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# Grand Plans

*There is an air of grandeur about decorator **Nico Castellini Baldissera's** Chelsea home. Its strong colours and sumptuous furniture make it the perfect showcase for his work*



**Text** Sally Griffiths • **Photographs** Andreas von Einsiedel



*Decorator Nico Castellini Baldissera (above, left) chose a warm shade of yellow for his drawing room (main picture and left).*



“My aim was to re-create an atmosphere of the grand tour with an inspirational mixture of furniture and fabrics”

Not many designers are given *carte blanche* to decorate an entire house for their first job – fewer still at the age of 23. Nicolo Castellini Baldissera is one of that rare breed of people who have a knack of doing things years before anybody else. Today a sage 27, he is busy establishing himself as a decorator in London with a roster of private clients. “I enjoy decorating for other people,” he explains. “The important thing is to recognise the style each client

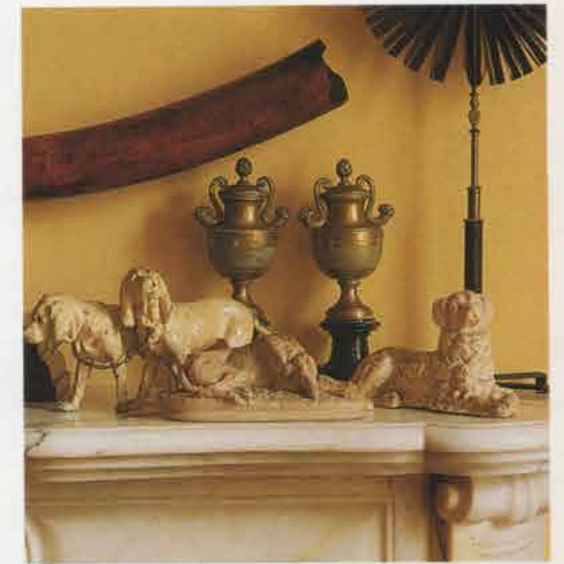
favours, then take it a little further to give them something they will be comfortable with.”

Although he has no formal training, his skills go back a long way, as Nicolo can remember rearranging ornaments and furniture in the family home in Milan even as a child. But his first break came when friends of the family asked him

to decorate their new home. He organised a team of electricians, engineers and workmen and set about the task. “It was a huge challenge, but a vital opportunity,” he says. Since then he has not looked back, decorating several Milanese apartments before he moved to London.

Nicolo’s London home is a small Regency terraced house in Chelsea – a dramatic change from the sumptuous family residence back in Italy. “The thing I love most about my house is having my own front door,” he says. “I have never liked the idea of a flat with porters and people milling about. I like to be totally independent.”

When Nicolo bought the house it



*Main picture:* Combray by Beaumont & Fletcher is used for the drawing room curtains. *Above:* Nicolo’s collection of antique dogs.

required only minimal structural work: a wall in the hallway was removed to make the drawing room bigger, and inappropriate fireplaces were replaced with more suitable designs. After that, all that was required was an injection of colour. “I mixed lots of strong shades together – five

in each room was my target,” says Nicolo. Yellow, which predominates, is a splendid foil for the pieces of antique furniture Nicolo inherited from his grandmother.

The inspiration for the drawing room was a stunning marble-topped Louis XVI console table. “As I could not possibly afford to furnish the house with furniture of that period throughout, I used a strong mixture of styles and colours instead,” he explains; sofas are upholstered in a bold Timney Fowler fabric and curtains in a faded linen from Beaumont & Fletcher.

In the centre of the room a large fabric-covered stool stands on a Victorian rug that successfully draws together all the colours in



“I decided to turn my bedroom into something rather pompous – as a joke, of course”



family have called me ‘the little Lord’, a nickname I inherited because of my outrageously grandiose ideas,” he says. “I decided to turn my bedroom into something rather pompous – as a joke, of course.”

What was once just a small and characterless bedroom is now a grand reinvention. A smart laurel-wreath wallpaper from Rupert Cavendish has been used with billowing silk taffeta curtains to stunning effect; and a bright red fleur-de-lis-patterned fabric from Braquie covers the bed. Nicolo has also given pride of place to a large golden eagle which is hung above the bed, while a fur rug is thrown over the bed – just for good measure. Finally, Nicolo took apart an old book of fishing prints and framed them *en bloc* on the walls.

The adjoining bathroom is light and bright and overlooks the next-door

the room. A beautiful collection of old master architectural drawings, including one acquired from an unsuspecting dealer for just £10, are grouped together on one wall. “My aim was to re-create the atmosphere of the grand tour with an inspirational mixture of furniture and fabrics,” he says. “I like things that evoke memories or tell a story.”

The integral dining area is approached through glass double doors at the rear of the room. Here, the walls are painted a lighter shade of yellow to encourage the natural light that filters down through a pitched glass roof. The handsome dining table is a family heirloom which extends to seat 48 guests, while the chairs are replicas of Louis XVI examples from his home in Milan.

By contrast, the rooms upstairs possess an amusingly overblown grandeur, a touch which Nicolo quickly points out is entirely self-deprecating. “Since I was a child my

garden, which, he says, is “perfect as I can enjoy the benefits of it without having to do any of the hard work!”

“The best thing about having your own bedroom and bathroom,” he believes, “is that there is no-one else to consider. You can just do exactly what you want without offending anybody.”

And does he miss the dimensions of his childhood home? “Well, I wouldn’t mind living in a palace,” he replies, “but I’m happy here – for the time being.” ■

*Nicolo Castellini Baldissera can be contacted at 30 Slaidburn Street, London SW10 0JP, (0171) 351 3425; fax (0171) 352 6438.*

*Main picture and above: in contrast to the lower level of the house, the rooms upstairs are humorously decorated with rather overblown grandeur.*

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