

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

With a rejigged spatial layout, vintage design pieces and jewel-toned colours, this Edwardian home was reimaged to suit a modern family's evolving needs

By Busola Evans

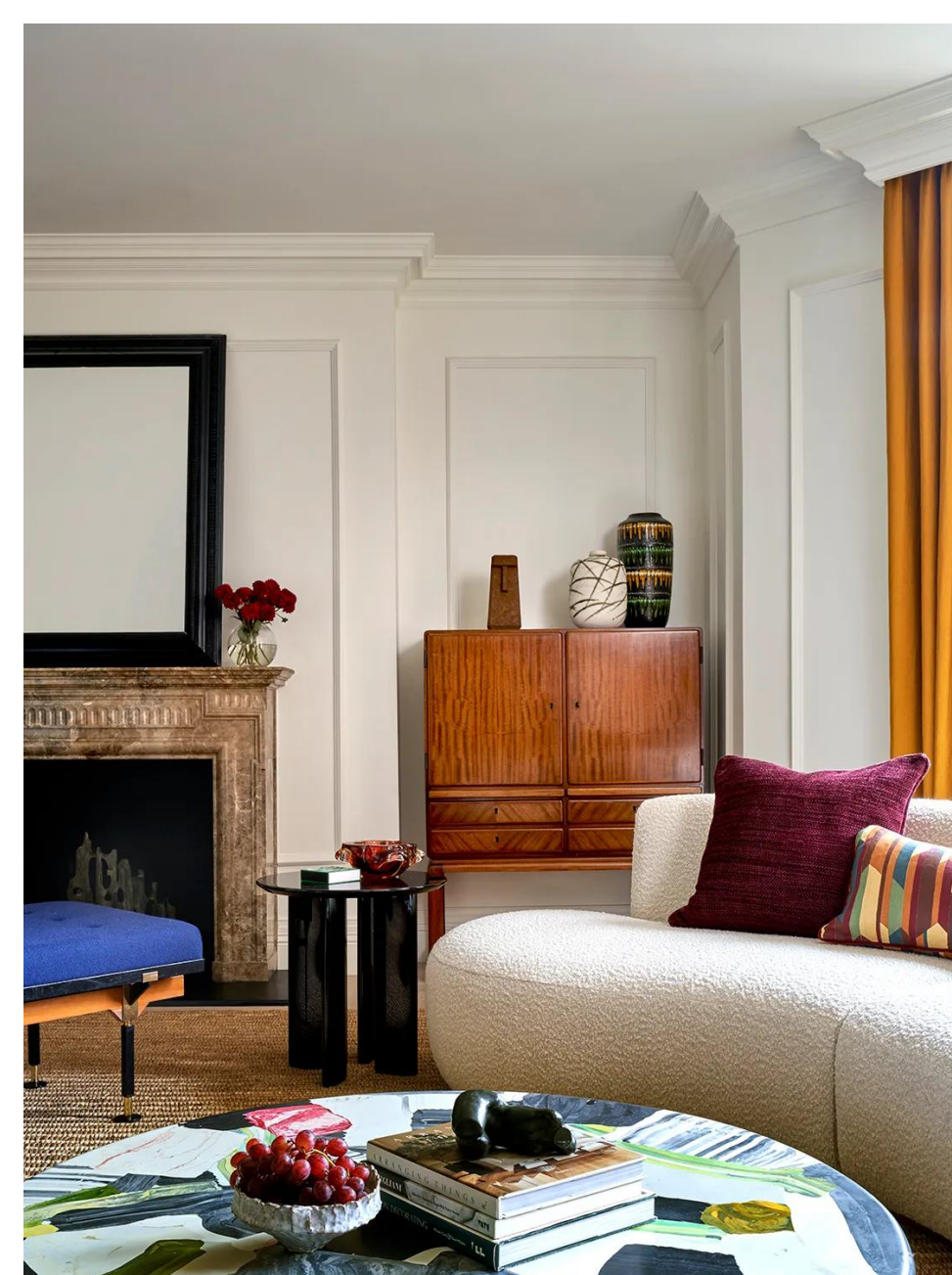
Photography by Simon Brown

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For most 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 renovation ideas and applying razor-like focus to maximise the layout. This was the challenge that faced Studio Vero, a boutique London-based practice, on taking on this five-bedroom apartment located in 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 three young kids, but everyone gets to that stage where you shift into a new period of your life, and areas that potentially were playrooms are becoming reception spaces," explains Studio Vero co-founder and joint creative director Venetia Rudebeck.



