

Foreign exchange

With a warm and welcoming restyle, a French couple have made this London property feel like home

Words: Jacky Parker Photography: Andrew Beasley



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The Popeye and Olive prints add humour to the sophisticated space. The dressing table belonged to Marie's mother and was a perfect fit between the windows. Bourgie table lamps from Kartell either side of the bed enhance the classic and contemporary mix.

Right: Upholstered doors are a wonderful way to bring colour to a room. The alcove cupboards are used to store bed linen and towels as the couple have separate dressing rooms. Antique mirrors behind the offset original fireplace lend a sense of symmetry.



When you're putting down roots in another country it's important to feel at home. Marie Guillet, a business coach, and her husband, Aymar, a financial entrepreneur, have managed this beautifully by fusing subtle touches of their French heritage into a Grade II-listed Victorian property in Belgravia. Working with interior designer Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari of NBB Design the couple have introduced warmth, humour and colour into their home. "Niloufar designed our last place and she understands our taste," begins Marie. "She takes time to listen, and brings personality to a home with small touches that look like nothing but are everything."

With their daughter, India, on the way and plans for another child to follow, Marie and Aymar wanted to create a comfortable and functional family home that reflected their personalities whilst still

being elegant enough to entertain business clients. "We didn't want it to feel like a hotel," recalls Marie. "We love hotels, but in most cases you can be anywhere. It was important for us to feel like ourselves but in London."

There was a wonderful surprise in store when beautiful original corning, which had been hidden, was revealed throughout. "We knew instantly that we wanted to it to be restored," says Marie. "It looks so chic and it feels very French to us, as apartments in the centre of Paris have this too."

Set over six floors, the property was much larger than the couple's first, but with Niloufar's expertise it now oozes charm and character in every room. "Being in the UK, we wanted it to feel cosy and warm," explains Marie. "Niloufar is not afraid to take risks with colour, but she uses it sensitively so it's not in your face."

As you enter the house, the narrow hallway has an illusion of space, which Niloufar created by implementing a colourful striped runner, a red painted handrail and two quirky faux stag heads on the wall. "It's bright and bold as soon as you open the door," says Marie. "Niloufar explained that the colours draw your eye away from the corridor."

The configuration remains the same with a formal dining room at the front of the house, the kitchen in the middle and a small snug room at the back, which leads to the garden. "In France we still have separate rooms for the kitchen and dining room," says Marie. "We like to keep our daily life and social life separate so we didn't want it to be open-plan. Essentially we wanted a French home within an English structure."

The couple opted for a country-style kitchen with painted wooden cabinets and marble worktops. "The traditional design and natural materials

look refined rather than utilitarian and it's a small area, so the pale surfaces reflect light," says Marie. The layout is the classic working triangle, with the oven, hob, sink and fridge all in close proximity, as well as a breakfast bar and plenty of power points and cupboard space. "It's a very easy kitchen to cook in," she adds. "Wherever I am I can reach or use what I need."

Accessed through double doors, the dining room is an eclectic mix of strong colours and statement pieces. Two large black shelving units house the couple's collections of crockery, books and ornaments. From the outset, the couple were keen to have things that are part of their life and history on display and to keep the doors open so that it feels welcoming from the hallway.

The bold hues continue upstairs on the second floor, where the master bedroom and ensuite are situated. A huge portrait of Peter Sellers as ▶



“Up here you can see all the rooves over London – it has a magical Peter Pan feeling. There’s a sense you could fly out of the window and I wanted to play with that.”

Inspector Clousseau hangs in the bathroom, and sets the tone for the raspberry colour scheme. “We like to have a sense of humour in the house,” says Marie. “The painting influenced the palette as we didn’t want another strong colour to compete with it.” The bath was panelled in mirrored glass for a decadent 1930s feel and double doors were upholstered in rich heavy dark pink linen – another of Niloufar’s ideas that the pair fell in love with.

