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March
2024

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Going

The inviting rooms of this Verbier chalet are a masterclass in artful fusion, as designer Vanessa Macdonald has brought together English and Alpine influences, antique and contemporary pieces, and texture and pattern to create a cleverly coherent whole



TEXT SERENA FOKSCHANER | PHOTOGRAPHS BOZ GAGOYSKI

off-piste



SITTING ROOM The beams were lightened and fireplace redesigned to create a sociable setting for seating, including a 'Bergere' chair and ottoman from Soane, upholstered in its 'Tendrill Vine' linen in apple and plum to match the curtains. An art pottery lamp stands on an Italian occasional table, c1970, both from Tarquin Bilgen, between 'Violet' rattan armchairs by Bonacina in Fermoie's 'Wicker' linen



INFORMAL DINING AREA Designed as a relaxed après-ski space, this has a mid-20th-century French birchwood table from Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler partnered by Bonacina's 'Antica' rattan chairs in tea. A lampshade in Borderline's 'Jaffna' in sage and a bespoke cabinet in 'Flower Pot' – an archive shade by Paint & Paper Library – pick up on the walls of the adjoining dining room. Vaughan's 'Sherwood' metal lantern in chalk white echoes the bespoke rug by Cogolin



DINING ROOM Walls lined in Claremont's 'Winchester' floral linen showcase a late-18th-century Italian **armoire** from Brownrigg and a mid-20th-century **dining table and chairs**, which were sourced from Giovanna Ticciati and used in the owners' previous chalet. Julie Neill's 'Henry' **chandelier** in a beatrice gold over plaster finish hangs above a collection of Pippin Drysdale **ceramics** from Adrian Sassoon



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Broadly speaking, chalet decorating falls into two categories. The first is contemporary: low furniture, white walls, abstract artworks, the decoration as cool and leanly contoured as the landscape itself. Then, in the opposite camp, there is the traditional approach: fluttering gingham on wood-framed windows, rustic Alpine furniture, high truckle beds, time-darkened beams – think Hansel and Gretel meets Heidi.

This chalet slots into neither pigeonhole. Perched high above the resort of Verbier in Switzerland, the property has been reimaged by Vanessa Macdonald of Melissa Wyndham for long-standing clients. The interior – a mix of antiques and modern pieces against a cossetting backdrop of seagrass and fabric-lined walls – nods to both English and Continental influences, yet feels totally at home in its Alpine surrounds.

Vanessa had worked on the owners' other houses in London and New York, and their previous chalet – a smaller property further down the hill. The perk of building a deep-rooted professional partnership, she explains, is that you develop an instinctive grasp of what clients like and what they do not. Fewer words, and even fewer moodboards, are needed. Their last Alpine bolthole had a mid-century feel, but for this one, she was given leave to do things differently. 'There's a definite chalet look, which we wanted to avoid,' says Vanessa. There was, however, one constraint: 'They bought the property in April and our brief was to finish the interior by Christmas.'

Before the paint sampling or furniture plotting began, there was a lot of practical work to do. Built in the 1990s, the two-storey house 'lacked coherence', Vanessa recalls. The bathrooms were too large; wardrobes and storage were scarce; the hall felt unwelcoming; and the wood panelling throughout was unsympathetically fussy. In collaboration with local architect Patrice Coupy, the layout was rejigged. Doors were moved and new bathrooms and a new kitchen installed, while existing features were simplified so 'everything can breathe'.

You get a clear sense of this in the sitting room, redesigned to take advantage of the top-of-the-world views of tumbling



HALLWAY An 18th-century walnut **commode** from Tarquin Bilgen is flanked by antique **chairs** in Robert Kime's 'Russell' linen. **Walls** in Guy Goodfellow's marine 'Fez Weave' set off an 18th-century Louis XV giltwood **mirror** from James McWhirter and Cox London's 'Hanbury' **wall lights**. **SPARE ROOM** **Headboards** in Borderline's 'Araminta' in ivory, **valances** in a GP & J Baker stripe and a Vaughan **rug** are balanced by Sister Parish's red 'Chou Chou' **wallpaper** in the bathroom



slopes edged by mountain ridges. Here, the once oppressive beams were sandblasted and lightened. The fireplace is a new addition, sited for optimal après-ski conviviality. A daybed, Soane and Bonacina rattan chairs are arranged around an antique table from Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler. The bespoke carpets are as pale and tactile as a fresh dusting of snow.

The confident juxtaposition of styles and eras also offers evidence of Vanessa's first job, working for private clients at Sotheby's in London. Dipping into the auction house's different departments – from modern British or antiquarian to 18th-century furniture – has made her 'a good generalist'. She is at ease choosing antiques and also commissioning contemporary design from the likes of Collier Webb, Coe London and French rug maker Cogolin.

Vanessa took over the running of Melissa Wyndham in London after its eponymous founder died in 2015. Like her influential American great aunt Nancy Lancaster, Melissa (whose sister is the interior designer Jane Churchill) acquired a reputation for quietly considered interiors – 'Nothing over-embellished, but always comfortable,' observes Vanessa. A Canadian by birth, she has built on that legacy, putting her own distinctive stamp on the firm's projects both in Britain and abroad. 'I see it as a progression from Melissa's wonderful taste and style – applicable to this decade,' she says.

Vanessa's use of texture and pattern 'in moderation' also sets this chalet apart. The hallway walls are lined with a Guy Goodfellow weave, providing a backdrop for a twinkling antique mirror and sconces. Instead of clinical tiles, fabric also lines one of the new bathrooms, lit by silver twig-shaped lights. The ribbed surfaces of the joinery in this room are a discreet reference, explains Vanessa, to the 'instantly recognisable' work of another British decorator who has influenced her approach – Chester Jones.

Vanessa's former employer Melissa might also have approved of the way in which furnishings from the owners' previous chalet have found new life here alongside the collection of art and contemporary ceramics – the latter largely acquired from the London dealer Adrian Sassoon. A surprising spirit of make-do prevails, with chairs being re-covered, and curtains tweaked and reused. 'My clients have a brilliant eye and they understand the value of things. So they wanted to reuse as much as possible,' says Vanessa.

In the main bedroom, a four-poster was reinvented with the addition of a canopy. Any hint of blowsiness in its floral pattern – also used on an armchair and footstool – is offset by the cooler tones of seagrass walls. Tiered bedside tables, which hold lamps and books, are replicas of the ones Vanessa originally designed for their New York house; a Scandinavian mirror glitters above an 18th-century English commode. The curtains, spilling over carpets like the trailing hem of a socialite's ball gown, are another quintessentially English touch but, like everything else here, feel totally at home.

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Vanessa Macdonald for Melissa Wyndham: melissawyndham.com

BATHROOM A blind and lampshade in Soane's 'Coquelicots' line tone with the frame of a Vaughan 'Belvedere' mirror in bronze. The shower is lined in Calacatta Borghini marble. **MAIN BEDROOM** Phillip Jeffries' 'Island Raffia' wallcovering in stone forest is a backdrop for curtains, bedhangings and a William Yeoward 'Percy' chair and footstool, all in Braquenié's 'Le Grand Géniois Rayure 4 Chemin' cotton from Pierre Frey. The wool rug was custom made by Cogolin.

