

The

# ENGLISH HOME



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# A townhouse REIMAGINED

Transforming a Victorian house on the edge of leafy Clapham Common has been a bright new chapter for this family in their newly configured home

FEATURE COSMO BROCKWAY PHOTOGRAPHY ASTRID TEMPLIER



In the upstairs family room, a pair of David Seyfried sofas covered in Colefax and Fowler's Casimir Red/Blue make an impactful statement. The French Crystal chandelier is an inherited piece.





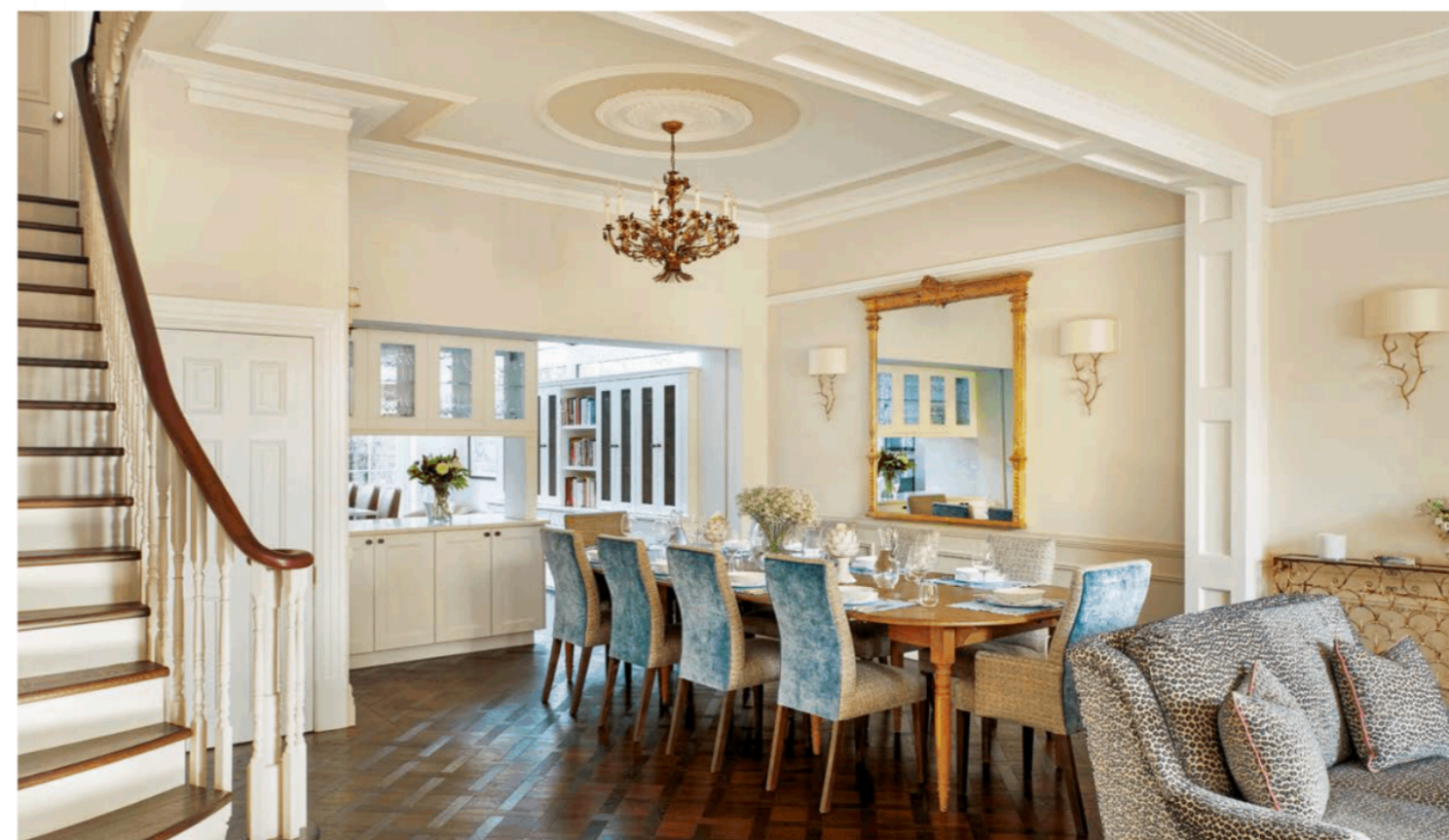
The ground floor sitting room has been given scale with curtains in Clermont Lavande by Manuel Canovas. Continuing the blue palette, Tor had two armchairs brought to life using Nantes Baltic Blue by Lewis & Wood complementing their classic George Smith shapes.

*‘We really wanted a house for entertaining, as well as a fitting space to house Katherine’s treasured art collection and my wine’*

**ABOVE** Steve and Katherine with their black Labrador, Terry, at the front of their Clapham townhouse. **RIGHT** The airy proportions of the open-plan living area encouraged the use of sumptuous textiles. The sofa is in Wilde, Blue and the backs of the dining chairs are in Cosima, Tapestry velvet, both Colefax and Fowler. The fronts of the dining chairs are in Exford, Denim by Linwood.

