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Shades of summer

**EASY DECORATING THAT
BLENDS INDOORS AND OUT**



SITTING ROOM
 The essentially neutral palette sets a formal tone here with character provided by the scattering of books and artworks. The sofa gently divides the space, allowing for a more relaxed seating area beyond with a chaise longue (left), which is beautifully complemented by a bespoke bookcase.
Fontana coffee table, £2,900, Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam, nicholashaslam.com, **Tondo side table**, £129, Swoon Editions, swooneditions.com, **Miro chandelier**, £2,466, Porta Romana, portaromana.com, **Tracery rug**, from £1,170sq m, Kelly Wearstler at The Rug Company, therugcompany.com

LONDON REBUILD

Age of elegance

Seemingly endless planning applications, a dramatic reconfiguration and the installation of a show-stopping staircase have all been worth the upheaval in the case of this undeniably stylish townhouse

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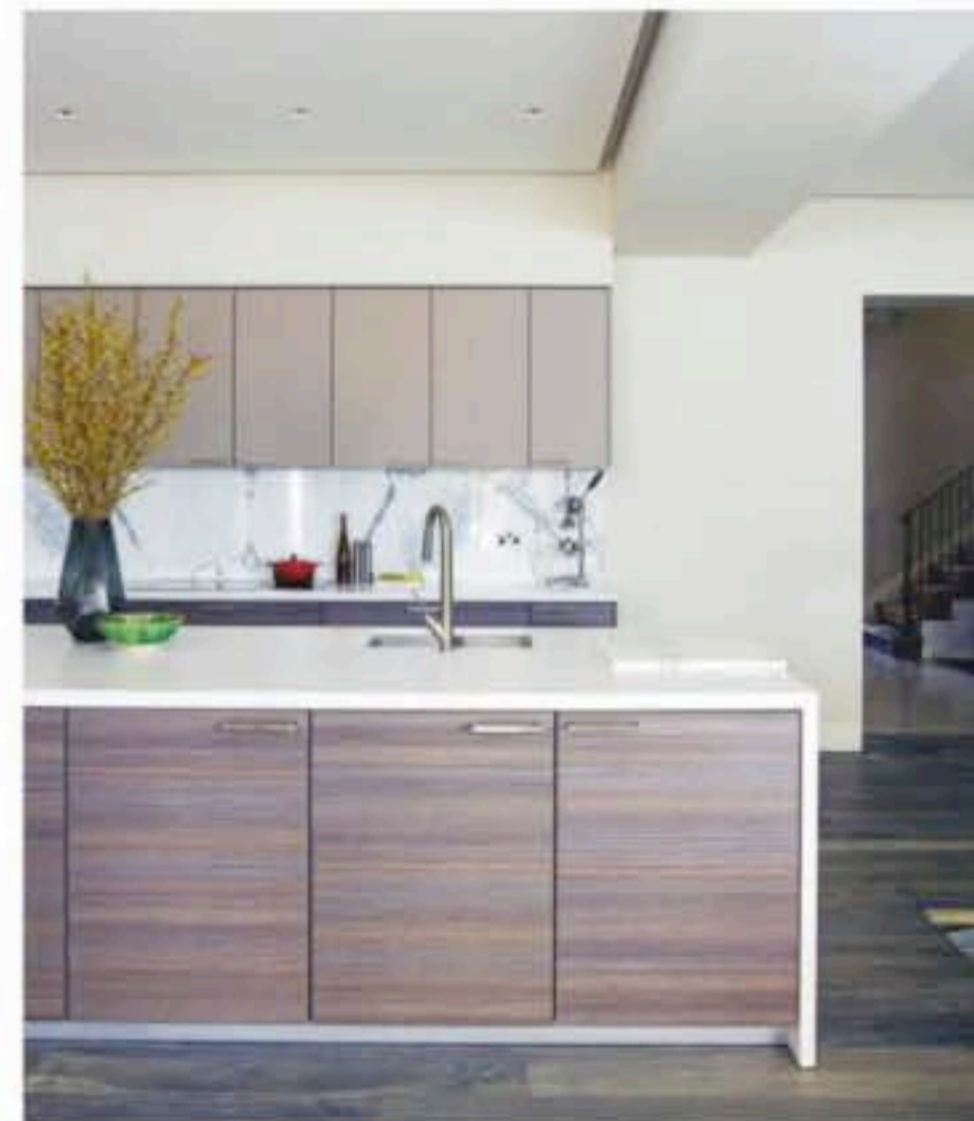
LANDING

One of the benefits of the new staircase was that the Howards were able to feature a spacious landing on each floor, ideal for displaying favourite pieces of art (left). **Umbria chair**, £1,749, Julian Chichester, julianchichester.com. **Curtains**, Victoria Smee, victoriasmeeinteriors.co.uk.

DINING ROOM

Striking pieces, from the eye-catching mid-century Italian walnut cabinet (below) to the contemporary console table and decorative mirror (right), introduce a note of understated glamour. **Harry console table**, £3,900; **medium green honeycomb glass lamps** on brass bases, £1,320 a pair; all Tyson, tyson.london. **Molten sculptures**, from £720 each, Jo Littlefair, jollittlefairlondon.com. **Chandelier** in crystal and gilt finish, £1,755, Brabin & Fitz, brabinandfitz.co.uk. **Buffet cabinet**, Norfolk Decorative Antiques, antiquelighting.co.uk.





SITTING ROOM

"Mixing and matching styles of art and periods of furniture creates a sense of depth and makes a scheme look more organic," says interior designer Rebecca Hughes. "Bianca Smith's paintings (above) are incredibly versatile as they are strong but also quite neutral."

