

EMMA J PAGE

LONDON INTERIORS

Lannoo

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INTRODUCTION

“I like the decoration of a room to be well behaved but free from too many rules; to have a sense of graciousness; to be mannered, yet casual and unselfconscious; to be comfortable, stimulating, even provocative...”

~John Fowler, **British interior decorator, 1906–1977**

Pinning down the essential ingredients that comprise a London interior is much like trying to reduce the vast metropolis into one ordered architectural reference point – a near impossible task. Just as the city blends traditional Victorian and Georgian housing stock with new builds, converted warehouses, social housing, tower blocks and landmark post-war estates, so its interiors comprise a fusion of decorative influences. The relaxed elegance pioneered by Colefax and Fowler in the mid-twentieth century, the softly modern, design-led rooms of Terence Conran a decade or two later, and the restrained schemes of interior architects such as John Minshaw have each made their mark. More recently, the capital's interiors have favoured a return to the playful, loosened-up look it has long flirted with: blowsy florals, clashing colours, vibrant prints and plenty of frills and fringing. Add to that a preference for natural materials including timber, rattan or marble and a delight in the exotic, from *ikat* designs to bold geometrics and you have something approximating London living: loose, imperfect, unpretentious and just a little bit rebellious.

The questions of what makes a home, why its interiors matter and how living in a city plays out are all at the heart of this volume. More intrinsic is the issue of how we live

in London itself as opposed to other key capitals such as Paris, Rome or Madrid. What makes an interior belong uniquely to its city and why? The answer lies not so much in a sense of uniformity but in the reverse: behind every ubiquitous London terrace lies a deeply individual home; beyond each formerly industrial space, an eye for adaptability and behind every high-rise or Victorian house conversion, a desire to live among the fray. London is not laid out in formation like some cities, nor is it easy to read. A series of villages stitched together over time, every borough has its own personality, from the urban appeal of Clerkenwell to the genteel, sometimes staid, streets of Chelsea. Social housing mingles with affluent, traffic-packed streets with quiet mews. Every area is subject to unexpected changes of fortune: some, such as Notting Hill, were once coveted, then neglected and now considered deeply desirable, others, formerly ignored, now under the spotlight. 1930s homes on the outer western reaches of the city offer a pull to growing families once located in more central neighbourhoods and long-overlooked period properties in East London are the subject of renewed appeal.

The city's interiors reflect this spontaneous approach – at first glance, unlike our European neighbours, it can be hard to spot any follow through or theme – botanical prints blend

with stripes, primary colours with neutrals; mid-century modern furniture with classic, sleek glass extensions and marble mantelpieces. It's not a look that's overtly pulled together but there's an undercurrent of cohesion running through. 'In that sense, London's approach to interiors is similar to its relationship with fashion,' says clothes-designer-turned homeware specialist Matthew Williamson (244–253). 'You know what to expect when you turn up for fashion week in New York or Milan, but London always delivers something subversive. Known for its sense of freedom and creativity, the city sparks the imagination. My own interiors embrace that sense of escapism. It's not about being British in a traditional sense.'

Many other homes look back to an era of tradition and use it as a springboard into something more unusual. Post-war builds sit among period homes all over the city and despite their often austere exterior, they represent the turning point between quotidian interiors and the sense of exotic that began to take shape in the 1960s, when designers like Terence Conran introduced paper lanterns, woks and duvets to Londoners and architects such as Chamberlin, Powell and Bon pioneered a new, more democratic way of living when they conceived the vast Brutalist Barbican Estate (80–87). 'There's a bravery in that kind of architecture,' thinks journalist-turned-interior designer, Tom Morris. 'It represents post-war optimism and the unconventionality of the 1960s, which I was always drawn to as a child. I also feel there's an intuitive sparseness contained within many other European city interiors, but Londoners love their belongings.' That passion for mixing artefacts, bordering on the anthropological, represents the city's architectural mismatch in microcosm. Few homes are as playful or culturally rich either, riffing on international design ideals as well as what's on the doorstep. The Victorian apartment conversion of interior architect Alex Holloway (226–233) is a case in point: its circle brush finish stainless-steel kitchen is inspired by the design of many of the city's fast food outlets, from fish and chip shops to kebab houses, created as a light-hearted love letter to the city he grew up in.