**T**he villas overlooking London’s Clapham Common have a particular charm. The views across large skies, changing with the seasons, alongside the majestic trees, all lend an illusion of semi-rural living while largely being built on a handsome scale denoting the area’s prosperous past. It was here that Steve and Katherine Smith found the perfect renovation project to concentrate on in the throes of lockdown. “When we first glimpsed the house, it was a tall warren of dark furniture, aspidistra plants and grills on the windows,” laughs Steve, standing in his new custom-made wine cellar. At first glance, it may have been a daunting project but the couple knew they had the drive and vision to transform it into the home they had been dreaming of. “It was the second time around for both of us,” reflects Steve. “With five children between us, and

being close to an ‘empty nest’, we really wanted a house for entertaining as well as a fitting space to house Katherine’s treasured art collection and my wine.” His background in engineering made Steve the perfect choice to be the project manager. The most obvious starting point was turning the six-bedroom house into a four-bedroom family home, with a focus on creating en-suite bathrooms from the extra space. “The original bathrooms were mostly windowless, damp and badly configured,” Steve explains. “We particularly wanted a large-scale master bathroom with a freestanding bath. There is nothing more relaxing.” Having moved several times, the couple were tired of ‘making do’ and wanted a serene and stylish setting for hosting convivial dinners for family and friends. “We met interior designer Tor Saer of Westcot House ▶







**ABOVE** Steve and Katherine wanted the kitchen to be a space that was as much for hosting, family gatherings, and even working, alongside the usual kitchen uses. Tor says, "We added a touch of grown-up glamour with a line of Trinket Pendants from Porta Romano which reflect the light when not turned on."

**LEFT** The 19th-century terraced villa overlooks the green spaces of Clapham Common and has been landscaped by Hampton Court-based garden designer Pollyanna Wilkinson.

because our children were at school together," Steve says. "Her very personal approach and attention to detail appealed to us strongly. Plus she is tremendously talented at furniture design – working with the best craftsmen in the country."

Tor also recalls an instant synergy with the couple and the project. "I was asked to visit when the renovations had just started," she says, "and was impressed by the incredible high ceilings, original sash windows and aspect. It was obvious that Steve and Katharine had also fallen in love with the house and so it was exciting, and a bit of a privilege, to be involved in such a passion project from the start."

One of the visions the couple had was for an airy open-plan kitchen place flowing on from the dining area on the ground floor. "We wanted it to be flat and clean, a sort of minimal, graphic space that we could use for other things besides cooking," explains Katherine. Working with Fulham-based Motte for the bespoke joinery, they avoided the use of a large extractor fan in favour of a streamlined aesthetic, complemented by a bevy of Porta Romana pendants hanging above a glossy island, which Steve jokes, "is my office half the time." French windows leading onto the garden have been given style and practicality with the

*'We wanted an enveloping family room which married elegance with comfort. We spend our evenings up here and never stop enjoying it'*

addition of electric chik blinds designed by Westcot House using Color & Co bamboo, which the couple love for its translucency and privacy.

The garden itself, a voluptuously wide patio, has been transformed by Hampton Court-based designer Pollyanna Wilkinson into a Mediterranean-tinged sanctuary, complete with a clematis-trailed loggia and trellised arches by the Garden Trellis Company. "Pollyanna is incredibly creative; she also made our driveway (another great draw for us to buy this house) into a work of art by creating swirling patterns from bricks. So many people stopped in slight awe as it was being done," Steve laughs.

The sense of decorative patterns continues with the staircase inside the entrance area; ingeniously, it was created completely in Poland and put in situ to replace a much narrower version. Tucked behind it, Tor has cleverly fitted in a small powder room, beyond which there are stairs leading down to a temperature-controlled wine cellar designed by

Steve to house his burgeoning collection of wine. The thread of conviviality runs through the house – it feels like a home for welcoming guests alongside the pop of a cork, and the layout reflects the movement of entertaining.

"Tor has a genius for re-covering classic shapes in striking complementary patterns and also for replicating existing pieces," says Katherine. "We had a smart George Smith armchair for the downstairs sitting room and Tor produced an identical copy of it – covering them both in a wonderful indigo Lewis & Wood pattern called Nantes Baltic Blue. They make the whole room sing."

With a signature deftness of colour pairing, Tor has placed an ottoman of her own design covered in Lee Jofa's zingy Desning Velvet in the centre of the downstairs sitting room. The effect is added to by a pair of antique wrought-iron console tables, found by a friend in Chichester and now serenely standing on either side of the handsome fireplace. ▶

**ABOVE** Tor created a cosy area at the rear of the first-floor family room, adding a dash of colour with an ottoman covered in Pickett, a textured velvet by Lee Jofa, and a Roman blind in Colefax and Fowler's Cyrus, Ivory, the same fabric used for the curtains in the front half of the room.





*‘The principal bedroom has a country house feel which fits with the exterior setting’*

Pieces with stories abound throughout the rooms in the house. In the upstairs family room, painted in Feather Down by Benjamin Moore as a backdrop to Katherine’s modern art, a semi-grand piano stands covered in family photos. Apart from having crossed the Atlantic several times due to Katherine’s Toronto background, the piano was, according to Steve, the last instrument to leave the Steinway workshop before the Nazis turned it into an ammunition factory.

The family room itself, with its long windows looking across the trees to the verdant common beyond was, according to Tor, “My favourite room to work on. It has the most incredible light pouring through the windows. It is so sunny on days, in fact, that sheer blinds became a necessity – they are a really good addition and sit neatly behind the full-length curtains. I love the David Seyfried sofas and the curtains with their soft pelmets and contrasting pleats. It’s a light and inviting room featuring Steve’s favourite colour – pink – which makes me happy every time I visit.” Happy indeed is an apt word to describe this beguiling transformation of a townhouse. ■

**ABOVE** The principal bedroom is a study in classic style with a headboard in Colefax and Fowler’s Alberry Leaf, and curtains in Nicole Fabre’s Grand Crocus. The chairs in Jane Churchill’s Alda Stripe in Green and Rosanna Lonsdale’s Flaming Lamps add a fun touch.

**RIGHT** The guest bedroom is an inviting space with a spriggy Colefax and Fowler wallpaper called Ashling and embroidered bed linen from Sarah K and a glorious turquoise lamp from Pooky adding a playful touch.