Artwork. Bianca Smith, biancasmithart.com.
Interior design. Rebecca Hughes Interiors, rebeccahughesinteriors.com.

STAIRWELL

Rebecca worked with Laura and Robert to tailor the design of the 14 solid glass drop lights, which are suspended from a ceiling canopy by brass chains (opposite page, top left).

Bespoke celestial pebble lighting. Ochre, ochre.net. **Architect.** Greenway Architects, greenwayarchitects.co.uk.

KITCHEN

Laura opted for a minimalist look (opposite page, top right), where the irregular veining of the book-matched marble splashback provides a pleasing contrast to the linear style elsewhere.

Kitchen in Sand Grey and Textured Teak, from £30,000, Poggenpohl, poggenpohl.com.

LIVING AREA

One end of the kitchen is home to a more relaxed space (right). "It needed a splash of colour, so Rebecca suggested the Paul Smith rug," says Laura. **Carnival rug.** from £1,055sq m, Paul Smith at The Rug Company, therugcompany.com.

The immaculate interiors of this double-fronted, mid-19th-century London townhouse are a far cry from the tired family home that its owners, Laura and Robert Howard, bought five years ago. The transformation is now complete, but it required clear heads and brave hearts as everything but the four exterior walls had to be stripped away to reconfigure the internal space, and the new rooms painstakingly decorated.

The journey began long before so much as a skip could be brought on site. Planning applications numbering well into double figures were submitted for the creation of an additional basement level, and the installation of a car-lift and skylights. Such was the intricacy of the project that, when the builders were finally able to move in and start work, Laura and Robert found themselves having to make decisions on an almost hourly basis. With busy working lives to manage at the same time, the couple decided to appoint interior designer Rebecca Hughes to help them.

The location and design of the existing staircase was an obvious and immediate problem that they needed to address. Centrally positioned and badly angled, it failed to link the house in any meaningful way, so the Howards commissioned a replacement structure that now scales the southern end of the property. Rebecca designed the non-uniform balustrades and convinced Laura that handrails in antique bronze, not timber, would be more in keeping with the metal details used elsewhere, so now the finished masterpiece lends an impressive air of European elegance to the whole house.

"We were going to ask Rebecca to do just two rooms," says Laura, "but after I saw what she could create, and how she worked,

it gave me the confidence to ask her to help us with the whole house." For her part, Rebecca was keen to capitalise on the glamour provided by the dramatic new spiral staircase and encouraged the Howards to commission a final flourish, an eye-catching chandelier that now hangs from the roof light on the top floor, all the way down the 31-foot-deep stairwell.

The new staircase also provided the Howards with the perfect opportunity to create a fresh layout for the rooms on each floor. The previous owners had carved out eight "poky" bedrooms, with ceiling heights that became increasingly lower, the higher the rooms were positioned in the house. It was a situation that was of particular concern to Laura. "I don't like dingy rooms; I much prefer big spaces," she explains.

"My original plan was to create three bedrooms in all," she says. "I would happily have had a large dormitory at the top of the house, but even the architect drew a line at this suggestion as he thought each of the three rooms would be too big." Advised to consider the preferences of future owners, Laura and Robert have dedicated the first floor of the house to their own bedroom, bathroom and dressing room, and created two more bedrooms on the floor above with a further two in the basement.

While Laura's attention was focused on the rest of the house, Robert's passion and expertise were channelled into designing and arranging the audio-visual entertainment. "As a family, we love listening to music and watching films," says Robert, who has created an acoustically insulated cinema room in the basement. "The surround sound is perfectly calibrated. You can turn the volume right up and you won't disturb a soul."





MAIN BEDROOM

Layering shades of grey and different textures has created a sense of calm and peace (above). However, as Rebecca explains, "It is important to introduce bolder elements, such as the distinctive pendant light, to bring definition." **Tree of Life on Grey prints**, £750 a pair, India Jane, indiajane.co.uk, **Addison blanket**, £130, The White Company, thewhitecompany.com.

MAIN BATHROOM

"I much prefer showers," says Laura, "so it was the architect who persuaded me to add the bath (left)." He was adamant that a main bathroom needs one because it provides a focal point for the room and future owners of the house might require it." **Blinds in Springtime in Natural**, £95m, Christopher Farr Cloth, christopherfarrcloth.com. **Brockwell side table** in bronze, £487, Robert Langford, robertlangford.co.uk.

GUEST BEDROOM

The mid-century-style ceiling light (right) with glass shades in smoky hues was only possible to hang because of the room's amazing ceiling height. Adding interest to the far wall is a collection of antique Spanish mirrors. "I especially like them for their uneven forms - each one is different," says Rebecca. **Andromeda antique brass chandelier** with mixed glass shades, £1,186.56, Heathfield & Co, heathfield.co.uk. **Valentin storage bench** in Blush Belgian linen, £540, Sofa.com. **Amber and Pink glass bottle**, £75, The Conran Shop, conranshop.co.uk.





SON'S BATHROOM

Laura chose the wall-hung vanity unit for its contemporary good looks and practical design, with handy shelving and shaver sockets hidden in the cabinetry (left).

Blind in Deniz in Indigo, £123m, Lee Jofa at GP&J Baker, gpjbaker.com.

SON'S BEDROOM

Eschewing wallpaper and plain paint, Rebecca suggested that a graffiti artist "tag" the main wall (below) with elements that particularly resonate with the couple's teenage son.

Bespoke mural, Graffiti Life, graffitilife.co.uk.

Vice Versa linen throw in Cobalt, £260, The Conran Shop, conranshop.co.uk.

