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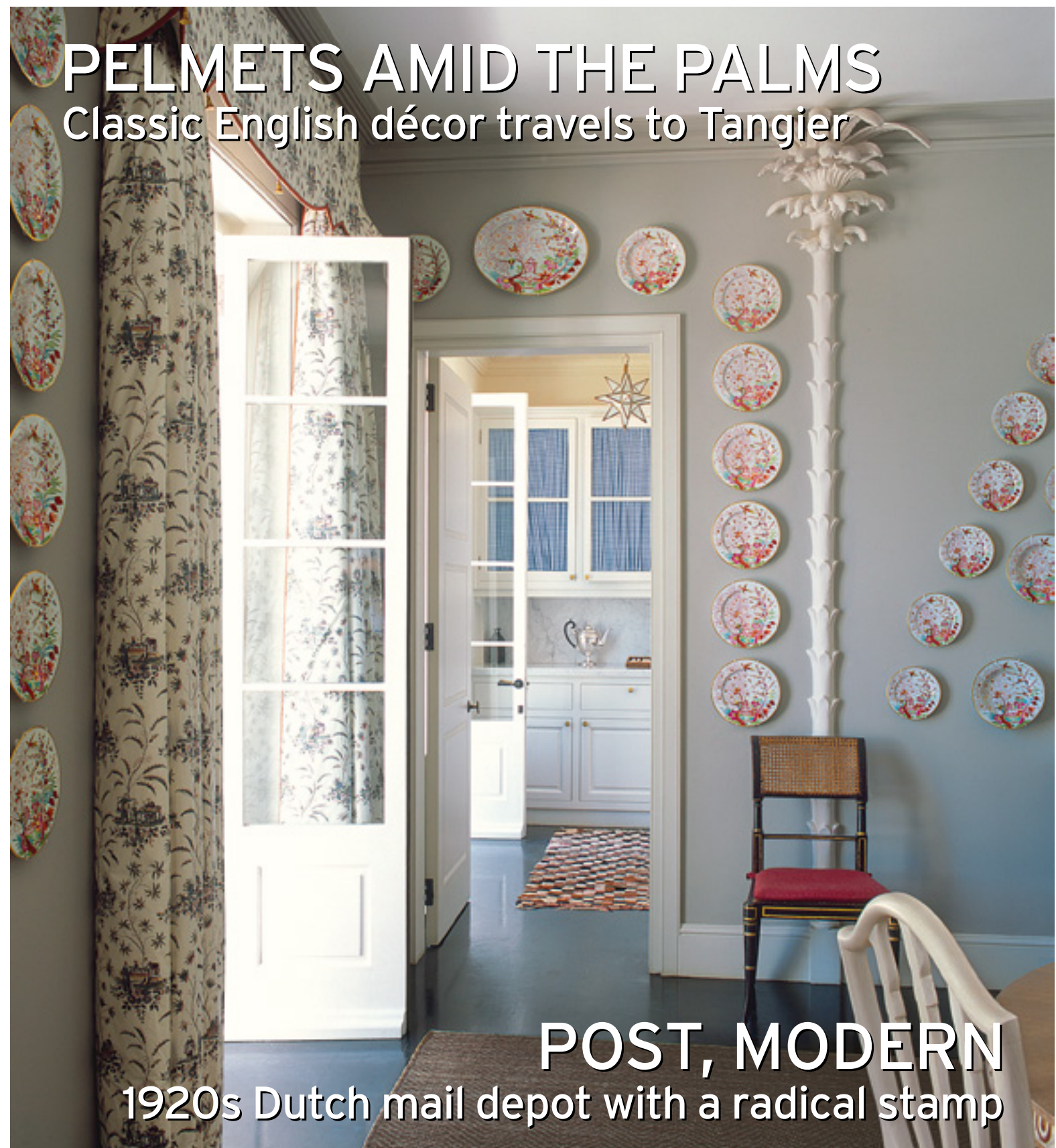
# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