This thinking paved the way for a reconfigured layout which incorporated much-needed new spaces such as an inviting breakfast room, back kitchen and an elegant study. But the finished result is much more than a successful re-imagination of the space. Studio Vero, set up 10 years ago by Rudebeck and her business partner and childhood friend Romanos Brihi, is known for its fusion of colour, art and antiques and it is those layered elements, so expertly woven 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 suggestions,” says Brihi. “The rooms were not connected so it felt very dated in that respect. The challenge was just re-jigging the floor plan and reconfiguring the layouts. There was plenty of room, it just wasn’t configured in how we live in this day and age.”



Inspiration was drawn from Studio Vero’s keen interest in European design which aligned with the Italian client. “We definitely were influenced by Parisian Haussmannian apartments, with rooms leading onto rooms,” adds Rudebeck.

The previously gloomy entrance hallway was taken back to brick and anchored with a light oak herringbone floor which runs through the apartment. Amongst the clever renovation ideas the designers applied, an imposing arched doorway with glass fronts (hours 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 Brihi. “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 Ludnow and another from American artist Christopher Wool, flank the doorway and indeed prized paintings is the main streak throughout the home and includes pieces from English artists Teddy Millington-Drake, rising star Theo Bardsley and still life painter Lara Voce.



Double doors lead to the dining room, once a single cavernous space that has now been cleverly partitioned using pocket doors to include a study. "It was almost an ambassadorial-sized room that we just don't use anymore," explains Brihi. The new dining space is a showcase of colour and pattern – the large green rug designed by Giancalo Valle for Nordic Knots is offset by the McLaurin & Piercy geometric block print on the dining chairs and a bold 1950s Sputnik light. The adjacent study is wrapped in navy grasscloth wallpaper by Stereo Interiors and the focal point is a majestic wall hanging in stretched fabric by Pierre Frey which shaped the room scheme. "It's so effective. People often think they need thousands and thousands of pounds for art but that's not the case," says Brihi.



Bespoke and antique furniture form a significant part of the design narrative. For the study, Studio Vero sourced a six-foot 1962 Rosewood desk designed by Italian architect Ico Parisi and other pieces include a 1960s 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 combined with antique brass detailing. In the adjoining newly-created breakfast room, there is play of texture and natural materials. The Phillip Jeffries Japanese paper weave dresses the walls and is complemented with a bespoke bleached oak round table and a trio of hand-braided rattan lampshades from Ferm Living. The custom-made banquette, upholstered in leather and mohair, creates a relaxed nook which works alongside the space's angled architecture.



