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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



A photograph of a dining room with ornate damask wallpaper in shades of brown and cream. In the center is a round, dark marble-topped table with a dark wood base, surrounded by four chairs with dark frames and yellow upholstered seats. On the table sits a white ceramic vase with black Arabic calligraphy. Above the table hangs a large, circular, light blue pendant light with a brass-colored frame. In the background, a dark wood fireplace mantel holds a row of small framed pictures. Above the mantel is a larger framed abstract painting in blue, red, and green. To the left, a doorway leads to another room with similar wallpaper, where a brown sofa and a small table with two brass candlesticks are visible.

TWO'S COMPANIES

A couple of professional aesthetes sharing the same roof could be a recipe for creative conflict. Not so at this central London town house that the decorator and founder of Veere Grenney Associates shares with his partner, David Oliver, creative director of the Paint and Paper Library. But whether it's in the placement of an antique or the application of a sophisticated wallcovering, 'We dovetail,' they tell Ruth Guilding. Photography: Simon Upton

A c1955 pendant by Max Ingrand for Fontana Arte overlooks a Moroccan vase sitting on a bronze-edged, marble-topped table designed by Veere Grenney Associates. The painting above the fireplace is by Alan Davie



Top: the view from the dining room towards the hallway shows an unattributed abstract from the 1960s and a Scandinavian bowl of the same vintage. Above: the ground-floor kitchen tiles are from Craven Dunnill Jackfield, the benchtop and surfaces are in Carrara marble and the joinery is coloured in 'Tarlatan' from the Paint and Paper Library. Right: in the small sitting room, a 1970s Michael Boyer stool sits on an antique Berber rug from François Gilles. The walls are covered in the same 'Louvres' fabric – by Marialida for Tissus d'Hélène – as the adjoining dining area



Top: the library's writing table, by Maison Jansen for Billy Baldwin, dates from the early 1960s, while the yellow chairs come from an 18th-century Austrian ballroom. Above: the first-floor sitting room's central light fitting is by Sciolari from Gordon Watson. Right: a chair upholstered in Colefax & Fowler's 'Bowood' sits opposite a white steel coffee table from Gerald Bland, New York. The painting over the marble fireplace, by Alan Reynolds, chimes with the cotton Cogolin carpet from Tai Ping



Right: the master bedroom's four-poster is designed by Veere Grenney Associates, as are the chequerboard carpet and white-linen walls. The Casa Pupo-style bedside lamps are from Hilary Batstone. Top: the geometric shapes on the Egyptian-inspired bookcase are by Giò Ponti, while on the landing an antique Thebes stool is just visible. Above: a c1970 chest of drawers from Maison Jansen sits beneath a Calder painting and by an armchair upholstered in Tissus d'Hélène's 'Arbre de Matisse Reverse'



GROWING UP in New Zealand, Veere Grenney was always decorating the house with his mother, but ‘never told anyone, because only pansies did that’. Now he runs a busy interior-design practice with clients all over the world and lives with his partner, David Oliver, in an 18th-century fishing pavilion in Constable country, a 19th-century house in Tangier and this London town house off Connaught Square, near Marble Arch.

By the age of 16 Grenney was poring over articles on Swinging London in every magazine and newspaper he could lay hands on. He devoured publications by David Hicks and set his heart on working for the late, great decorator. But when Hicks failed to respond to his letter of application he joined the hippy trail instead, settling in Morocco for nine months and then arriving in London, where he set up a stall at Portobello Market. ‘Of course, in those days we all lived in squats in Oxford Gardens, that was 1970s life,’ he remembers. ‘Then I had a flat in Little Venice where I painted the walls white and hung up all my old Indian scarves, beads and kaftans. You didn’t see the photograph of what I used to look like with my long hair and dungarees, did you? That’s probably a good thing!’ When he took a stall in Antiquarius Antique Centre, he was talent-spotted by one of his customers, Mary Fox Linton. She became a great mentor and friend, and he trained with her, then moved on to Colefax & Fowler, where ‘They wanted me because I was more contemporary, and I wanted to learn their craft.’

The tall house in London is a relatively new acquisition, bought from a friend. It is neither very large nor symmetrical but now it is entirely perfect. ‘My last apartment (*WoI* March 2008) had enormous rooms, but coming to a small house everything has to be just so,’ says Grenney. ‘But I’ve really enjoyed doing this house. Nicky [Haslam] came out with one of his wonderful lines – he said small rooms are so much easier to decorate.’ But this is also a family house, with the basement furnished for Eddie and Cosmo, Oliver’s two young sons, and the first that Grenney and Oliver have designed together. Oliver, who is the creative director of Paint and Paper Library, was responsible for its bold colour spectrum and range of paint effects, including glazes and matt or mottled finishes. ‘I insisted on more and stronger colour,’ says Oliver, ‘because, being tall, the house lent itself to big jumps in colour, from wall to wall and room to room.’

