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The owner's priority for this house was to reverse its aspect so that the main rooms overlook the garden at the back. The result is a large, light sitting room (both pages). Separate groupings of furniture are

anchored in the space by rugs from Farnad Peyman at Oriental Heritage, as well as carefully chosen, complementary fabrics

Tripartite coalition

From what was formerly a rambling, large London house with two wings, a triumvirate of architect, designer and client has made a homogenous whole, overlooking the substantial garden

TEXT LIZ ELLIOT | PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON BROWN



adore spontaneity,' declared Noel Coward. 'Particularly the spontaneity that comes from 14 weeks of intense rehearsal!' This house, bursting with individual pieces and surprising juxtapositions, is a physical expression of that statement. The triumphant cast – in this case architect Thomas Croft and designer Philip Hooper, both of whom insist that the client's own contribution be equally applauded – took three years over the production and, in this writer's view, the result is stunning.

Having bought the house in 2001, the clients asked Thomas Croft to restructure it because they admired a house he had designed for a friend. 'From living locally, I had known this house for 20 years and loved its mysterious quality,' explains Thomas. 'I always thought it wonderfully quirky and unusual in being so wide – in essence, it is a small country house in the centre of London.'

As it was such a huge project, Thomas wanted a designer to join him at an early stage. He suggested Philip Hooper, one of the senior decorators at Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler, with whom he had worked for several years at John Stefanidis. Philip's architectural background and his style – modern, yet respectful of the history of a building – made him an ideal choice.

The client's main priority was that the aspect of the house be reversed so as to overlook the garden, rather than the street. Built in 1843, it consisted of a loose arrangement of rooms, many of which were on different levels, and was divided into three sections – the main body of the house, and two smaller wings of different heights, one of which was a separate flat. As Thomas was aware, it needed a firm hand to pull it together.

He demolished the separate wing and replaced it, putting a series of utility rooms at the front of the new block, and a full-width kitchen lit by a translucent glass wall behind. The kitchen leads into the dining room at the back of the house, which has a wall of three-metre-high french windows



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
A Chinese glazed pot converted into a lamp stands on a table in the bay window of the sitting room. The broad hallway runs from the front to the back of the house. A clerestory, supported by a steel frame, lets more light into the dining room. The dining chairs are from Christopher Howe Antiques; the oak table is from Nico Villeneuve. The kitchen is lit by a translucent glass wall, and is separated from the dining area by a bar and cabinets by Bulthaup. An eighteenth-century French chair is covered in a bold stripe from Antico Setificio Fiorentino

CLOCKWISE FROM THIS PAGE The main bedroom is painted 'Powder Blue' by Farrow & Ball, a perfect foil for neutral fabrics and antique pieces. The pair of seventeenth-century, gilt and tortoiseshell mirrors are from Christopher Jones Antiques. A Thirties glass lamp from B&T Antiques and a bowl by Rupert Spira echo the shapes in the painting

above. In the first-floor study, ethnic textiles, such as this antique Caucasian kilim, combine well with the striped fabric on the chair and ottoman. The main bathroom has a smart bath from Water Monopoly





opening into the garden. 'I was adamant that I did not want a conservatory, and Thomas's solution is brilliant,' enthuses the client.

Thomas raised and extended the terrace at the back of the house, and installed a series of french windows along the length of the building. A modern take on the Georgian habit of joining the main block to its wings with colonnades, these windows, framed in steel painted 'Nato green', serve to soften and unite the back of the house. Thomas is lavish in his praise of his clients: 'They showed great sophistication in not cleaning the exterior bricks. Our aim was to create a nineteenth-century finish using twenty-first-century techniques. We call it "house healing",' he laughs.

On the first floor, the central corridor connecting the main bedroom suite with the two spare bedrooms has been opened up by the introduction of double doors leading to the study, which has french windows offering views of the garden. The second floor houses the children's rooms and, above, the roof has been opened up to provide an invaluable playroom, with a glass-sided stairwell that serves to bring light into the floor below.

The original layout of the garden, by Arabella Lennox-Boyd, has been retained. The borders were replanted by Rachel Barstow and Rosalinda Willis, 'wonderful plantswomen, who took enormous trouble in their new planting schemes, visiting a number of times to discover where the light fell throughout the year,' says the client. 'We moved in 600 shrubs and, with the help of landscape designer Tommaso del Buono, extended the lines of pleached limes on either side to protect our privacy. The garden continues to be maintained by Simon Rose.'

From the outset, the client, Thomas and Philip discussed the interiors in tandem with the architecture. 'The advantage of such a long lead time is that you can build up a feel for a house in

an organic way,' explains Philip. 'The conversations between the three of us were often to do with colour; the client was enormously receptive to the introduction of the unexpected and loved the combination of ethnic textiles and Western fabrics. We gathered together a portfolio of examples from places such as Ghana, Thailand and Indonesia, found some at fairs and through contacts, and discovered several pieces when we visited Robert Kime's warehouse in Wiltshire, a treasure trove of antique textiles. Other fabrics came from a wonderful mill in Florence which, apart from making lovely textured pieces, has a very, very off-beat colour sense, which appealed to the client.'

Philip believes strongly in the responsibility of the designer to support and resurrect the skill of craftsmanship. He encouraged the collection of pieces by ceramicist Paul Philp and introduced photography into the client's already established art collection. Textured bronze lamps by sculptor Hannah Woodhouse feature throughout the house; their strong metal forms echoing the lines of the window frames.

'I call this blending of unexpected elements the anti-school of decorating,' says Philip. 'To make it successful – casual not contrived – you have to keep a firm hand on every aspect. As with minimalism, it is essential that the ultimate finish of the interior is immaculate.'

'One truth I learnt long ago was that it is difficult to make a successful interior if no one else has the opportunity of editing your work,' he continues. 'The ultimate working relationship when designing has been described to me as being rather like a tennis match. You hit the ball over the net and your client comes back with a better one. It keeps you on your toes and ups the standard of your game.'

In the case of this house, it must have been a very good match □
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Philip Hooper (tel: 020-7493 2231)



OPPOSITE A run of three-metre-high windows unites the rear façade of the house (above). The roof space behind the pediment was opened up to make a playroom for the children (below left). The glass-encased stairwell (below right) lets light down to the lower floors. THIS PAGE The terrace along the rear façade was raised and extended; the landscaping was by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. Planting, by Rachel Barstow and Rosalinda Willis (tel: 01439-788701), includes alliums in a bed of herbaceous perennials (above). Tommaso del Buono, of Del Buono-Gazerwitz (tel: 020-7243 6006), planted pleached limes round the garden boundary to provide privacy (right)