## PELMETS AMID THE PALMS

Classic English décor travels to Tangier

## POST, MODERN

1920s Dutch mail depot with a radical stamp





A photograph of a large, ornate living room. The walls are covered in floral wallpaper. A large fireplace with a white mantel is on the left. A large, light-colored sofa with a red cushion is in the center. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. A large window with white curtains is on the right. A large, ornate table with a blue and white patterned top is in the foreground. A large, ornate chair with a blue and white patterned back is on the right. A large, ornate side table with a blue and white patterned top is on the left. A large, ornate rug is on the floor. A large, ornate vase with flowers is on the mantel. A large, ornate clock is on the wall. A large, ornate mirror is on the wall. A large, ornate lamp is on the table. A large, ornate plant is in the corner. A large, ornate statue is in the corner. A large, ornate bust is in the corner. A large, ornate urn is in the corner. A large, ornate candelabra is in the corner. A large, ornate clock is on the wall. A large, ornate mirror is on the wall. A large, ornate lamp is on the table. A large, ornate plant is in the corner. A large, ornate statue is in the corner. A large, ornate bust is in the corner. A large, ornate urn is in the corner. A large, ornate candelabra is in the corner.

# SHEER VEERE

A tangled, overgrown plot on a steep slope in Tangier might have fazed many people. Not Veere Grenney. Seeing the potential in the cliff-top cottage and its obscured views across the Strait of Gibraltar, the interior decorator spent five years conjuring a supremely elegant home for himself. With its chintz walls, antique and modern furniture and cherished gardens, Gazebo might just mark a personal high point – not that he's one to get precious about it, he tells Ruth Guilding. Photography: Christopher Simon Sykes

In the drawing room two Egyptian-style chairs by Liberty sit either side of a fireplace in the Soanian manner made by Jamb. The 1930s chandelier is by Maison Jansen, as is the faux-bamboo table in the treillage room at the far end, which has sea views



The colonnade and courtyard with its central fountain are furnished with Moroccan carpets and antique lanterns, classic rattan furniture and eight orange trees. Grenney's collection of Andalusian-pottery olive bowls hangs on the wall to the left







**VEERE GRENNEY** is telling me about how he came to build one of the most beautiful houses in Tangier. It is an exceptional place because he built it very slowly and for himself, the story is a good one because he is an excellent raconteur and it's a subject that makes him very happy. We have just got to the dining room, which was to have been mirrored and slightly 1930s. Then he saw Syrie Maugham's plaster palm trees in a book that was in his library and gave a drawing of them to his workmen in Tangier. 'And then I was looking through an old copy of *World of Interiors* and there's a house down in Dorset [*WoI* Aug 2014], which, I believe, is owned by someone called Philip Mansel,' he continues, 'and I saw in the dining room there plates hung as lozenges and I thought: What a wonderful idea! And then a few weeks later I was looking at the catalogue of a local auction house and there was a 250-piece chinoiserie service – *and* the main colour was a burnt orange, which I'd just decided to do the dining chairs in. So I bought the lot!' The plate triangles now filling his dining room's walls are one of the most visually pleasing tropes in Gazebo's lovely rooms.

When Gazebo came up for sale it was just a small cottage built high up on Tangier's Old Mountain on a slope covered in scrub and laurel. Far below is the sea and just above is El Fook, the house of legendary aesthete and dealer Christopher Gibbs, to whom Gazebo



then belonged (*WoI* Dec 2016). The extensive grounds had grown wild and tangled so that 'you couldn't see all the view although I knew there was one', says Grenney. 'But the view now is quite extraordinary – Gibraltar and Trafalgar, truly the mouth of the Mediterranean. Every single ship that's sailed the Mediterranean has gone past here!' The existence of the old cottage militated against the interior decorator's usual practice, and rather than laying out floorplans and furniture on paper first, he was building and designing in tandem. The entire process took five years, with everything (other than its hand-painted 'wallpapers') executed by Moroccan builders and craftsmen skilled in the local traditions of weaving, carpentry, mosaic and plasterwork. 'Every single drawing came out of my office, done by Bob Walker – he's a genius, he trained under John Fowler in the 1960s – and I had a really wonderful project manager called Jerome. I refused to stress myself because I also have a daily job,' says Grenney. 'I never put any time restrictions on it.'

Joining the original cottage at right angles, the long rectangular drawing room came first. As rebuilding advanced and he saw its basic shape, Grenney thought: We could easily do a Soane ceiling. 'So we drew it up and Jamb made me a wonderful fireplace, then I decided I wanted chintz-covered walls and curtains, an old 1920s hand-blocked document by Lee Jofa that took six months to print.

