



THE HIGH LIFE

Bold, bright and larger than life, the new Manhattan penthouse of Jimmy Choo supremo Tamara Mellon reflects her exuberant outlook. By Sarah Harris. Photographed by Todd Selby

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Tamara Mellon at home in Manhattan, wearing a Victoria Beckham dress and Jimmy Choo heels. The reception room's palette is derived from six photographs of snakes by Guido Moenich. Hair: Jimmy Paul. Make-up: Mary Philips. Digital artwork: Touch. Styling editor: Sarah Harris.



Huge faux-antelope horns flank the fireplace in the reception room. The Sixties armchairs are by Courrèges

The entrance room, a photograph of Marilyn Monroe hangs on the platinum-coated walls

Minty's candy-pink bedroom

Tamara in her office, wearing scarlet Oscar de la Renta

Eight-year-old Minty in the playroom (converted from a dining room)

The walk-in closet contains 320 pairs of Jimmy Choo's "brogans" more are stored in the basement

An antique Turkish crimson cloth hangs in the master bedroom

The dining table was bought for \$20 in a junk shop

fifteenth anniversary), and into the whitewashed kitchen. Here, Helen the uniformed housekeeper is whipping up an egg-white omelette, and Macie the four-month-old Yorkie is throwing up. (Mellon's pretty PA, Irina, has the vet on speed-dial and is talking through the dog's symptoms.) Effervescent interior designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard (who just returned from outfitting an "emergency apartment" for the Osbournes in Los Angeles, and after this pitstop in New York will head to the South of France to install a library for Elton John) is jet-lagged, and furiously hunting for a pick-me-up in the shape of a strong coffee and a cream-cheese bagel. "Great tan!" he yells. "Vichy," Mellon replies, drawing on a Marlboro Light (she's smoked since she was 14; tried quitting, couldn't). The 43-year-old Mellon, founder and chief creative officer of Jimmy Choo, relocated to New York 18 months ago. "I was ready for a new challenge, but really, I made the move here because of Minty," she begins, referring to Araminta, her eight-year-old daughter, who has been bestowed with a candy-pink bedroom, which she has wasted no time in decorating with posters of *Twilight* pin-ups, Robert Pattinson and Taylor Lautner. "I have no family in London and her dad lives here, as does his extended family, and I thought it was important for her to grow up being part of something that's bigger than just me and her." Since their bitter divorce in 2005, relations between her and her ex-husband, Matthew Mellon, scion of the American banking and oil dynasty, are now amicable. "I try," she says. "Because you know what? Minty is half of him, and if I start being rude about him, then it becomes about her." But the move here was no sacrifice. "I'm in love with New York," she says. "This city has everything: it's peaceful and quiet, but if you wanted to go out every night, there are four events to choose between."

This \$21 million apartment, with its high-ceilinged, light-filled rooms, was one of the first that she viewed, although its white walls are now long gone. "This aesthetic is something that Martyn and I have created," she says, as we walk through to her glowing reception room

via a corridor wallpapered in an original David Hicks geometric print. "We call it a very Jimmy Choo look." The bold terracotta-and-avocado colour scheme originated from Mellon's set of six photographs of brightly coloured coiled snakes by Guido Mocafico – a curious choice, since she admits that she's terrified of them. "Oh yeah," interrupts Bullard (who also decorates the homes of Cher and Christina Aguilera), "terrified unless it has a fin heel attached."

It's hard to know where to look first: to the textured walls clad in sun-blasted terracotta custom-dyed linen, or to the

lamps, big brass sculptures, and big sofas scattered with big, plump cushions. It's enough to make you feel like you've been shrunk and sent back in time to a world of hyper-colour, circa 1975.

"The mood is similar to my last house, but we used a lot more colour here. Martyn really pushed me on that front," Mellon says chirpily. When she sold her Holland Park home she shipped the furniture over, but as this apartment is 7,000sq ft – 2,000sq ft larger than her previous house – it swallowed it up. "Martyn and I have had to shop a lot for furniture; even when we're not together, he's constantly emailing me images."

