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PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CLEVELANDS

HOUSES & GARDENS

Our choice of irresistible spaces, inside and out

This month, we visit a Victorian home filled with beautiful objects from around the globe, a modern penthouse that meets its owner's brief for comfort and sophistication, and a sustainable hillside self-build. It is all about location, location, location for one family, who looked at more than 100 houses before buying on their favourite street, while a determined couple take on the greatest challenge of their lives, restoring a 13th-century abbey. Also enjoy charming gardens in Yorkshire and Cornwall. ▶

SITTING ROOM

The two Gio Ponti chairs upholstered in pink linen strike a crisp note against white walls. "I love pink, purple and red and have to refrain from overusing them," Nicolò says. Other mid-century modern pieces include the 1970s gold-topped coffee table, which has a bar concealed in its base.

SON 2 sofas, around £2,750 each plus fabric, SON Milano, 0039 024 351 3165, sonmilano.com. Sofas in Bolgheri in Dust, chairs in Bolgheri in Fuchsia, both linen, £205m, C&C Milano, 020 7751 4554, cec-milano.com. Doynton stools, £1,436 each plus 3m of plain fabric, Ben Whistler, 020 8576 6600, benwhistler.com. Clouds Summer rug, from £924sq m, Luke Irwin, 020 7730 6070, lukeirwin.com.

LA DOLCE VITA

An eye for colour and clever juxtaposition, honed over a lifetime immersed in interior design, inform the distinctively creative decoration of Nicolò Castellini Baldissera's London home

WORDS ALICE WESTGATE | PHOTOGRAPHS MARK LUSCOMBE-WHYTE



DINING AREA

Jewel-bright upholstery and a colourful rug forge strong visual links with the sitting room (this page), while the low wall between the dining area and kitchen allows natural light to flood the space. The Danish table dates from the 1960s and the chairs were made in Italy in the 1950s.

For similar mid-century dining furniture, try Osi Modern, 07881 953708, osimodern.com. **Sculpture**, Antony Gormley, antonygormley.com. **Rug**, Federica Tondata at Fedora Design, 001 212 431 3436, fedoradesign.com.



Early in our conversation, as he shows me round his London home, Nicolò Castellini Baldissera says, "I pride myself on not having a specific style. The look I create varies according to my surroundings." The Italian interior designer, who builds, restores and dresses grand houses all over the world, has residences in Paris, Tangier and London, and each one is decorated differently.

For his Victorian home, he has chosen a wonderfully considered mix that perfectly fits its metropolitan context. "I always have great respect for the country I am in," he says.

Such sensitivities are not surprising, given Nicolò's heritage; he is from a prominent Milanese family and his father, Piero Castellini Baldissera, is a well-known architect and designer who co-founded the family textile house, C&C Milano. "I certainly inherited my creative drive from my father," says Nicolò. "Growing up with him was extremely illuminating as he was





constantly rearranging our home environment. We also travelled widely and I was very receptive to all the ideas that came my way. I haven't lived in Italy for twenty-five years, but it remains a huge influence."

So much so that, two years ago, when he bought this maisonette set across the top three floors of a house in north Kensington, he might have been tempted to redecorate its run-down interior in sumptuous Italianate style, with luxurious furnishings, rich colours and opulently layered textiles, art and antiques. Instead, he opted for a contrasting effect with a framework of white walls and curtainless windows. Friend and interior designer Andrea Bizzarro, who project-managed the refurbishment, helped to make the space feel more contemporary by stripping back and painting a metal staircase, and removing the skirting boards for cleaner lines.

"I was struck by the loftiness of the open-plan sitting room, dining area and kitchen, which make up the property's middle floor," says Nicolò. "I particularly struggled with the concept of an open-plan kitchen – I've always believed kitchens should be separate spaces – but here, I changed my mind. I thought it

STAIRCASE

The gallery-like feel of the open-plan middle floor makes it an ideal space for exhibiting artworks and collected treasures, including Cloned Red Dog with Plastic Boots by Belgian artist William Sweetlove and an Ekoi headdress from Nigeria.



