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The drawing room (this picture) is warm and inviting, with a bespoke gas fire by Neville Stephens, flanked by portraits of the owner's children. The drawing room opens into the library (above right), decorated in a similar palette of mauve, jade and stone; the purple sofa was designed by Gytha Bouchon



winter quarters

The Norwegian owner of this London house was determined to find a light-filled yet cosy winter base for her family, which her interior designer achieved with texture, colour and plenty of cultural references to the family's Scandinavian homeland

TEXT **LISA FREEDMAN** | PHOTOGRAPHS **RACHEL WHITING**
LOCATIONS EDITOR **LAVINIA BOLTON**



THIS PAGE The dining-room ceiling is painted in burnt-orange lacquer, which is echoed in the piping on the chairs. OPPOSITE The antique mirror above the fire (top left) was bought in Petworth. The dining room can be separated from the kitchen by curtains (top right), which are secured with pompom tie-backs from Abbott & Boyd. A terrace overlooking communal gardens opens off the sitting room (bottom); the storm lanterns are by Swedish designers Skogsberg & Smart



Marry in haste, they say, and repent at leisure, but the same does not necessarily apply to buying a home. The owner of this elegant stucco-fronted house in west London was given just a few weeks to find somewhere appropriate to transplant her family from Norway to a new life in England. Now, she is living happily ever after.

Of course, she had her priorities clear from the start and top of her search list was a demand for light. "The estate agent who took me round said: "You keep looking out of the window; you're not paying attention to the house,"" she recalls.

While inattention of this sort may send you to the head at school, here it proved a wise decision. When it's warm, the owner and her husband linger over breakfast on the balcony, and at all times they enjoy sweeping views over open spaces and the London skyline.

At the start, however, the interior certainly did not live up to its surroundings. The Grade II-listed house, built as a family residence in the nineteenth century, had spent decades divided into small flats. It took a full two years to reunite it as a harmonious whole.

The owner hadn't lived in England before and was initially astonished by how daunting a task renovation could be. "Whenever I suggested something to an architect, they'd say, "That could be OK – or not." It got to the point when I asked myself, "Am I insane?" Sensibly, she decided that was the moment to bring in reinforcements and, through a friend, was introduced to Gytha Bouchon.

Gytha, half of the two-sister team that runs the Chelsea design firm Nuttall, studied furniture and fine arts at Sotheby's and interior design at the Inchbald, before working for Sally Metcalfe at George Spencer Designs. In 2000, she launched the company now known for its sophisticated English aesthetic and knowledgeable access to many of the country's finest craftsmen.

'I don't have a set style,' says Gytha. 'You always have to recognise this is not your house; your aim is to reflect the character of the client.' The 'character of the client' in this instance is fun-loving and family-oriented and the owner was looking for a home that was as vibrant, relaxed and practical as she is herself. 'I didn't want it to be stark and minimal,' she says. 'I wanted every room to be like a jewellery box; a tower of jewels stacked one on top of another.'

Gytha's reputation for texture and colour, as well as her anything-is-possible approach, made the owner feel they could work well together. 'It was a big move and I wanted it to be enjoyable,' she says.

The family had been used to the expansive lateral space and stark white light of northern Europe, but the early delays had at least given the owner time to adjust to London's moody Whistlerian greys. 'We still spend much of the summer in Norway,' she says. 'I wanted this house to be a winter house, somewhere you could curl up in a sofa and read a book – a house that would hug you to it.'

Another essential was to make the transition as easy as possible for her three children, a boy and girl in their early teens and a daughter on the brink of university. 'It was a dramatic move for them, and I wanted them to feel this was really their home,' she explains.

In order to get them thoroughly involved, she let each child design their own room – with Gytha's help. 'The son wanted something very modern and sleek, so we built clean-lined units in sharply contrasting orange and white,' says Gytha. The daughters had a softer vision, and Gytha supplied the younger with a shoe-box stage to play with a medley of blue-and-white prints, while guiding the elder in the creation of a romantic suite on the lower-ground floor. This hideaway – with its walk-in wardrobe, mosaic-lined plunge bath and silvery chintz – would be the envy of any teenager, but it also has a decisive personal identity provided by the inclusion of much-loved furniture and pictures from the family home in Norway.

