

TIMES OF THEIR LIVES

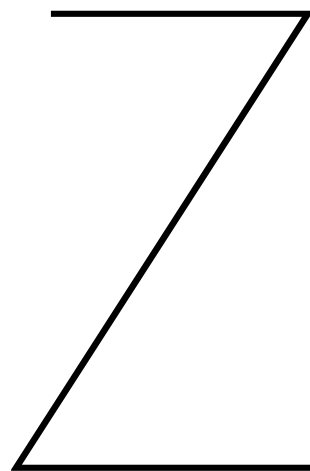
ANTIQUES, ART DECO AND MODERN ART ARE ALL AT HOME IN THIS CLEVERLY REIMAGINED TOWNHOUSE

Photography Alexander James Words Catherine Coyle



[Right] Pierre Frey silk curtains are embellished with Samuel & Sons trims. The mahogany console table is from Julia Boston Antiques and the chair, an 18th-century Swedish antique, has been updated in a bold Hermès striped fabric.

[Previous pages] The original pickled pine panelling in the drawing room has been spruced up and now feels light and modern. By creating furniture with simple shapes, Gillette has been able to balance the period details of this 300-year-old home with the 21st-century requirements of the owners. Rather than trying to faithfully replicate one historical era, the designer has used texture, pattern and colour to keep the interiors feeling fresh and up to date. The flooring is by Tim Page Carpets; the lighting, from Visual Comfort, lends drama; and Dedar linen on the sofa is elegantly understated



en masters, gurus and life coaches can all offer wisdom when we're trying to adjust our lifestyle. But have you considered enlisting the guidance of an interior architect? Balance, after all, can be achieved just as readily through your physical environment as through your spiritual well-being. And balance is what interior designer Mark Gillette does best, as Rosie and Simon Kidston discovered when they purchased the Chelsea townhouse of their dreams. It was no easy matter finding the right expert to overhaul their 300-year-old home and make it fit for a 21st-century family with two teenagers, without stripping it of its heritage.

Gillette's was the only studio outside of London to pitch for the job, and it was his spirited use of colour and his experience of blending the period elements of a house into a workable, contemporary home that persuaded the Kidstons to go with him. They didn't want a stuffy, over-stylised setting and they were aware that mixing historic eras could be difficult.

Not for Gillette, though; as an interior architect with a background in antiques and art, he is well placed to find the elusive sweet spot between period architecture and contemporary living. "I'm a firm believer that old properties look better with an 'evolved' feel," says the designer, who is already working on a second project for the family, this time overseas.

The townhouse is Grade I listed, so he and his team had to work around some pretty severe restrictions; they couldn't alter the configuration of the rooms or the position of doorways, for example. Some renovations had been made in the 1980s, however, when original features such as the wooden panelling had been rejuvenated, so he had a lot of positives to work with.

The owners, who split their time between London and Switzerland, wanted the Chelsea property to have both an 'English look' and a fresh and liveable feel. "Finding that timelessness comes through how you use materials," says Gillette.

"I think that bathrooms can play an important role when you are trying to get across the period of the property. If you look at classic New York hotels ▶





Paisley patterns by Etro and rich reds dominate the TV room on the first floor. A custom-made Turkish ottoman-style sofa makes the room deceptively large, while the high-gloss lacquer on the walls was applied by a Geneva-based specialist. The vintage Coromandel coffee table is by Tarquin Bilgen and the atmospheric lighting is from Galerie des Lampes in Paris

or even historic banks, you can get a sense of functionality and how to make these spaces work well but also look really grand.”

In space carved out of the basement to create a bathroom on this lower level, Gillette was eager to capture the spirit of 1940s glamour – he often looks to the 1930s and 1940s for inspiration for how to create a fluid, workable and luxurious space. Here, using materials including Calacatta Oro marble from Stone Age and introducing Visual Comfort period light fittings, the designer has achieved a contemporary interpretation. “We were really given a blank canvas by the clients, so we have been selective with the antiques we sourced, and have used colour and pattern to keep the scheme up to date.”

