

wallpaper*

*THE STUFF THAT SURROUNDS YOU



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 AUSTRIA € 8.50
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to die for

regal rio // palm springs eternal

sacred spaces // metal urges

cool in kinshasa // fairy tale fashion

juicy jewellery // immortal morsels



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stay calmia

Always looking to use innovative materials in its work, Groves Natcheva Architects turns spa building into an industrial business

When Groves Natcheva Architects got the commission to build Calmia, a well-being and holistic centre smack in the middle of London, Adriana Natcheva and Murray Groves saw it as an urban challenge in urbane Marylebone. In the two years since they set up their firm, projects have included a modern barn in Somerset, a Fulham penthouse and a forthcoming house in south London – Calmia was a great opportunity to prove their talents outside residential work.

Incorporating Groves' Buddhist beliefs and Natcheva's sources of inspiration – the spas of Bali, Thailand and India – the architects have created a space where ancient meets modern. Walk in off the street and it's sensory overload: white plant holders-cum-shelves stacked with colourful products, floors brightly screen-printed with water lilies, a discreet tea bar with heavy cube seats, and stairs leading up to an almost-hidden retail section. Downstairs is the relaxation room and spa – replete with India-pink and orange walls – wood flooring and the most colourful showers in town.

In designing Calmia, the pair also experimented with an innovative, unusual material. While the retail section's white walls, vast vases and chunky shelves

appear hewn from solid rock, the reality is very different. Having fashioned the forms from MDF, the surfaces were then coated with a material called Ceram. Developed by a British company by the name of Liquid Plastics, the product renders surfaces very hard indeed. 'It's sand mixed with resin and is usually used on hospital floors or factories where trucks drive over them,' says Natcheva. 'It's so tough that it can barely be drilled through. It has a real body and solidity.'

Ceram can be scraped on to surfaces, just like plaster: add more resin and less sand and it's easier to manipulate. And best of all, it's waterproof, so plant holders don't leak, customers' wet shoes don't leave permanent marks and the health spa is set to look good for a long time to come.

Groves Natcheva Architects is already planning its next move. 'Architecture is such a good thing because you don't have to choose,' says Natcheva. 'People come to you with an idea and ask for a solution. But what we don't do is pastiche,' she adds. 'We're a young firm and although we shouldn't say no to business, you have to start as you mean to go on.' ★

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