

## Designer profile

## Harriet Anstruther

Judith Wilson meets Harriet Anstruther, who redecorated this Victorian terrace house in Chelsea for her artist client, creating a clean look with splashes of bold colour

PHOTOGRAPHS CHRIS TUBBS

Harriet Anstruther studied fine art in London at the City & Guilds and Byam Shaw art schools, and started out working in fashion and textiles. She then retrained at the Inchbald School of Design, and launched her multidisciplinary architectural design practice in 2011. A member of the Development Advisory Board at the V&A, she is also an ambassador and committee member of the Royal Academy of Arts. Harriet likes to work closely with clients, 'finding out who they are and what they want'. Current commissions include the refurbishment of an Edwardian house in Clapham and a nineteenth-century apartment in New York, and the decoration of a house in Singapore and offices in Whitehall. She divides her time between her 1840s house in Kensington and a sixteenth-century house in Sussex, which she shares with her husband, daughter and two dogs.

'My artist client wanted me to "refresh" this five-floor, 1860 terrace house in Chelsea, as it had been rented out and looked unloved. The timescale was a challenge – we had just eight weeks. As a designer, I am instinctual and love to understand a building and its history. Good design is about making the most of what you have and I liked the architectural detailing here. We made no structural changes. I visualised the house as very light, sparse and calm.

'We painted the walls throughout in "All White" by Farrow & Ball, and sanded and oiled the existing timber floor to give a matt finish. I love clean lines, but I don't like a home to feel too precious. In the kitchen, I retained the plain units but had the client's Sixties table resprayed white. I've had parts of the ceiling gilded, including the underside of the arch, which adds subtle highlights. I'm all in favour of using a client's furniture, but I believe in careful editing. The vintage Saarinen "Tulip" chairs have new seat squabs covered in "Varese" velvet by Designers Guild. The apple-green colour ties in nicely with the art on the wall. I also customised the pendant light, adding neon flex from Historic Lighting and gilding the inside of the shade.

'The kitchen is on the raised ground floor, which gives the house an unusual layout. I

advised my client to move her studio from the basement to the attic. The basement has plenty of light, so now works well as the sitting room. My client retained the polished-concrete floor; I wanted to celebrate its industrial nature, but I have deliberately chosen unstructured furnishings to soften the look. The George Smith sofas have loose covers in "Brera Lino" linen in oyster and the curtains are unlined "Charente" linen in vanilla, both by Designers Guild. I love mixing old and new, and I like it when things are a little bit distressed.

'Adjacent to the basement stairs there is a "spare" space, which could have worked as a study. My client already had a desk upstairs, so it was more interesting to turn this zone

## SITTING ROOM

(below) The George Smith sofa has covers in 'Brera Lino' linen in oyster, by Designers Guild; the coffee table is made from antique folding pine benches.

## BEDROOM (bottom)

A neon tube light from Mr Resistor and a colourful artwork add character



KITCHEN (left) Harriet stands by the Sixties dining table, which she had resprayed white; the gilding on the underside of the arch and the inside of the pendant shade adds subtle highlights

into a breathing space. There is always a twist to what I do and the electric-blue wall – "Ultramarine" by Bristol Paint, which does wonderful neons – provides a splash of colour. This blue is such a delicious, tactile shade and reminds me of Yves Klein's blue sculptures. I used my client's Fifties leather chairs, but added a "Tutti Frutti" light from The Conran Shop. It has blown-glass bulbs and, when illuminated, casts amazing shadows on to the wall. I've chosen to hang the *Starlings* photograph by Paolo Patrizi above it, as the blurry birds in flight create a similar effect.

'My client's bedroom is on the first floor, in what originally would have been the grand drawing room. The windows are lovely and

*'I love mixing old and new, and I like it when things are a little bit distressed'*

big; they are the key to its appeal. I like the architecture to do the talking, so rather than obscure the windows with curtains, I've added plain bottom-up blinds. The nineteenth-century painted-pine columns in the corners accentuate the height of the ceiling. Bedrooms should be romantic, so I have used a curvy "Emmy Wing" double bed from John Lewis, teamed with satin cushions from The White Company. I have a weakness for pink, so I enjoyed including my client's artwork and the French nineteenth-century footstool embroidered in jewel colours. But neon is my favourite, hence the tube light from Mr Resistor.

'The challenge of any job is to find a balance between what the client wants and what the designer wants. It is also to visualise a space, to assist a non-visual client. Our homes soak up our emotions, so it is my job to create a shelter that makes my clients feel at their best' □

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