Clever Renovation Ideas and a Vibrant Art Collection Gave This Tired Apartment a New Lease of Life

With a rugged wabi-sabi ethos, vintage design pieces and jewel-toned hues, this Edwardian home was reimagined to suit a modern family's evolving needs.

By Marcus Fox
Photography by Ed Morgan
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For more city dwellings, even at top end, space is at a premium. Which is why, the true genius of an interior designer lies in using clever innovation ideas and applying more like focus to maximise the layout. This was the challenge that faced Sandra Vera, a boutique London-based practice, on taking on this five-bedroom apartment located on an Edwardian mansion block in Holland Park, the west of the British capital city.

The client had lived in the property for several years with his three children but as they grew older, the apartment became increasingly less compatible with their ever-evolving lives. "When the family started living in it, it was very much for the three young kids, but everyone grew to that stage where you drift into a new period of your life, and areas that weren't quite as important become more important to them," explains Sandra Vera *co-founder and joint creative director* Venetia Rashbrook.

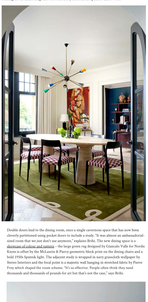
This thinking paved the way for a reconfigured layout which incorporated much needed new spaces such as an inviting breakfast room, bank kitchen and an elegant study. But the finished result is much more than a successful re-imagination of the space. Sandra Vera, set up 10 years ago by Rashbrook and her business partner and childhood friend Romane Hinal, has created a beautiful home that reflects the personalities of these talented observers, or, *especially* women, in that has given this home its unique soul.

"The first thing we did was have an in-depth look at the layouts, how they wanted to live and come up with solutions," says Bella. "The rooms were not connected so a little very dated in that respect. The challenge was just re-jigging the floor plan and reconfiguring the spaces. There was plenty of rooms, it just wasn't configured in how we live it this day and age."

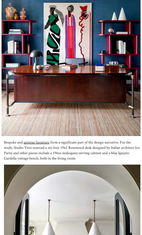
Inspiration was drawn from Sandra Vera's keen interest in European design which aligned with the client's tastes. "We like to mix contemporary with Scandinavian, mountainous, and eastern European influences," adds Rashbrook.

The previously-closed-entrance hallway was taken back to brick and anchored with a light and herringbone floor which runs through the apartment. Amongst the decorative interventions ideas the designers applied, an imposing arched doorway with glass-frosts Doors were spent deliberating over the thickness of the architrave around it! was added to help flood the space with natural light and panelling was introduced on the walls to bring back architectural character lost to time. "It adds an extra detail," says Bella. "The client was very keen on certain projects we had done in the past and the art that we had procured. So we knew we were going to be working with a great collection and the panelling frames it beautifully."

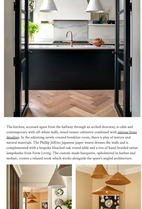
Two artworks, one from London based abstract artist Hannah Ludlowe and another from American artist Christopher Wool, flank the doorway and indeed jewel paintings in the main streak throughout the home and includes pieces from English artists Teddy Millington-Drake, rising star Thea Bentley and still life painter Lara Vera.



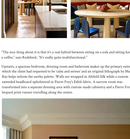
Double doors lead to the dining room, once a single conversion space that has seen been reconfigured into a generous area for family and friends. "We had a very specific requirement and room that we just don't see anymore," explains Bella. This new dining space is a showcase of colour and texture – the large power rug designed by Gancado Vidle for Nordic Knots is mirrored by the Lucas & Porter geometric block print on the dining chairs and a bespoke Japan Inks Tokyo collection study is wrapped in a gorgeous patterned wallpaper by Mary Fox Linton. The adjacent study is wrapped in a gorgeous patterned wallpaper by Mary Fox Linton which dispel the room silence. "It's a reflective. People often think they need thousands and thousands of pounds for art but that's not the case," says Bella.



Bespoke and antique furnishing form a significant part of the design narrative. For the study, Sandra Vera sourced a late 19th Ottomanski desk designed by Italian architect Ico Parisi and other pieces include a 19th-century mahogany serving cabinet and a blue Ignazio Gardella vintage bench, both in the living room.



The kitchen, accessed again from the hallway through an arched doorway, is calm and contemporary with off-white walls, wood veneer cabinetry contrived with antique brass handles, a Corian worktop and a Bulthaup island with a Miele hob and Gaggenau extract material. This Philip Jeffries Japanese paper room dresses the walls and is complemented with a bespoke blackbud ash round table and a trio of hand-braided rattan lampshades from Form Living. The custom-made banquette upholstered in leather and mohair, creates a relaxed zone which works alongside the space's angled architecture.

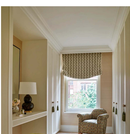


"The nice thing about it is that it's a real hybrid between sitting on a sofa and sitting having a coffee," says Rashbrook. "It's really quite multifunctional."

Upstairs, a spacious bedroom, dressing room and bathroom make up the primary suite which the client had requested to be 'calm and serene' and an original lithograph by Mary Fox Linton sets the tone for the room. The bed, which is flanked by two bespoke concealed headboard upholstered in Pierre Frey's Alabi fabric, A custom room was transformed into a separate dressing area with custom-made cabinetry and a Pierre Frey leopard print runner travelling along the centre.

Photo: Ed Morgan

"It was time had to well to being a fabulous dressing room and it's got incredible storage. There's something quite Hollywood about it – the Pierre Frey runner adds a kind of glamour to the whole space," says Bella. The bathroom marginally embraces textiles with a soft Roman blind in Susan Brown's Scrolling Fern and an olive green velvet upholstered custom bench.



As one of the additional bedrooms, an Ottoline wallpaper offers some soft pattern layered with a Sanderson fabric on the fabric of Gaye Gooderham. Joined to a matter cushion, and Pierre Frey on the bedspread.

The project, which took just over a year to complete, has done what the best designs do – completely enhance the way the inhabitants engage with the space.

"We've never trying to pretend that we're moving from but one thing that we do try to do is really improve the quality of your life," says Rashbrook. "There are so many people living in houses where they think they don't have enough space, but actually it's just about reconfiguring, making sure that all the spaces are being used to the best way possible."