That there is no 'one' London interior is also largely down to the cosmopolitan nature of the city, noted for embracing the outsider. People from all walks of life are drawn to the capital. Like New York, its much younger sibling, London has assimilated, and been enriched by, a plethora of cultures. The capital has a centuries-long, not always comfortable, association with exotic artefacts, most notable in the Victorian era when spoils from around the world were proudly displayed in the home. Today, that translates into a

fascination with the unusual, whether collections of Guatemalan textiles, as seen in the home of Dylan O'Shea and Caroline Lindsell (196–205) or the playful displays of Murano glass fruits in the house of Spanish jewellery designer Sandra Barrio von Hurter (32–39). A host of nationalities have made their mark in the town and thanks to the considered, pared-back eye of the French or the more rigorous approach of Americans, the city's interiors have benefitted from a sense of global eclecticism.

Perhaps more than any other capital, London is noted for its preference for houses over apartment dwelling. The result is street after street of tall, narrow homes rather than horizontal, one-level living. Consequently, channelling in enough light and reorganising once sectioned-off layouts to accommodate partially open-plan living are the main preoccupations of city dwellers. Many design choices are conceived as an antidote to London's often flat, grey light. Glass extensions, whether steel or wood-framed, welcome in valuable additional daylight, while sunshine yellow, apricot and blush pink decorative accents are a recurring motif. As if to combat the occasional harshness of urban living, an abundance of florals and botanics is also common, in a twist on the English country house style pioneered by John Fowler and Sybil Colefax in the 1940s and 50s. It reflects a desire to live outside the city, in nature, while still being within its embrace. Despite the new apartment blocks springing up all over the city, there's a renewed attachment to earthiness, to the outdoors and to reflecting nature in textiles and textures.

It may never be possible to truly quantify what defines a London interior. But it is conceivable to pin down the universal elements that make up a home. Whether colourful, pared-back, contemporary or traditional, what unites the schemes in the following pages, and in every home that we enjoy spending time in, is a sense of warmth, hospitality, shelter and comfort, underpinned by an unapologetic personality hit. City dwellers sometimes have to go to extra lengths to achieve that, contending with spatial and economic issues, while coming up with imaginative ways to handle an occasionally stifling sense of urban sprawl. Londoners – and those that they welcome from around the world – are particularly resourceful when it comes to creating individual schemes in often repetitive settings. Add to that a pinch of eccentricity and a willingness to break conventional design rules and you have something that comes close to the essence of a London interior.

Emma J Page, London





COSMOPOLITAN
INTERIORS
ARTISTIC
CLASSIC
ECLECTIC
RULE-BREAKING

01



COLOUR POP

Parisian design motifs meet British eclecticism in a colourful reinvention of a classic brick townhouse

As anyone who lives in the capital will tell you, London did not win the lottery when it comes to light. Often flat and grey, it lacks the uplift of southern European climes. So, injecting this townhouse with a hit of sunshine required considerable thought on the part of its Parisian-born owners. Their south-facing home already had plenty of benefits – tall windows, access to a communal garden and a more generous width than usual. But it needed some punch. In collaboration with K&H Design, they worked on a confident combination of colour and pattern intended to combat the city's overcast days.

'The light here can have the effect of sapping the energy of Mediterranean colours such as a bold Greek blue or a Moroccan red,' says K&H's founder Katie Glaister. 'So we couldn't rely on those hues. Instead, it was a case of drilling down and finding tones that were a little more knocked back.' The result is a considered palette that lifts the spirit as soon as you step across the threshold – via a sunshine-hued front door. Thanks to glazing instead of solid walls throughout the ground floor, the eye can travel freely from front to back,

taking in the garden at first sight. Shades of green and blue appear in abundance, from mint-framed internal glazing to the celadon pop of the kitchen island or a powder-blue coated sliding pantry door. 'Though our white walls, herringbone floors and interior windows are all Parisian design motifs, the bold colour pops are definitely more eccentric,' says owner Louise Baladi. 'It's the kind of clash that suits London more than Paris, but it works because there's instant uplift.'

That mix-and-match sensibility is one of the reasons that Louise wanted to collaborate with her interior design team. 'Being short of inspiration was not the problem,' she reflects. 'Instead I needed a guiding hand to curate my ideas, because I love wallpaper, print and geometrics. I wanted to combine that aesthetic with a dash of classicism.' The result is a mix of patterns that pull together like a tapestry: in the hallway, multicoloured tiling, a colour-block stair runner and a densely patterned wallpaper are captured in one striking vignette. Meanwhile in the principal bedroom, a

← A unique 30m non-repeat pattern stair runner runs all the way up to the second floor. It meets large-format hexagonal floor tiles in a vibrant colour clash. The glazed internal wall frames views of the kitchen and garden beyond

Inner glazing and full-length French doors have partially opened up this space while honouring the integrity of the original layout

mural-like botanic paper by Woodchip & Magnolia covers a dividing wall between sleeping and dressing quarters, adding depth and drama.