The house, built for the Duchess of Hamilton in 1715, has a layout typical of the 18th century, arranged over four levels. The first-floor drawing room epitomises Gillette’s prowess in combining heritage and modern glamour: the walls are lined in exquisite original pickled pine panelling, now cleaned and restored to its former grandeur; and there’s an Art Deco Jean Michel Frank parchment coffee table, ▶



[Above] Gillette's alterations to the kitchen were mainly decorative. He added the marble worktops and splashbacks from Stone Age, a rug from Tim Page and curtains in Dedar fabric. [Top right] A flatweave Swedish rug from Robert Stephenson injects a splash of colour in the entrance hall, while the beautifully arched doorway catches the eye. [Bottom right] A Catchpole & Rye cast-iron bath takes centre stage, with symmetrical vanity units and bespoke mirrors by Simon Orrell in brown oyster shell and nickel

a pair of antique Swedish chairs now upholstered in bright Hermès stripes, and a 1967 abstract painting by Irish artist Frank Phelan.

"We kept things fresh by using simple silhouettes against the panelling," explains Gillette. "It's intuitive. We listen to our clients and introduce contemporary art when it is appropriate to do so; ultimately, our interiors have got to have punch and be visually pleasing."

If impact is the goal, the redesigned TV snug meets the brief. In its previous incarnation, this room presented several challenges; its angled chimney breasts limited wall space, and the proposed plans felt too twee for a chic home. Gillette decided to have all the walls coated in an opulent red lacquer, with the high-gloss finish going all the way up to the ceiling. It's brilliantly done (by a specialist who was flown in from Switzerland to complete the job) and looks like it has always been there, rather than being a new intervention. "It has greatly expanded the room and made it feel luxurious and very atmospheric. And it's actually a really ▶





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[Left] The second-floor dressing room has been lined in Pierre Frey wallpaper, with Tam Tam on the ceiling. The mahogany cabinetry with ebonised and nickel highlights was designed by Gillette and his team. **[Centre]** The master en-suite uses bookmatched marble with oversized antiqued fixtures and has fittings by Samuel Heath. The deep borders are reminiscent of an Art Deco shower room, where glamour and functionality work hand in hand. **[Above]** The handmade marble sink has a soft, gently curving outline

good way to protect walls,” adds Gillette. The feeling of cosiness and grandeur comes from the choice of furnishings too: “We created a bespoke Turkish ottoman-style sofa upholstered in a rich Rubelli velvet and embellished with fringing from Samuel & Sons.”

The designer is a stickler for impeccable joinery and went through the whole building methodically identifying and removing any poorly made or badly installed reproduction woodwork from earlier renovations, replacing it with bespoke cabinetry that has been meticulously crafted and made to measure. In the dressing room off the master bedroom, for example, he has devised an elegant area that looks as though it might have been here since the house was built; in fact, the bespoke mahogany cabinetry with ebonised and nickel accents, a classic Alfonso ▶





[Above] Timorous Beasties' Graffiti fabric curtains and wardrobe door panels set the tone for this teenager's bedroom. Both the bed and ottoman are by And So To Bed, with a Jonathan Adler bedside table and a Porta Romana lamp.

[Previous pages, left] Clashing tiles add interest in this bathroom, where the Fired Earth marble mosaic tiles on the shower wall and part of the floor contrast with the Arabescato marble used on the other surfaces. **[Right]** A four-poster bed by Justin Van Breda is dressed in neutral fabrics that allow the patterned feature wall (Lewis & Wood's Jasper Peony wallpaper) to come to the fore



[Above] A Simon Horn sleigh bed is a commanding presence in this bedroom, but the Ralph Lauren Lighthouse Stripe curtains and Stark carpet add a more casual note

Marina chair from Paolo Moschino and a horsehair blind by Le Crin, from Abbott & Boyd, are all new additions.

The landings, stairwells and hallways on each storey have been kept deliberately neutral and unfussy, as a way to counter the bold colour and texture found in the rooms. It's a clever concept: these are spaces to pause and drink in the elements that make this timeless home work.

"We always strive to make features and details appear as if they've always been there," says Gillette. "No one wants their home to feel like an old museum." ■