

# ROWHOUSE

IN A STORYBOOK CORNER OF LONDON, INTERIOR DESIGNER **GARY McBOURNIE** AND ARCHITECT **MIKE FISHER** RESTORE THE JUBILANCE OF A VICTORIAN-ERA TREASURE.

# RENEWAL



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DYLAN THOMAS; STYLING BY SARA MATHERS; (OPPOSITE PAGE) LUKE WHITE.

In the living room, a convivial window seat overlooks an emerald and white back garden (opposite). Striped banquette fabric, Pierre Frey, French lantern, Carlton Davidson Antiques





ANYONE WHO'S WANDERED AN unfamiliar city knows the enchanting moment when you turn a corner and suddenly find yourself in a little pocket of otherworldly charm. On one such quiet street in the London neighborhood of Knightsbridge, an American couple laid claim to just that sort of scene: a charming rowhouse nestled in what their designer, Boston's Gary McBournie, refers to as a "Mary Poppins neighborhood." Pure magic.

The four-story, white stucco house was built in 1840, on the heels of England's elegant Regency period (think Jane Austen

and *Bridgerton*). Yet as cinematic as it appeared from its street, "it was a disaster within," says McBournie. Subjected to multiple changes over the years—"many of them not so nice," he adds—"it had this knotty-pine, 'ye olde English paneling' thing going on, a staircase that shook when you walked up it," and an overgrown wreck of a garden frequented only by a mangy fox. The designer, who had previously worked with the clients on more than a dozen projects, had anticipated a straightforward decorating job, but it quickly morphed into a complete gut renovation.

"At one point, you could stand on bare earth, look up through four floors, and see sky," says Mike Fisher of Studio Indigo, the London-based architecture and design firm that McBournie

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—INTERIOR DESIGNER GARY McBOURNIE

A pair of Syrie Maugham chairs (Jonas) in the sitting room are covered in a panther-print velvet (Brunschwig & Fils). Above them, a 1950s chinoiserie panel (Zugasti Antiques)

OPPOSITE: A geometric arrangement of jewel tones ascends the stairs. Stair runner, Stark Carpet





A series of 19th-century framed seaweed presses adorn the owners' bedroom. Drapery trim, Samuel & Sons. Bed linens, Pratesi



ABOVE: On a set of Louis Philippe dining chairs (Julia Boston Antiques), green satin cushions are striped with broad pink trim.

BELOW: Variegated Portland stone pavers and a Regency lantern by Charles Edwards guide the approach to the four-story, 1840s home.



teamed up with for the project. With extensive experience renovating listed (“landmarked”) buildings, Fisher and team set to work re-creating the structure to reflect the best aspects of its long history. His colleague James Kandutsch had casts made from fragments of original details uncovered during demolition so they could be replicated exactly and found floor plans detailing each stage of the house’s expansions and renovations. Where there was no historic record, he adapted features of similar buildings from the period (for instance, a stunning curved

staircase topped by an oval oculus that pours daylight into the house’s core). “Our philosophy was, let’s restore the building in the most authentic way possible,” says Fisher. “And that created this wonderful canvas for Gary to add his layer of wonder.”

McBournie, too, looked to historic documents for inspiration—though not of the written or sketched variety. Most of the palette and patterns for the house, for example, came from a single small antique Turkish rug. “We loved its colors and design, with Chinese, Indian, and Turkish influences,” says McBournie.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUKE WHITE; (OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP RIGHT) DYLAN THOMAS; STYLING SARA MATHERS.

“I like *collections of things*; they help a room become real. You need a starting point other than going to the design center to pick out fabrics.”

—GARY McBOURNIE



Fresh shades of apricot and aqua awaken a ground-floor kitchen and breakfast room. Cabinetry paint, Teresa's Green by Farrow & Ball. Refrigerator, Sub-Zero. Countertops, Caesarstone



“A wonderful *sense of joy and well-being* now fills this house.” —ARCHITECT MIKE FISHER

“It became the starting point for everything.” Because it was too small to suit any of the spaces, McBournie re-created it as a large living room rug and designed all the house's other rugs as well.

Evolving the palette was an exercise in both nuance and contrast. Clean, bright paint colors look crisp and elegant against the white exterior and snowy interior trim. In the living room and library, which open to one another, a lucid cherry red plays against a pale green “somewhere between celadon and lime,” says McBournie. “We didn't want it getting too Christmassy.” Each room also incorporates elements of its neighbor's palette, while upstairs, bedrooms welcome softness through pattern, scale, and form. Walls are upholstered and furnishings rounded, creating a sense of flow and ease in smaller spaces, yet colors remain rich and patterns vivid. “The rest of the house is so alive,” says McBournie. “I didn't want the bedrooms going too sleepy.”

Studio Indigo excavated the lower ground floor, site of the original kitchen and servants' quarters, to generate additional

ceiling height and create a gracious space for daily living. Here, McBournie explored a different kind of contrast. “It's more casual and modern,” he notes. The banquette, upholstered in an Indian-inspired fuchsia and orange ikat, is where the clients enjoy most of their meals, from morning coffee to sociable dinners, so it was custom-designed for just the right height and firmness. “There's nothing more uncomfortable than eating with your hands at your shoulders,” says McBournie. Meanwhile, the Edwardian sofa and Parsons-style coffee table at the center of the room are low and neutral so as not to block views of the garden beyond, brought back to life with ivied walls, white hydrangeas, and a tiered fountain flanked by mirrored trellis archways.

But far from a riot of vivid and lavish blooms, the garden is a study in greens and neutrals. In this peaceful corner of London, the profusion of colors flourishes indoors. “A wonderful sense of joy and well-being now fills the house,” says Fisher. Tucked away, like the building itself, in an enchanting oasis of calm. ♦

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## LONDON BRIGHTS

1 Sunlight pours through an oval oculus similar to those seen in houses of the era. Rosewood and antique brass mirror, Kerry Joyce. 2 Charming checks and soft upholstered walls in shades of honeydew make for an inviting guest room. Drapery fabric, Clarence House. 3 In the breakfast room, low-hanging fruit arrives in a series of 19th-century Chinese watercolors. Banquette fabric, Manuel Canovas. 4 Lee Jofa's Hollyhock pattern turns the owners' bedroom vestibule into a flourishing floral canvas. 5 Custom latticework garden mirrors flank the terrace's stone fountain. Furnishings, McKinnon and Harris. 6 An Italian alabaster temple (ca. 1840, Timothy Langston) rises from a Louis XVI mahogany commode. Landscape painting, Henri Pailler