HALL

The console table, made by a friend, offers an opportunity to display a characteristically intriguing array of objects.

Artwork. Anish Kapoor, anish Kapoor.com. **Faux coral.** Horneman Antiques, 020 7229 2898, raymondhorneman.com. **Taxidermy.** Emma Hawkins, 020 7518 0680, emmahawkins.demon.co.uk





MAIN BEDROOM

Confident use of colour and shape define this scheme, featuring Nicolò's own-design headboard, an ochre rug that was specially woven in Morocco and a fabric panel (right), which was found by interior designer Andrea Bizzarro in Istanbul.

Headboard, Nicolò Castellini Baldissera, ncastellinibaldissera@gmail.com. **Walls** in Stiffkey Blue, Estate Emulsion, £36 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball, 01202 876141, farrow-ball.com. **Fabric panel**, Andrea Bizzarro at Hook Design, 020 7371 9045, hook-design.co.uk. **Wire form**, Barry Griffiths at Flow Gallery, 020 7243 0782, flowgallery.co.uk.



would be interesting to experiment with a new way of living." The resulting sense of space inspired Nicolò to consider this floor rather like a gallery, taking advantage of the uninterrupted natural light. "I decided to keep furnishings quite sparse and simple, with a few touches of colour. It represents an altogether fresher approach to decorating."

The bedrooms, however, buzz with colour: petrol blue and ochre in the main bedroom on the lowest level, and burnt orange against deep grey walls in the guest room in the attic. "Deep hues in the bedrooms, with white in between, make for a beautifully cocooned feel," Nicolò says.

A lifetime of travelling has provided Nicolò with an array of fascinating objects with which to dress the rooms, from taxidermy and African carvings to modern installations and pop art. "I've accumulated a huge number of possessions and tend to move them between my properties, as the mood takes me," he says. "I never travel light and often carry unusual hand luggage. I brought the red dog sculpture, by Belgian artist William Sweetlove, from Paris on the Eurostar, much to the amazement of the French customs officers."

Nicolò also admits to being something of a hoarder. "I never throw away anything that might be of use in the future," he says. "I have a whole room in my

father's house filled with fabrics that will one day become part of new schemes." It was while reacquainting himself with this collection that he came across the blue velvet curtains which had once hung in his grandmother's bedroom, and which he has transformed into seat covers for the 1950s Italian chairs in his dining room: "My grandmother would certainly have approved of how beautiful they look," he says.

Nicolò's talent for adapting his possessions to suit very different living spaces is evident in numerous successful juxtapositions of antiques and contemporary pieces in his London home. The mid-century dining furniture, for example, has an Antony Gormley sculpture as a backdrop, while sofas designed by Nicolò's father are flanked by lamps made from 19th-century Chinese bronze vases. "That's always been the main challenge - to pair an antique chair with a modern canvas, or an Old Master with a contemporary table," he says. "David Hicks is a huge inspiration. I always use his striking combinations of colours, patterns and eras as a reference."

All of this exudes a sense of energy so, despite Nicolò's professed lack of a signature style, this interior is as bold and fascinating as any he has created before. "This is not a formulaic London house," he muses, "but I know I am in London when I'm here. As with all my projects, context is everything." ■

BATHROOM

For the look of a classic bathroom in an English home, Nicolò chose traditional fixtures and fittings and a monochrome palette.

Similar basin, London washbasin with pedestal, E867, CP Hart, 0945 875 1121, cphart.co.uk. Walls in French Gray, Estate Emulsion, £36 for 2.5 litres. Farrow & Ball, 01202 876141, farrow-ball.com



GUEST BEDROOM

As elsewhere, blocks of colour energise this bedroom in the attic. Nicolò designed the headboards using an outline inspired by Moroccan motifs.

Headboard in Maremma in Yellow/Orange, linen, £112m; bedcover in Suvretta in Light Grey, cashmere, £543m; chair in Venezia in Bordeaux/Gold Striped, silk, £196m; all C&C Milano, 020 7751 4554, ccc-milano.com. Claremont jute flatweave carpet in Grey, £168.56sq m, Tim Page Carpets, 020 7259 7282, timpagecarpets.com