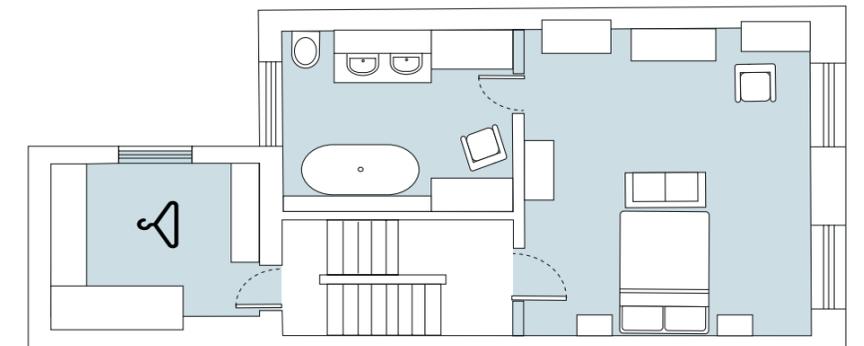
The warm palette continues in the master bedroom with upholstered cupboard doors either side of the fireplace, and the same beautiful fabric that was used for the bathroom blind chosen for the bedroom curtains. “I wanted a pattern, so that when they are closed it looks like a painting,” says Marie. “I loved the colour and pattern on this fabric as it is subtle.” Niloufar incorporated the bed from Marie and Aymar’s previous

home and created a slim cabinet at the foot of the bed to house the TV, so it’s hidden when not in use.

On the top floor is the nursery and its location was a major factor in Marie’s design inspiration. “Up here you can see all the rooves over London – it has a magical Peter Pan feeling,” she says. “There’s a sense you could fly out of the window and I wanted to play with that.” When the room was decorated India, three, and Vladimir, two, were not yet born, so the couple chose neutral tones, influenced by Marie’s favourite children’s boutique, Bonpoint. Charming cloud wallpaper covers one wall and because the room is long and narrow most of the furniture was positioned on one side for a feeling of space. “The children can have fun and play here,” says Marie. “Each room in the house has its own story.” **[KBB]**

Above left: Subtle touches such as the fabric doors, bookcase and mirrored panelling evoke a sense of grandeur and luxury. Traditional-style taps with curved edges soften the look further. “I love that it doesn’t feel clinical,” says Marie.

Above right: There’s a tranquil yet playful feel in the nursery and it’s Marie’s favourite room. “It feels like anything is possible; it has a great vibe,” she says.

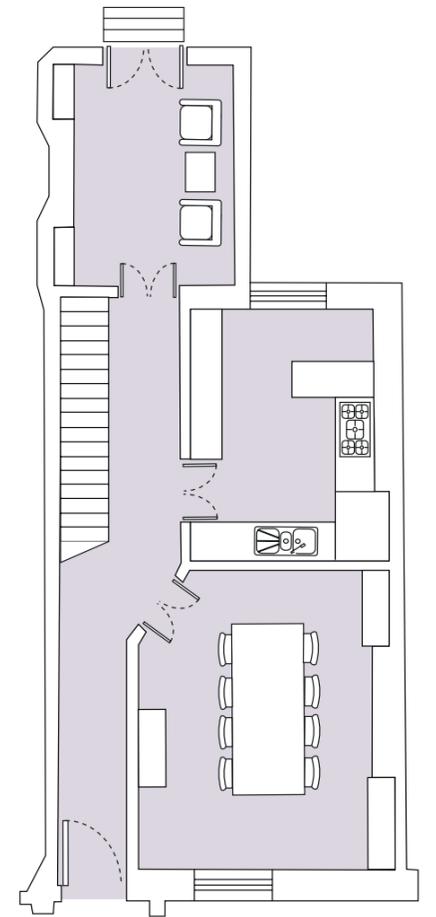




Above: The colourful entrance hall sets a cheery, welcoming tone, with fake stag heads and striped stair runner.

Top right: Marie enjoys the fact that the relatively compact kitchen is easy to work in, as everything is neatly to hand.

Opposite page, bottom: Warm grey oak flooring has been laid throughout the house. In the kitchen it is complemented by the soft grey tones on the cabinets. The small details such as the bookcase and chandeliers make the space feel relaxed and elegant.