To step in from the street one windy summer’s day is to find oneself in a cool, chaste hallway hung with a single monochrome abstract. Just beyond is the kitchen, shaped like a wedge of cheese, and tiled from floor to ceiling like the most hygienic of 19th-century dairies. Light bounces off its white ceramic walls, but the stairwell beyond is a contrastingly dark olive colour, combed with an intricate wave pattern. The effect is totally modern and simultaneously redolent of shagreen leather – or one of the grained finishes beloved of the architect Sir John Soane. The golf-ball cornices in the hall are Soaneian as well.

Top: the antique French washbasin in the gent’s cloakroom is from Water Monopoly and the mirror is also Gallic, by Jacques Adnet. Above: David’s son Eddie’s room is decked out with another Moroccan-style carpet from François Gilles and a ‘Bi Disc’ table lamp by Jean-Michel Frank. Right: an Arts and Crafts pendant from Humphrey Carrasco lights the dressing room, with its Bugatti – left – and ebonised Godwin side tables. The bed itself is dressed with chocolate ticking by Rogers & Goffigon





Entering the dining room is like taking the lid off a particularly scrumptious tin of assorted chocolate biscuits, a Fortnum's Christmas selection, perhaps. The charm and comfort here and in the sitting room beyond belong to the wall hangings of Fortuny-style cotton, with the kind of Baroque foliate pattern found in flock wallpapers of the early 18th century. Hanging on these print-blocked walls are the boldest of the 20th-century British paintings that Grenney has been collecting for decades, by Roger Hilton, John Wells and Alan Davie.

The circular marble-topped table and fireplace from Jamb were both made for this room to Grenney's specification. So was the plump sofa in the sitting room beyond. It is positioned opposite a bronze and rosewood bookcase styled on those made by Billy Baldwin for Cole Porter's suite in the Waldorf Astoria, New York. The bookcase is backless, so 'the Fortuny comes through', says Grenney. 'In this room, to have the books and the John Wells and the Hilton, it's just magical!'

The silk-velvet wall hangings woven in Paris for the drawing room were David Oliver's inspired choice, an impossibly rich and luxurious yellowish moss green that reminds me of the upholstery at Knole. 'There's no braid, it's just stretched so that it has a more contemporary feeling to it,' says Grenney. 'I covered the brackets with green velvet too, it's called stuckwork. If I was doing the house again, I'd cover the cornice in the fabric as well.'

The room's glowing walls are offset by a chic white linen carpet, silvery rose chintzes and a pair of Chinese porcelain cats that flame turquoise against the velvet. A magnificent 18th-century-style writing table from the Villa La Fiorentina in Cap Ferrat cohabits happily with gilt-and-painted chairs of c1790 from a set of 100 made for a Viennese palace and bought by Grenney with a legacy from his father. Drinks bottles are lined up beside a neat platoon of Britvic tomato-juice miniatures. 'I love them being out, it feels more generous,' says Grenney.

Grenney's bedroom offers a homage to Hicks in his glory days, with a huge, pale four-poster hung very simply in white with gold trim. 'I adore living in white and gold,' he says. 'I feel like an Austrian army officer; they had those wonderful uniforms. It's a lovely way to live every day.' The adjoining bathroom is white too, equipped with an elegant little bamboo Thebes stool and one perfect museum-quality chair by Josef Hoffmann, dating from the Vienna Secession.

Otherwise, Grenney swears by James Graham-Stewart, the dealer whom he declares 'the best, with such good taste'. Is it difficult, having two aesthetes living and decorating together? I ask him. 'Either something fits or it doesn't,' he says simply. 'David has great taste, and we dovetail. And when I decorate for myself, I use all of my talent' ■

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Top: on a half landing, with walls lacquered and combed by Alistair Erskine, a painting by Craigie Aitchison hangs above a late 19th-century English terracotta sculpture of a shrouded woman. Above: a 19th-century Indian glass painting and a chair by Josef Hoffmann mark the view from bathroom to dressing room. Right: Veere Grenney Associates designed the master bathroom's sinks and counter top in Arabascata marble. Under the louvred window sits an antique Thebes stool found at James McWhirter