Their is a lasting friendship. The pair met in London through Tamara Beckwith, when Mellon was 18 years old. "It's like I'm living in her underwear drawer – mentally, we're almost as one," says Bullard. Still, they have their disagreements. "Mostly about cost," she quips, shooting Bullard an affectionate sideways glance. "He says you have to have this, you have to have that, and I'm like, 'Stop hemorrhaging cash!'" But it isn't all precious; yes, Mellon's pale leather dining chairs are by the French Art Deco designer Jacques Adnet and cost around £30,000, but the round, smoky glass-topped dining table was picked up at an old junk shop somewhere on New King's Road for £20.

Mellon's bedroom, a Zen-like, airy space, is her favourite room. There are two black and white fashion photographs by Jim Lee on one side of the wall, and on the other, a stack of self-help books on her windowsill. "I'm always reading some kind of self-help book. I love Daniel Goleman; he teaches a lot about emotional intelligence. Right now, I'm reading his *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*."

Above her bed is an ornate wall hanging; a gold thread-embroidered tapestry that she and Bullard stumbled upon in a bric-à-brac shop in Istanbul. "I did some research and found out that it's a 200-year-old cloth used for circumcision," explains Bullard. "We rather liked the idea of putting it above the bed."

Because this is a listed building there are restrictions, but in order to >



In the kitchen, a Jean-Michel Basquiat painting hangs behind the Sixties chandelier

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accommodate more space in the walk-in wardrobe, one wall had to be moved. This room – which serves as a walk-through between her bedroom and the mosaic-tiled ensuite – is vast, and organised with military precision. Clothes hang in colour-co-ordinated sections, which are then subdivided into genres. “I’m anally tidy,” she admits. It’s a system installed by Practical Princess, the company headed up by her good friend Erika Gibbs, who flies over from London twice a year to de-clutter and rejig. Everything has its place. Shoulder bags – hundreds of them – are filed upright on shelves like books. There are more than 125 clutch bags; 11 of which are in the same style but in different colours or finishes. On top of a chest of drawers sit 51 pairs of sunglasses neatly arranged and sorted into rows of black frames, brown and tortoiseshell frames, pink and white. And then there are the shoes, or rather, “Chooos” (aside from Ugg and, as witnessed earlier, a lonely pair of Nike trainers, she doesn’t own any other brand). All 320 pairs of them (excluding boots) are

friends, a gang that includes designer Tory Burch, art dealer Vito Schnabel, photographer Terry Richardson and Ron Perelman (she has been on the board of Revlon since 2008). “I’ve found it very easy settling in here,” she says, before confessing: “Well, I’ve had a year of crazy travel, so I feel like I need to physically be here a bit more; I still haven’t actually walked around my neighbourhood to find my local coffee shop...” As the Jimmy Choo design team is based in London, Mellon is back and forth a lot; for Minty’s sake, she tries to keep work trips to a maximum of three nights, but as she says, “It’s exhausting. I’ve been jet-lagged for a year.” She has her favourite haunts – Pastis, Waverly Inn and The Lion – and is quick to insist that clubs are no longer for her. “The last time I went to one was six months ago, and I just thought, ‘I can’t do this any more, get me out of here.’ Sometimes, I accept that it’s part of my job, and I’m used to that; but I think I’m antisocial now – which I know is incongruous to what the world sees... I prefer to go for some Japanese with Terry, or shop for art with Vito.”

Hundreds of shoulder bags are filed upright on shelves like books. “I’m anally tidy”

carefully displayed on custom-built shelves.

Every few months her personal collection of 37½s is updated with around 50 new styles. Upon closer inspection of the soles, some are barely worn while several are brand new; like all women, Mellon is a repeat wearer of her favourites. In order to make room for the new, older styles are stored downstairs in the basement. How many pairs are in storage? “Oh, thousands,” she estimates, before justifying, “It’s been 15 years.”