Q&A

Interior designer Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari of NBB Design says...

What was the biggest challenge with the project?

To reuse furniture and art from the clients' previous home whilst making this home feel fresh and new.

Did you manage to save any money anywhere?

Painting the stair handrail in red gave the wow factor for a small spend. Also, the black bookcases in the dining room were made from MDF and painted so were economical to make.

What advice do you give clients on finding a good contractor?

I don't – I always use the same one! If you don't use an interior designer who has their own team, then I would suggest asking friends and going to see the quality of the work. Get a few quotes and don't necessarily go with the cheapest. The bulk of the budget should go into the structural work, good plumbing and electrics; you can always change your sofa down the line!

Any tips for people working on a similar project?

Working with a professional is not always as expensive as you might think. It will save time, which in turn saves money and a lot of hassle.





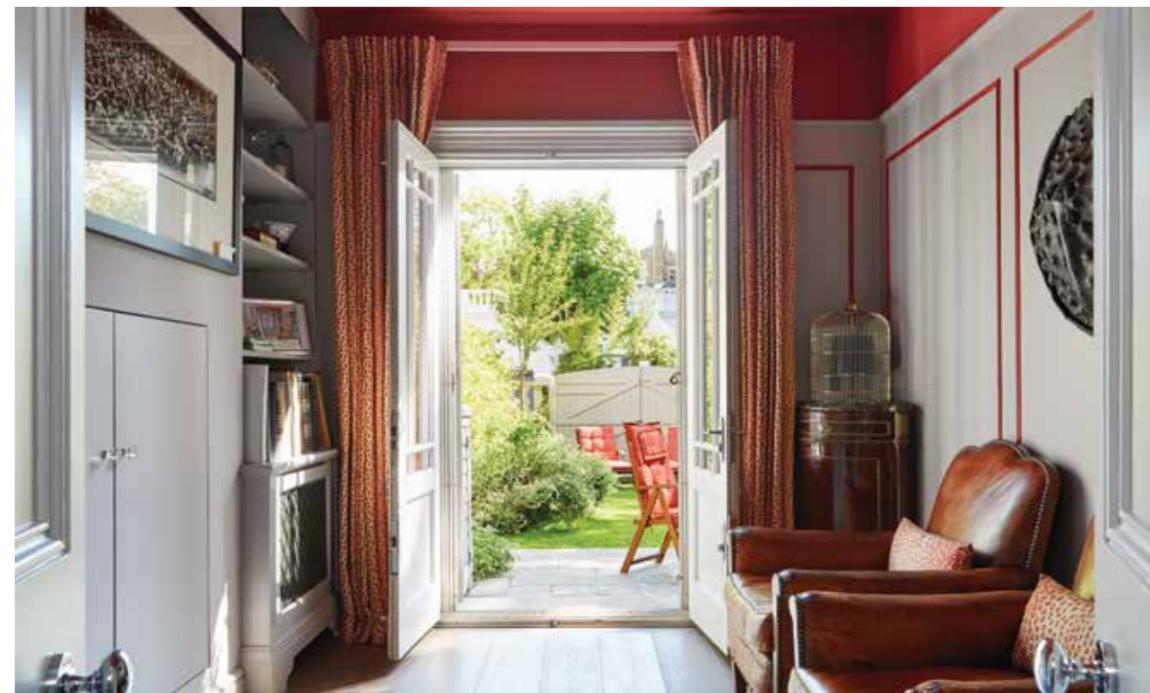
Above left: In the first-floor cloakroom, the fluorescent shades on the French toile used for the blind give it a modern edge. Niloufar continued the theme with the multicoloured panelling. "Guests love it," says Marie. "It brings a sense of fun."

Above right: The beautiful architectural details have been enhanced with a darker paint shade. The bold red lacquered dining table is a bespoke piece that Niloufar commissioned for the couple's previous home. It can be made into two smaller tables when required.

Right: The red Chinese cabinet and brass candleholders complement the artwork and pull the room scheme together.

