

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WINFRIED HEINZ

# Beyond the pale

How a vibrant mix of antiques brought a soft-hued London home to life. By Angela Linforth



Clockwise from left: in the study a loose-covered armchair stands beneath a roman blind in a Christopher Farr fabric; walls in Sanderson's 'Sage Grey' provide a calm background to a Habitat sofa and a Danish 1940s chair; a gilded wood and crystal chandelier hangs low over the dining-table, which is covered with a John Stefanidis fabric; Neisha Crosland's 1930s-inspired wallpaper makes a background to antiques in the Whites' bedroom



For the cash-rich but time-poor, the notion of poking around a selection of dusty chairs in an auction house is about as alien as that of doing their own ironing. Which is where the interior designer Virginia White comes in. For White tries to give her clients an appreciation of the beauty of antiques and the value of mixing them with modern pieces in a well-thought-out interior. And you need go no further than her own three-storey family home in Islington, north London, to see her design philosophy in action – a small find here, a hand-me-down there, combined with great panache against a backdrop of chalky pastels. 'I've tried to make the house look as if it has just come together, rather than been interior-designed; I have never been a fan of the over-perfect or the ostentatious,' she says.

After a Fine Arts degree (specialising in the early 20th-century St Ives group of painters) and a spell in the Antiquities department at Sotheby's, White was prompted to change her career while working for the Guggenheim Museum in Venice. 'I adored the interiors of the palazzos,' she says. 'The owners managed to display almost kitsch things alongside fine antiques and wonderful chandeliers with real style.'





The children's bedroom

Inspired, she took a course in interior design at Chelsea College of Art and Design, inviting the celebrated interior designer John Stefanidis to her end-of-year show. White's chutzpah paid off, and she landed a job with him. Two years later, when her husband Robin's legal work prompted a move to Bermuda, White found British expats queuing up for advice on decoration. She also volunteered for the National Trust there, and found further inspiration in the white walls, hardwood floors and cloudy glass chandeliers of the traditional colonial homes.

Virginia and Robin bought their own house five years ago. As well as laying a herringbone parquet floor, they have re-installed wood panelling throughout, painted in muted Farrow & Ball and Sanderson colours. For soft furnishings White prefers a bolder touch, choosing patterns inspired by designers from her favourite period, the early 20th century.

The house has that relaxed feel that can only be created by

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someone who knows her own style and is at ease with it. Danish glassware sits alongside pretty fabric boxes; modern art and books are in abundance. Much of the furniture comes from Islington's renowned Criterion auction house, but it has been chosen with comfort in mind.

Virginia and Robin's bedroom, at the top of the house, is decorated in Neisha Crosland's 'Anemone' wallpaper. Across the landing, the bedroom of their daughters Iona, eight, and Honor, six, is a charming mix of floral fabrics and antique prints and furniture. And if White's love of antiques was handed down to her from her archaeologist father, it looks as if it has now reached another generation. 'I caught Iona explaining the virtues of a piece of furniture to her eight-year-old friend the other day,' White laughs. ●

Virginia White, 020-7226 1344; virginia@whiteinteriors.com

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