It’s hard to fathom from this pristine, highly styled interior that this apartment is still a “work in progress”. Deliveries arrive throughout the day. The latest is a set of brown suede footstools from LA, which Bullard unpacks, sending polystyrene balls flying. There are also two huge terraces and a rooftop yet to transform. On the roof, Mellon plans to build a swimming pool; on one terrace, a playground for Minty; and on the other, an entertaining area complete with an open-air fire, bar, lounge, and projection screen. “I imagine hosting great outdoor movie nights up here.”

Although she has yet to meet the neighbours, she has already built a network of close

We move upstairs to her office. The floor is covered in a snowy white alpaca rug from The Rug Company, the sort that buries your feet under its thick lustrous pile. The windows are framed in glazed linen drapes with appliqué leather strips. The corner sofa is bespoke and upholstered in ivory leather, a buttery soft hide that’s normally reserved for Jimmy Choo handbags, no less. In the centre of the room is a Seventies, Willie Rizzo white lacquered coffee table, which cleverly slides open to reveal a built-in cocktail cabinet. (Mellon ingeniously uses it to store glass jars filled with jelly beans, goji berries, liquorice and chocolate-covered raisins.) Her enormous glass-topped desk, supported by two huge brass ram horns, is by Jansen, from one of its last collections during the Sixties. Shelves are filled with art and fashion books and framed photographs of her late father, Tommy Yeardye, co-creator of Vidal Sassoon. “That’s where my head for business comes from. I failed everything at school, flunked every subject and left with zero qualifications, but my father always taught me to think outside of the box.” After a year’s schooling in Switzerland she returned to set up a market stall on Portobello. “I remember

him saying to me, ‘Great, go do it, you’ll learn how to trade.’”

The rest is now well known: she landed a job at *Vogue* as accessories editor, got fired, went to rehab, set up Jimmy Choo, and now has the initials OBE after her name. “It’s such a huge honour,” she says of the accolade. “We’re a British company after all.” And one that could soon be up for sale (Jimmy Choo was acquired by international private equity firm Towerbrook Capital Partners in February 2007, in a deal which valued the company at £185 million); if reports in the press are anything to go by, it’s a sale which could see her exit the empire that she has spent 15 years building. “I’m not going anywhere,” she firmly states over the phone from her summer rental in the Hamptons, where she was holidaying when the news broke. “There is too much future growth in the business for me to leave now.” This is Mellon in business mode. “We’re talking to a number of banks,” she says, before adding, “There is also an IPO route, where we could go public for £1 billion. Or we take another private equity. We’re looking at all the different options available to us, and it’s hard to know which is preferable until we’ve really examined them all.”

Certainly, there are still areas that she is keen to conquer. “We have a wish list,” she reveals. The first fragrance, which Mellon is the face of, launches in February next year, and – inspired by refurbishing two homes – a homeware line is an area that she plans to explore. Also on the list: ready to wear, watches, jewellery and shoes for men. “We’re not a shoe company, we’re a lifestyle luxury brand and we’ve realised how elastic that band is, and that people will accept many different product lines from us.”

As for what the future holds for her personally: “I don’t know if I’ll get married again. I’m not ruling it out. But one of the reasons why I still work hard is to keep my independence, and that’s really important to me.” Whatever else happens, her future now is in New York. “Minty will stay at school here until she goes to college, so certainly for at least another ten years we’re here.”

It’s clear that this city suits Mellon – there’s an air of ease and contentment that seems to surround her. “I feel happy,” she says, and then, sidestepping away from a rare moment of sentimentality, “My last assistant used to call me the Buddha, because no matter what storm hits me I’m always calm. I’m best in a crisis, it’s my finest hour.”

“And,” she adds, “my therapist said to me once, ‘If ever there’s a war, I want you on my side.’” Who wouldn’t – especially with those heels.



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The ensuite bathroom has an Art Deco feel, with a Venini glass chandelier reflected in multiple mirrors



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