Top: on one wall in the dining room, Syrie Maugham-esque plaster palm trees stand sentry either side of a chimney piece that was influenced by John Fowler (and designed by Veere Grenney Associates) and an 18th-century French serving table on another. The centre table was made by Paul Belvoir, of Gordon Watson, and is surrounded by painted Hepplewhite-style chairs. Above: a plate room at the back houses some of the owner's 250-piece chinoiserie service from Paris. Opposite: more porcelain arches over the door into the pantry







This page, clockwise from top: local craftsmen made the 'Temple' floor tiles, which were designed by Veere Grenney Associates, as well as the kitchen and Crittall-style door. The shelves are polished concrete, while the lights are by Hector Finch; the house sits in two and half acres of terraced gardens, which were planted with landscape designer Christopher Masson's help; £1-per-metre gingham replaces cupboard doors. Opposite: the dining pavilion, designed by architect Cosimo Sesti, looks out over the Strait of Gibraltar towards Spain







In the master bedroom, an armchair from the 'Jasper' collection by Michael S. Smith keeps company with an ebony four-poster bed, c1850, an Arts and Crafts oak side table, a marble-topped Florence Knoll coffee table and a Moroccan rug





Then this chintz has quite a lot of pink in it, so the sofas are pink and the walls are covered in pictures.'

The drawing room looks out across the strait at its far end but its long wall encloses one side of the courtyard so essential to the indoor/outdoor living that Tangier's temperate climate invites. 'When I bought the house I knew I must have a huge courtyard with its back to the sea that faces south and east and west, so when the wind was blowing you'd always have a refuge,' Grenney says. Its furnishings, the rugs and tiled seating set among flower-beds and planters have been assembling gradually as he began to understand how it would be used. The final element in its decoration was to hang up two rows of deep Andalusian olive bowls. 'I had got a whole collection over the years. I thought: What am I going to do with them? Suddenly my help and driver, Mouhcin – or was it my co-director Natasha Greig? – said: "Why don't you put them on the wall?" Then the man who does all the iron-work comes over and makes the most divine clips that hold them in place in ten minutes, so I hung them straight away!'

The guest-rooms are treated as a separate complex on the other side of the courtyard. But it is the verdant garden tumbling down the slope below the house in a series of paths, terraces and pools that delights Grenney most of all. 'It's very lovely at this stage in life to discover a new passion,' he says. 'I suddenly feel



I am becoming my mother, who used to go into the garden and pull up all the weeds and leave them for my father to clear up. Now I do the same thing! I love a good hack too at the end of April, and then it all starts growing again.' The garden has been exerting its magical pull, making him want to spend longer and longer there. 'I can be in my garden for days on end and not see anyone. It is the best place in the world.' His rescue dogs Nancy and Stella, and their companion Lulu, lure him back too. 'Nancy, my first street dog, had been very badly treated when I got her, and I thought: Well, if she survives, I'll give her a grand name,' he says fondly.

Gazebo is little short of perfection, but its creator learned long ago to regard that as a trap. 'Years ago I went to see Geoffrey Bennison in the King's Road. I was always a bit terrified of Geoffrey. He looked rather like a wizard and I was in awe of his taste. He said, "Come in, child!" And there was a marvellous boulle cupboard – it was ravishing. We were talking and he was explaining to me how it was made. On this cupboard was a beautiful white azalea and he had this watering can with a huge spout, and he picked up the can and poured water in every direction. It went over everything, all the boulle, and he said, "Don't worry, darling, it's so much nicer like this!" So I'm just saying: "Don't be precious, you should never be *too* perfect!"' ■ *'On Decorating: A Point of View', by Veere Grenney, is published by Rizzoli, rrp £50*

Top: Veere Grenney's peacock-blue 'Burley' wallpaper provides the backdrop to a series of watercolours. Above: across the landing is a dressing room, tented with brown-and-white ticking made by Moroccan weavers, where a 1960s Guy Lefèvre desk and a painted Regency chair offer a secluded place to write. A Carlo Bugatti table stands beside the bed. Opposite: local marble lines the lower part of the bathroom walls. The fittings came from the Water Monopoly in London, while the white side table is a Godwin design