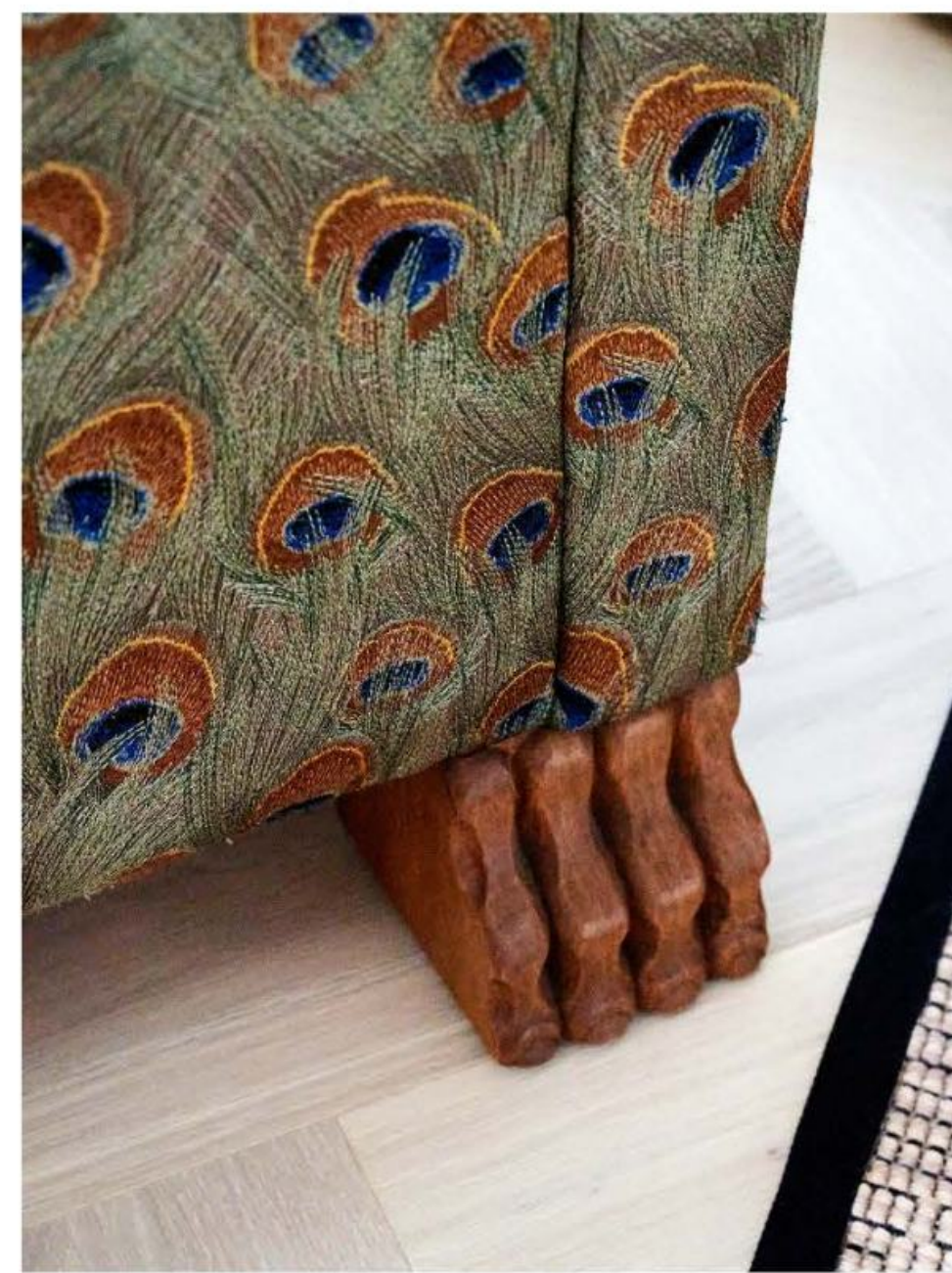
“The nice thing about it is that it’s a real hybrid between sitting on a sofa and sitting having a coffee,” says Rudebeck. “It’s really quite multifunctional.”

Upstairs, a spacious bedroom, dressing room and bathroom makes up the primary suite which the client had requested to be ‘calm and serene’ and an original lithograph by Man Ray helps inform the earthy palette. Walls are wrapped in Alfield Silk while a custom extended headboard upholstered in Pierre Frey’s Edith fabric. A narrow room was transformed into a separate dressing area with custom-made cabinetry and a Pierre Frey leopard print runner travelling along the centre.



Photo: Simon Brown

“It just lent itself so 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 Brihi. The bathroom equally embraces textiles with a soft Roman blind in Soane Britain’s Scrolling Fern and an olive green velvet upholstered custom bench.



In one of the additional bedrooms, an Ottoline wallpaper offers some soft pattern layered with well-chosen fabrics from the likes of Guy Goodfellow, found on a scatter 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’re never trying to pretend that we’re saving lives but one thing that we do try to do is really improve the quality of your life,” says Rudebeck. “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 in the best way possible.”

