





tors, loves the craftsmanship and finds them genuinely beautiful. Every object and picture has a story to tell.

'The thing about people with a collecting instinct is that we always remember how much we paid, where we bought it and why. The thrill of acquiring a bargain adds instant value, and sharing a passion with friends such as Ruth Guilding [creator of the inspirational Bible of British Taste], who introduced me to Breon O'Casey and the potter Seth Cardew in Cornwall, has been great for opening my eyes to artists I didn't know and for inspiring new collections.'

And then there's the sheer enjoyment of the treasure hunt itself: 'Sometimes we'll pretend to each other that we haven't noticed something, waiting to see who'll strike first. I'm much more impulsive, I'll generally plunge in right away. Often, we do car boot sales together and can't resist buying things off each other's stalls before we've even finished setting them up.'

Virginia regards art—and, in particular, her specialist genre of Modern British—as the focus of her

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professional work. 'These days, I've become less involved with all the structural stuff and prefer to operate more as a style director and art consultant. I've set up several collections for clients and, for interior-design commissions, I use my treasure-hunting instincts, but on a grander scale. A great ally in finding good 20th-century works is my dealer friend Mark Wilson of Cross Street Art.'

The ease with which she blends furniture, paintings and sculpture of different eras with bold fabrics owes much to the eclectic style of her childhood home—her German father is a Classical archaeologist who worked as a museum director, her Scottish mother a translator of contemporary art catalogues.

The third of four sisters raised in an artistic milieu, Virginia was educated in Germany and then Scotland, where she spent happy hours trawling the junk shops of Edinburgh and the North-East. The family holiday cottage at Nethybridge in the Highlands is a shrine to those sorties: 'Virtually no picture cost me more than £15. I've never had much money, so I just buy what I like and

can afford.' Even when putting together the main body of her collection, she rarely paid more than a few thousand pounds for works by St Ives School artists such as Ben Nicholson, William Scott, Brian Ingham, Patrick Heron and Roger Hilton, to which she's added 1960s prints by the likes of Patrick Caulfield, Jim Dine, Bridget Riley and David Hockney.

For all the enjoyment of hanging a £5 junkshop landscape beside a Howard Hodgkin print, she relishes the connections that run through her pictures; she'll identify a subtle link, show a Victor Passmore print alongside a relief by his pupil, the little-known Richard Forster.

Interspersed with all these are works by artists and designers she knows and promotes, such as John Workman, whom she discovered working in Brixton and now collaborates with in making a series of covetable 'magical light boxes'—Claude-inspired landscapes painted in black tar on parchment and then inserted into Kodak light boxes.

Or Rose de Borman, one of her favourite contemporary designer-



artists, whose screen-printed animal cushions, textiles, glass paintings and quirky sculptures fill the house. She has collaborated with Rose, together with Alexander Hamilton and Oriel Harwood, in designing furniture and fabrics for her Virginia White Collection, which she launched in 2012. She describes the collection as 'artistic without looking crafty' and composes all the colours herself. This May sees the launch of three new fabrics (all handblocked on linen), her Burlington Chair, Nest Eggs (set of three sculptural occasional tables) and Thalassa mirror (made with Oriel Harwood on a sea theme).

Another formative influence on Virginia's taste for juxtaposing modern and old was Venice, where she did a scholarship at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum and then worked for the British pavilion at the Art Biennale in 1993. Inspired by her love of historic Venetian interiors filled with modern art, she produced strong, Italian-based designs incorporating paintings by Cy Twombly

as part of her interior design and decoration degree at Chelsea College of Art, and was snapped up by the acclaimed interior designer John Stefanidis.

After working for him, she moved on to two architectural firms, gaining experience on everything from London mansions to foreign hotels. But it was after she returned from Bermuda—a year's posting with her husband's job—that her interior-design consultancy really took off in 2000, initially by word of mouth.

Virginia describes herself as specialising in 'classical interiors with antique and modern vintage pieces to create homes for modern living'; she says she wants her rooms to look 'as un-interior-designed as possible, but with an underlying unity'.

At home, where light floods in on three sides of her end-of-terrace house, her approach has been to introduce certain 'period' features where they work, rather than to restore everything back to the original. On the ground floor, she has installed chimneypieces and panel-





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Virginia is also obsessed with the ancient Greek Klismos form, which she has used several times in her collection. As she says: 'I combine Modern British art with pieces ranging from the 5th century BC, through Georgian and Pop, to contemporary design to create classic modern interiors that feel well composed without taking interior design too seriously.'

ling (the latter painted her favourite Farrow & Ball shade of Slipper Satin), laid parquet flooring and heightened the openings. 'You have to understand proportion; the tall doors feel French, but they work here because they're the right proportion and they open the rooms up, making them feel less boxy.'

She views this room as her print gallery, juxtaposing works by St Ives School and Pop artists with a 19th-century Italian chandelier and 18th-century chairs. 'These rooms are not designed all at one time—they're work in progress and reflect the lifestyle of a modern family home. I'm always moving things around and adding new finds, but in a subtle, not unsettling, way,' she explains.

Virginia is keen to pass on her approach to her clients, whom she aims to 'educate up' into buying a few good antiques and 20th-century classics to provide a solid basis on which to build. 'People get too bogged down with their audio-visual systems and gadgets and then find they have no money left for those personal objects that give the room its character. Start with one or two things you really like, and, soon, they'll become part of you and when you move, they'll move with you. Good things look good anywhere



and you should have no qualms about mixing pieces of different periods and styles.'

Of the assemblage in her own drawing room, which includes a pair of 1960s Kare Klint safari chairs standing beside a 1930s Belgian nest of black-lacquer stools, she says she regards her furniture more as moveable pieces than conventional arrangements. A key piece is the

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### How to get the look

**The Virginia White collection**—which includes her own furniture and fabric lines as well as works of art and objets trouvés that she likes—is available to view online at her website (020-8749 2995; [www.virginiawhitecollection.com](http://www.virginiawhitecollection.com))

Her furniture collection is made by Acton-based furniture and upholstery experts A. T. Cronin (020-8749 2995; [www.atcronin.co.uk](http://www.atcronin.co.uk))

**For other works** by the textiles and ceramics artist Rose de Borman, visit [www.rdeborman.co.uk](http://www.rdeborman.co.uk)

**Oriel Harwood's work** is available to view online at [www.orielharwood.co.uk](http://www.orielharwood.co.uk)

**To follow Ruth Guilding's updates** on her Bible of British Taste, subscribe to her newsletter at [www.bilbeofbritishtaste.com](http://www.bilbeofbritishtaste.com)

**For 20th-century artworks**, visit the Cross Street Gallery at 40, Cross

painting she picked up for £80 at Criterion Auctions: 'I couldn't believe it, it's absolutely my palette: a symphony of blues merging into brown blacks and Etruscan red, redolent of Piper and Hitchens.'

Beneath it, her Temple House sofa takes pride of place—one of her own designs, traditionally made by A. T. Cronin in its London workshop. This is a classic Georgian design, but