Opposite page, top right: A colourful Chinese panel hangs on the wall. The dramatic pendant is a blend of classic and contemporary, a theme reflected in all of the rooms.

Bottom right: The red palette continues in the garden room, with striking painted ceiling and panelling. "The summers are short so we thought a snug, cosy feeling would work here," says Marie. Leather armchairs and bookshelves give the feel of a private members' club.





Left: The couple enjoys dining outside when the weather is warm. Red seat pads on the chairs create cohesion between the house and garden.

SourceBook

DESIGN

Interior designer Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari of NBB Design (020 7349 7099 or www.nbbdesign.com)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry NBB Design, as before, painted in Dovetail, Farrow & Ball (01202 876141 or www.farrow-ball.com)

Appliances Hob, Smeg (0844 557 9907 or www.smeguk.com); Ovens, Miele (0330 160 6600 or www.miele.co.uk); Extractor, Westin (01484 421585 or www.westin.co.uk); Wine storage unit, John Lewis (0345 604 9049 or www.johnlewis.com)

Tap Perrin & Rowe (01708 526361 or www.perrinandrowe.co.uk)

Chandeliers For similar try Laura Ashley (0333 200 8009 or www.lauraashley.com)

Flooring Grey oak, Gravity Flooring (01784 440184 or www.gravityflooring.co.uk)

DINING ROOM

Bookcases and dining table NBB Design, as before

Dining chairs Victoria Ghost by Philippe Starck, John Lewis, as before

Chandelier Light Shade by Moooi (020 8962 5691 or www.moooi.com)

Chinese cabinet For similar try The Nine Schools (0117 332 3673 or www.thenineschools.co.uk)

Curtain fabric Giverny Etoile by Nina Campbell (020 7225 1011 or www.ninacampbell.com)

GUEST CLOAKROOM

Paint Plummet, Farrow & Ball, as before

Plaster panelling Simply Mouldings Ltd (01932 848323 or www.simplymouldings.co.uk)

Neon paint The UV Centre (01296 663905 or www.theuvcentre.com)

Sanitaryware Bathstore (0330 024 0845 or www.bathstore.com)

Pendant light Peter Jones (0345 604 9049 or www.johnlewis.com)

Blind toile fabric For similar try My Fabrics (020 3326 5482 or www.myfabrics.co.uk)

MASTER BEDROOM

Bed and headboard NBB Design, as before

Carpet Gravity Flooring, as before

Curtain fabric Christopher Farr (020 7349 0888 or www.christopherfarr.com)

Chandelier RV Astley (01922 744000 or www.rvastley.co.uk)

Lamps Bourgie by Kartell, Made in Design (020 7692 4001 or www.madeindesign.co.uk)

Love seat Bought on eBay. For similar try Swoon Editions (020 3137 2464 or www.swooneditions.com)

Bedside tables For similar try Orchid (020 7384 2443 or www.orchidfurniture.co.uk)

MASTER BATHROOM

Vanity unit For similar try Porter Vanities (020 3355 1817 or www.portervanities.com)

Bath Bette (0844 800 0547 or www.bette.de)

Mirrored bath panels GH Interior Glass (020 8461 8966 or www.ghinteriorglass.com)

Taps Bathstore, as before

Blind fabric Christopher Farr, as before

Mirror Chelsea Glass (020 7720 6905 or www.chelseaglass.co.uk)

NURSERY

Floor paint Brassica, Paint & Paper Library (020 7823 7755 or www.paint-library.co.uk)

Wallpaper For similar try Not on the High Street (0345 259 1359 or www.notonthehighstreet.com)

Cots and furniture For similar try Mamas & Papas (0345 268 2000 or www.mamasandpapas.com)

HALLWAY

Stair runner For similar try Roger Oates (01531 632718 or www.rogeroates.com)

Stag heads For similar try Graham and Green (020 8987 3700 or www.grahamandgreen.co.uk)

COST

A similar kitchen would cost around £33,000, a similar master bedroom around £18,000, and a similar master bathroom from £20,000