The owner, too, wished to maintain a strong link with the family's past, and a significant collection of Norwegian art was the spring-board for much of the design. 'I felt that by including things that were familiar, we could provide a sense of continuity,' she says.

In the first-floor drawing room and adjoining sitting room, for example, the palette of lilacs, jade and taupe reflects the spectrum of a large oil adorning one wall. In the ground-floor dining room, another significant work inspired Gytha to suggest painting the ceiling in a dramatic fiery lacquer. 'It's such an autumnal colour,' says the owner. 'It's really lovely when it's dark and the room is lit by candles.'

For connoisseurs of Scandinavian art history, however, the most fascinating work in the owner's collection is the portrait of a young woman in a floral hat. The subject, the owner's great-grandmother, regularly modelled for Munch.

Despite the early setbacks, the protracted rebirth proved as pleasurable as it was productive. 'I found the variety and craftsmanship in England quite extraordinary,' the owner enthuses. And evidence of the range and skill of these talented makers is now apparent in every room, from the hand-painted walls in the main bedroom to the bespoke gas fires in the drawing room and dining room.

'There's nothing worse,' says Gytha, 'than someone walking into your house and saying, "I know precisely where you got that."' Certainly, there's no danger of that here □

Nuttall: 020-7584 8989; www.nuttallhome.com

BOTH PAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The Spanish bed in the main bedroom was a wedding present. A sculpture by Norwegian artist Nico Widerberg is reflected in the bathroom mirror. The owner's son's bedroom is sleek and modern, with orange accents. The eldest daughter's bathroom has a glamorous sunken bath. Her bedroom is lined with a Holland & Sherry wallcovering. A study has been created on an upstairs landing; the walls are covered with purple fabric criss-crossed with ribbon



CONTRIBUTORS



Gytha Nuttall **INTERIOR DESIGNER**

Interior designer Gytha Nuttall is constantly searching for inspiration and as a result she never 'strays far from the interiors bubble'. 'I think the most important thing is that space should reflect the character of its owner,' explains Gytha. Her designs are renowned for their architecturally clean lines and mixture of old and new pieces - an

aesthetic that is showcased in the elegant west London house she decorated on page 72. Having studied at Sotheby's Institute and the Inchbald, Gytha worked at George Spencer Designs for three years before setting up her own business, Gytha Nuttall Designs, in 2000.



Gaelle Le Boulicaut

PHOTOGRAPHER

Gaelle Le Boulicaut started work as a photojournalist, 'travelling extensively and reporting from borderline countries'. The onset of motherhood 13 years ago demanded a new and 'less risky' subject matter, and Gaelle now specialises in architecture and interiors. Turn to page 82 to see her photographs of a town house in Paris, a commission she approached with 'complete amazement' at 'the quality of craftsmanship and decoration'. Having spent 10 years in Sydney, Gaelle is now based in France, where she lives in 'a very modern house' and enjoys her rare moments of free time surfing and skateboarding with her children.

Anthony Gardner **WRITER**

Anthony Gardner traces his writing career back to early childhood. 'From the moment I started to read books I was so entranced by them that I decided I wanted to try to create something equally magical,' he explains. Since graduating from Oxford with a degree in English, Anthony has worked at a number of titles including *Harpers & Queen*, the *Telegraph Weekend Magazine* and *Tatler*. He is now 'a freelance journalist Monday to Friday, and a novelist at weekends', who is currently writing 'a satirical novel about Chinese spies and urban foxes'. This month he explores Ann Boyd's Oxfordshire cottage on page 108.



Jo Foley **WRITER**

Jo Foley is a seasoned spa-goer who has been writing about the wellness industry since the days when 'spas were known as fat farms'. In this Christmas edition of *House & Garden*, she shares her expertise and charts the best Christmas-present spas on page 137. When Jo is not waiting in airports, which she cites as 'the worst part of the job - they are getting more

and more unpleasant,' she is 'catching up with new and revamped health resorts across the globe' in search of 'a truly great massage' □

