



Sweet harmony

Interior designer Rose Uniacke marries bold, masculine materials with soft, feminine detail in her west London home. The result, reports *Ruth Corbett*, is a match made in heaven >

Photography *Chris Tubbs*





This spread, clockwise from top left: French chrome lighting and ceramic vessels in the main bedroom; Rose Uniacke stands beneath an Italian 1960s chandelier from Hilary Batstone; a corner of the drawing room features some of Rose's art collection; the kitchen's sleek black slate units; the bath is by renowned French designer Andrée Putman; in the main bedroom, an antique crystal chandelier dominates; the dining table is by Piet Hein Eek at Rabih Hage

Interior designer Rose Uniacke describes her decorating style as 'strong'. She works with tough, masculine materials, such as concrete and steel, that she can then soften and feminise with fur, cashmere, silk or crystal. 'I'm interested in comfort and generous open spaces,' she says. 'And I like mixing things, particularly old and new. When one gathers a collection of furniture over time, a home really feels like a home.' Time is a luxury many of her clients don't have, which is one of the reasons they choose Rose to do the job for them.

Rose began her career as a gilder and furniture restorer. In 1994, she moved to a chateau in France and spent three years collecting architectural antiques, furniture and lighting from the 1930s and 1940s. 'My mother, Hilary Batstone, had a shop in London and I would send my purchases to her to sell,' she says. 'When I came back in 1997, we set up shop together. Interiors has always been a passion, so it was easy to slip into that world.'

Their enchanting furniture and design shop, just a stone's throw from the famous Pimlico Road Design District, has become known worldwide for its spare, elegant and thoroughly modern approach. You'll find contemporary Perspex alongside 19th-century chandeliers, hefty stone lamp bases and gloriously patinated chests and cupboards. Its eclectic *mélange* has brought in a new class of customer keen to fill their own houses with timeless classics of all periods.

Before she knew it, Rose had her first substantial commission from a customer. 'It took off from there,' she recalls. 'The work kept coming and I loved it.' Rose Uniacke Interiors was soon established and Rose began working on numerous different projects, including the Marquess of Bute's remarkable Gothic house, Mount Stuart.

Rose's aesthetic is rooted in her upbringing in the Oxfordshire countryside, in a lovely old family house. 'Mum had very good taste and the house was always beautifully done,' she says. 'The minute I had a place of my own I



This page: an antique mirror hangs above a grey Carrera marble double sink in the en suite bathroom. Opposite, from left: a pair of leather chairs by Borge Morgensen and a stunning crystal chandelier in the main bedroom; velvet, leather, silk and wool are some of the natural textures Rose has chosen for the drawing room



ROSE UNIACKE'S FIVE FAVOURITE PLACES TO SHOP:

Sadie Coles, 35 Heddon Street, W1, (020) 7434 2227, www.sadiecoles.com

This is a fabulous gallery. Sadie Coles is highly informed, passionate about her subject and works with many new and established artists.

Dover Street Market, 17-18 Dover Street, W1, (020) 7518 0680, www.doverstreetmarket.com

The epicentre of London's avant-garde fashion, with such a great selection of unique collections and couture labels, including Lanvin, Chloë Sevigny and Gareth Pugh.

Wild At Heart, 222 Westbourne Grove, W11, (020) 7727 3095

Nikki Tibbles has such beautiful flowers. She initiated a fresh and inspirational approach to floristry and she can create a look for any occasion with just the right amount of elegance and discretion.

Egg, 37 Kinnerton Street, SW1, (020) 7235 9315

I love the way Egg mixes lovely fabrics and clothing alongside a beautifully subtle selection of ceramics, glass and one-off jewellery pieces – great for presents or treats for myself and friends.

Pimlico Road Farmers' Market, Orange Square, corner of Pimlico Road and Ebury Street, SW1

Every Saturday morning I love shopping here. Their organic selection comprises everything, from locally-sourced vegetables, handmade bread and cakes to some surprises, such as oysters and the freshest herbs around.

loved the interior part of it. I was constantly rethinking and redoing it.'

Fast forward a decade or so and she now lives in west London with her husband, film producer David Heyman, their new baby and three of Rose's four older children. The house, an elegant Victorian gem, has been extended into the rear garden at ground level and is a perfect showcase for Rose's distinctive style. 'What was appealing about this house was the fact that it's wider than most built during this period: the rooms are square rather than long and thin,' she says. Although the bones and shape of the place were good, Rose stripped out everything, opened up high arches between rooms, took out all the radiators and floors and started from scratch.

Instead of the ubiquitous contemporary glass box extension, a wall of glass doors reaches across the entire back of the house and folds away to reveal a leafy garden, while a new side extension with glazed roof above the dining area floods the space with natural light. The ground floor is now almost entirely open plan, with steps leading up from the kitchen and dining space to a sophisticated double reception room, the enormous bay window of which overlooks a small front garden complete with olive tree.

Rose has painted the walls white throughout and the floors downstairs are covered in pale antique parquet reclaimed from County Hall. While fashion may, in recent years, have been all about pattern and wallpaper, Rose has resisted this particular trend. She's not remotely swayed by fashion in interiors and has stayed loyal to her preference for a blank canvas on which to impose texture, colour and comfort. This pale backdrop perfectly complements the numerous very beautiful objects and artworks on display. 'My husband and I collect modern art and photographs,'

she says. 'The Sigmar Polke in the kitchen is our latest piece and I absolutely love it.'

While Rose might design specific pieces, such as sofas and armchairs, to fit a particular space, totally custom-made environments are not to her liking. Throughout the house pieces of all vintages – a fabulous pair of 1970s leather chairs, elegant mid-20th century lights, mercury-glass mirrors, 18th-century inherited antiques and Danish pieces from the 1950s – rub shoulders.

Upstairs is a bedroom and bathroom suite of considerable charm. Created from a warren of smaller rooms, these rooms, with working fireplaces in each, are linked by a full-height arch and are quite the most indulgent of personal spaces. In the bathroom, grey Carrera marble lines the shower. The bath, by renowned French designer Andrée Putman, is centrally situated and vast, and above the chimneypiece hang stunning timber-framed Italian mirrors. The room is spacious enough to allow for fabric-upholstered wardrobes in one alcove, balanced by a modern sculpture in the other. In the bedroom, oak boards have been strewn with a chocolate goatskin rug, luxurious drapes sweep the floor and a fabulous crystal chandelier from Rose's shop glitters above.

Having carved a unique niche in the world of residential interiors, Rose is ready for fresh challenges and has her sights set on hotels and restaurants. 'I'm dying to do a hotel,' she says. 'Even though there have been huge improvements to hotel interiors I feel they are often quite sterile environments generally. I think I could bring something new.'

Something tells me it's only a matter of time before we'll be able to drift through a beautiful hotel lobby designed by Rose Uniacke. Now there's a pleasant thought. ■

Rose Uniacke, (020) 7730 7050; www.roseuniacke.com

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