

# Lateral thinking

*Formed by turning four adjoining flats into a single living space, this north London conversion is filled with its owners' impressive collection of art and contemporary ceramics, much of which was bought to suit the restrained, modern interior*

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The drawing room, which is painted in six different shades of white, bears witness to the owners' love of contemporary art: key pieces include a large photograph by Candida Höfer (left) and two sculptures by Ken Miharara (centre and right). The pendant light is by Ingo Maurer





FROM TOP The ceramic artwork on the coffee table in front of the fire is by Frederic Leake Kewell. The sleek built-in display shelf incorporates a display shelf for an installation by Jacob van der Bruggel

**H**igh on the crest of a hill in north London live Peggy and Herschel Post, an American couple who have just celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. During their 50 years together, they have been passionate collectors of fine and decorative arts, becoming fearfully knowledgeable in the process.

Herschel's mother's approach has drawn him to Old Master drawings, prints and letters; Peggy, a founder member of the Chelsea Fringe in Flowers, which rescued the home of the Bloomsbury Group, focuses early-twentieth-century art, contemporary ceramics and African art. Their innate sense of quality, honed by years of collecting, was in place to tackle a completely new challenge.

A year ago, the Posts descended from a traditional Victorian town house to an ultra-modern horizontal conversion, filling it with newly acquired contemporary and modern art. Peggy had found two flats for sale, on the ground and basement floors of an 1850s building and, with her usual persistence, had managed to acquire the two flats beside them. Overnight they became owners of four flats, with a potentially lovely garden at the back. 'The challenge was to make them all work as a single family dwelling,' explains Peggy. 'I wanted it to be a modern space, although the building is in a conservation area, it is not listed. How was an opportunity to create something entirely different.'

The Posts chose Matthew Rattans from MDM Architects to amalgamate the flats – the drawing room is now 10 metres wide, with three tall windows. Carving out a hall and staircase, they raised the floor frames by just over a metre and dug down them, at basement level, to acquire more ceiling height, pushing back the garden by a third to allow for a secluded terrace and extra light. 'We brought only the best pieces from our previous house – they went into Herschel's library, now the repository of our treasured possessions from the past,' says Peggy. 'Apart from a few other things, the art is mostly contemporary. I feel that Herschel and I have at last joined the twenty-first century.'

Her first purchases were two monumental photographs – a Camille Hüller from her Library series and a Wim Wenders of an abandoned Soviet school in Armenia, both of which now hang on the north wall of the voluminous drawing room – and a work by the ceramicist Edmund de Waal. 'That always wanted to commission an Edmund de Waal installation,' says Peggy. Edmund chose the west wall for his frame of pots, as the shadows are best on that side of the room.



An installation by Edmund de Waal hangs on the west wall of the drawing room, above a Calacatta d'Oro marble chimneypiece





French windows open out from the kitchen (above left) to the garden (this picture), which was designed by Arnie Maynard. The traditional library (above right) is the repository for the owners' older artworks, including two nineteenth-century Italian bronzes



The rich colour scheme of the library was determined by a painting by the sixteenth-century artist Francesco Morandini. The chair is covered in a Claremont damask





FROM TOP: Dark  
silhouettes in the corridor  
leading to the spare  
room display African  
sculptures. The light  
feature in the spare  
room is highlighted by  
Mass Designer Tom  
Barthel's suggested  
wallpapering a screen  
to stand behind the  
bed, rather than the  
wall, to add interest

Much of the interior reflects Piggy's love of ceramics. Commonly bringing the first bill in line with pieces glimpsed through dealers' windows, "I became addicted to pots and sculptors," she explains. "My favorite piece is always the last one I bought: the Ken Miharas in the drawing room are the most beautiful things that I have ever seen." She often visits artists' studios to discuss commissioned work — the Dutch ceramicist Henk Wilkens, whose Mack tile installation hangs above the Frank Stella in the hall, remains a good friend.

To provide a homogenous background for this burgeoning art collection, the duo turned to Tom Barlow from Wallis Works. He worked them with fabric and paint — using his studio in the drawing room — and introduced them to Ego Moore, whose sculptural light now hangs in the drawing room.

A garage hang with exquisite Old Master drawings leads from the drawing room to Herchel's "old world library," which occupies the whole of one of the original four flats. A Mannerist painting by the sixteenth-century artist Francesco Mazzanti sets the palette for the room: the red veneer of the bookcases intermingles with warm lacquer, and provides a fitting environment for the restored Grand Tour ceramics and Biedermeier bronzes.

The compact kitchen by the hall is a gallery of nineteenth-century British pottery: Mary Newcomb, Bernard Mordaunt, George Linn and others hang above the range. Billings cabinet, which incorporates a display shelf for yet more ceramics, leads via the Stiegel table to the distinctive white benches, while the table was commissioned from the Hackney-based Martin Gumpert, and the whole is a reminder that art can coexist with functionality.

Beyond the French windows in the kitchen lies the new-glazed garden by Jane Maxwell — all grass, glazed oak spire, Japanese accessories and tea. Downstairs, the bathroom is more eclectic. In the main bathroom, the tones of the George Yardhouse-inspired carpet of large round motifs echo those of the Chinese Green and Vasari Bell paintings on the wall, but there is a splash note — a gigantic circular sculpture, a form of coral sculpture by Lizzie Fery, hangs behind a modern four-poster bed. In the corridor, buckle chairs and niches display African bronzes and animal carvings.

Mixing the old with the new, Piggy and Herchel have together created an astonishingly interesting space, its several palettes creating a rich contemporary serenity. But their passion for collecting continues, and with Piggy's direction and eye for life, who knows what the next step will be. □

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A large sculpture by Lizzie Fery hangs behind the bed in the main bedroom, which is dressed with a cashmere bedcover from William Westhead and 'Paprika' cushions by Twill Textiles

