), [Greif Lazic](#), and [Brian Pearson](#), hangs above.



"I wanted to make it a little bit queer-oriented without being in your face, so you'll get things that you can't really quite decipher," Justin reveals.

"There's a piece that almost looks like a silver dog bowl, but it's actually just a really enlarged photo of a cock ring, which is kind of odd, but I think kind of fun."

In the living room, the berry tones continue with dusty pink [Zak+Fox](#) pillows, a maroon wooden peg sculpture by [Bradley Duncan](#), a contemporary [America Martin](#) painting, and a [Desiron](#) midcentury-style console with spray-painted burgundy doors. The [Røros Tweed](#) throw and sculptural [Tom Dixon](#) chair upholstered in a [geometric Kelly Wearstler fabric](#) both feature multiple shades of red.



The adjacent open office comprises a black [Vitsoe](#) wall-mounted desk unit, a bubblegum pink mushroom ottoman, and a vintage Merlot-hued-and-chrome chair from the Netherlands, which nods to Alexander's birthplace. It's a restrained yet playful vignette, with a neutral base and strategic pops of color, just as Justin imagined.

