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Perfect UNION

Interior-design company Todhunter Earle was brought in to give a reconfigured flat in west London a unified feel for a couple with very different tastes

TEXT JENNIFER GOULDING | PHOTOGRAPHS LUCAS ALLEN | LOCATIONS EDITOR HATTA BYNG

OPPOSITE The front door opens on to a hall with a wall of mirror glass; an oak storage unit from Talisman stands in front of it. THIS PAGE 'Axel' lights from the Emily Todhunter Lighting collection, from Best & Lloyd, flank the architrave in the drawing room



I remember saying: “There’s really not much to do. I hope you don’t mind that it’s such a small job,” says the owner of this maisonette in South Kensington recalling her first meeting with interior designer Emily Todhunter. Tactfully, Emily said nothing while proceeding to devise a scheme that covered everything from the pattern of the Portland stone floor in the hall to the bespoke leather pad for the study desk.

When this meeting took place, architect Peter Tigg and builders Cordles had already begun the business of combining the owners’ first-floor flat with the newly purchased ground-floor flat. Nevertheless, under Emily’s advice, key changes were made to the plans, including moving the main bedroom downstairs and removing the mezzanine from the kitchen. ‘At the time it was a pain, but I am so glad we did it,’ says the owner. ‘I thought interior designers just provided a decorative eye and saw to finishing touches. I was wrong. They do so much more. They look at exactly how you live in the space and tailor it precisely for you.’

In this case, the solution was unconventional. The front door opens on to a grand hall with one wall of mirror glass and two lined with opulent, emerald-coloured velvet. ‘There are moments in this job that I adore and decorating this hallway was one of them,’ says Emily. ‘Isn’t this colour wonderful? And look at the edging, double-piped silk. A slightly over-the-top detail, but just lovely.’

On either side of the hall are the study and the formal drawing room. It’s an impressive enfilade, decoratively, of course, but also architecturally – the ceilings are high, the windows vast and the original cornices deep. ‘These rooms are intended for drinks parties. That is one of the reasons we enlarged the doorways, to



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A hand-painted, de Gournay silk wallcovering decorates the main bedroom. Architect Peter Tigg designed this staircase, which connects what were the ground-floor and first-floor flats. An artwork by Jean-Marc Bustamante, entitled *The Lion*, makes a statement in the drawing room. THIS PAGE Concealed in a wall of built-in wardrobes in the main bedroom are the doors to the twin bathrooms and dressing room





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT
Curtains in 'Kinta' (cream) from
Clarence House add colour to a
child's bedroom. Wishbone chairs
from Skandium surround a
Benchmark table in the kitchen.
Industrial, French pendant lights
add a modern feel. Extensive
shelving makes the most of the
high ceiling in the family room



improve the flow between the rooms,' she explains.

At the rear of the drawing room is a door that leads to a corridor and a strikingly modern staircase. 'Originally, we wanted the staircase in the hallway, but this is a listed Victorian building and planning permission was denied. Instead, we moved it to the back of the building, which, although tricky, was the best outcome because it keeps the hallway intact and meant Peter created this fantastic structure. It is very clearly a contemporary addition and that way, it shows real respect for the building,' enthuses Emily.

The corridor leads to the main bedroom. Decorated in shades of cream, copper and taupe inspired by the custom-made de Gournay silk wallcovering, it has a wall of built-in wardrobes, which also conceal entrances to the twin bathrooms and dressing room. 'It's a rather ingenious arrangement, if I do say so myself,' says Emily

gesturing to an impressive floor-to-ceiling, marble-clad door that can be used to divide the two bathrooms and transform the dressing room, which has an elegant sofa bed in it, into a spare room with an en-suite bathroom.

Upstairs are the children's bedrooms, separated by a Jack and Jill bathroom, and the hub of the house – the kitchen and the family room. 'We spend 80 per cent of our time there,' says the owner. The style of decoration in these rooms is more modern and relaxed, but there is still drama, most obviously from the dark units and industrial lights in the kitchen. 'It was brave to use dark-stained oak, but it works because it is such a large space,' says Emily, who has seen off any potential heaviness with pale walls, white crystallised-glass worktops and a series of cabinets displaying coloured-glass vessels.

Emily describes the family room as 'the lightest,

brightest, cheeriest room imaginable'. It is also multifunctional: there is a play area for the children; a desk where the owners can work; and a generous L-shape sofa for watching television. 'I sometimes worry that we've made it too nice. At the weekend, my son always says, "Please Mummy, can we stay at home,"' says the owner.

To create a successful decorating scheme in both the entertaining and family areas, Emily had to negotiate the conflicting tastes of the couple. 'My husband favours a modern, white, minimalist look while I prefer something softer, more mixed and interesting, with some bold touches and colour. But we both wanted a scheme that we wouldn't tire of in a couple of years.' Keeping both of them happy was a tall order, but Emily was unfazed. 'We always look at what the clients already have and think about their lifestyle so we can build a look and feel for the house. Of course,

there is an element of intuition, of reading the client as well as the building. They will say: "I like this, but not that," and you have to work out why,' she explains. 'Oddly enough, I did study psychology at university, though I think it was mostly analysing mouse statistics.'

The owner feels she has done more than simply fulfil a brief. 'The amazing thing about Emily is that she can take any room and find a piece that just makes it, like the light in the stairwell, the rug in the study or the green velvet in the hallway. Then she sources things to surround it that look as though they were designed specifically to go with that piece.' Quite a talent, and definitely not something you learn from mouse statistics □

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