The family eschewed a formal dining room in favour of a relaxed, semi-circular banquette. Upholstered in a tobacco-coloured leather, it chimes with mosaic inset flooring in the kitchen, giving off the feel of a French brasserie. 'We moved the kitchen from the lower-ground floor to the ground because it made sense for it to be the heart of the home,' says Louise. 'Everything happens around that island, from homework to stolen moments with a cup of coffee.'

Small details throughout, from ironmongery to the cool, tactile finish of the Pyrolave-topped kitchen counter, create the backbone of this home. 'Growing up in Paris, one is surrounded by beauty, from ornate fireplaces to parquet flooring,' says Louise. 'Interiors are not over-designed, but

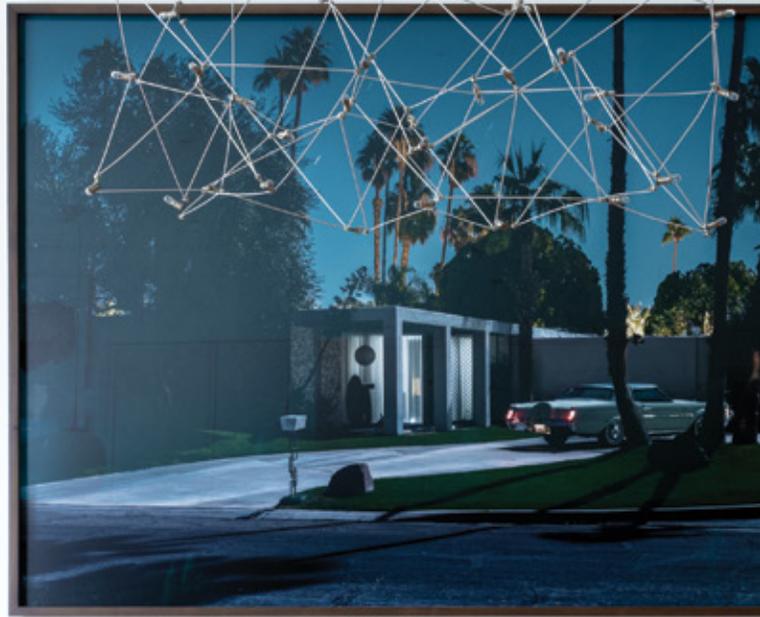
schemes have a soul. I wanted to replicate that here.' As a result, French flair coexists with a sense of British playfulness. The powder room's vivid emerald green walls are studded with back issues of *Paris Match*; a sofa by British maker Russell Pinch blends with a pastel pink armchair by India Mahdavi; a candy-hued loo is contrasted with a grey marble bath surround. Parisian lateral living

has been replaced with the multiple levels that come with a townhouse. 'Until I moved here, I didn't fully appreciate a Londoner's obsession with having their own front door,' admits Louise. 'But now I understand – not least because I can paint it any colour I want.'

→ Mint-green glazing in Little Greene's Tabernacle complements the vivid pattern of a bespoke rug by Marguerite Le Maire. A paper pendant by Eva Manz contemporises period elements, such as the marble fire surround











K&H Design installed a relaxed, bistro-style banquette in this area, which bridges living and kitchen zones. The dining table is by Arnold de Vinck and the pendant light is from Espace Lumière Studios





A fluted island is topped with tactile Pyrolave (an enamelled lava stone) in a vivid verdigris shade. Herringbone flooring inlaid with mosaic and a trio of opaque glass pendants evokes the feel of a French bistro. The bar stools are from Philippe Model

In the children's bedrooms on the top floor, ceiling heights have been opened up to the rafters so that they feel like principal rooms, rather than secondary attic spaces

- ↓ This multifunctional space is used as both a playroom and a yoga studio
- In the hallway, modern hexagonal flooring riffs on traditional Victorian encaustic tiling







A dividing wall, papered in Oasis Mural by Woodchip & Magnolia, creates a dramatic delineation between sleeping and dressing quarters



←
Candy-coloured hues - including a multicoloured loo - inject a playful feel. The floor has been painted in a checkerboard effect using Farrow & Ball's Green Blue combined with Edward Bulmer's Plain White. A neon shower curtain pulls the scheme together