

A FABRIC AFFAIR

For her own London home, Irish interior designer Sarah Chambers combines tradition and the unexpected, and has the patience to wait for what she wants

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX JAMES



HOUSE



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Dublin-born Sarah Chambers left a career in international marketing to pursue a lifelong love of design. With years of experience as a director at London practice Carden Cunietti, she began her own business two years ago. She talks to us about personal and professional projects, what makes a house a comfortable home and how to inject some fun into it all.

WHERE DID IT BEGIN? With a degree in International Languages and Marketing from DCU, I moved to London when I was 21 and worked at Lehman Brothers for six

years. I've always loved fashion but felt it was too late to get into the industry; it's funny thinking that now, I was only 30. With interior design there's a greater balance between the creative and the practical which suited me better, so I took a course at Chelsea College of Art and Design. Carden Cunietti took me on for work experience where I stayed for twelve years before starting my own business. **WAS THAT A CHALLENGING MOVE?** I wanted more flexibility; with a nine-year old daughter and a husband who travels a lot, it's nice to call your own shots. I had my own clients at Carden Cunietti and was used to running entire projects myself so it wasn't a huge change. I resigned in 2014 when we moved to Boston for a year with my husband, an economics professor. Two clients were looking for help with projects at the same time so it all took off quite quickly. **HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE DESIGN OF YOUR OWN HOME?** We bought a Victorian terrace house in Vauxhall, South London, in 2007. The size and location were the only things I liked about it so I didn't feel bad about ripping everything out and starting again. We worked from the top down and by the time we got to the kitchen the money had run out. We installed a "holder" kitchen from IKEA until eight years later, Patrick McKenna of Dublin's

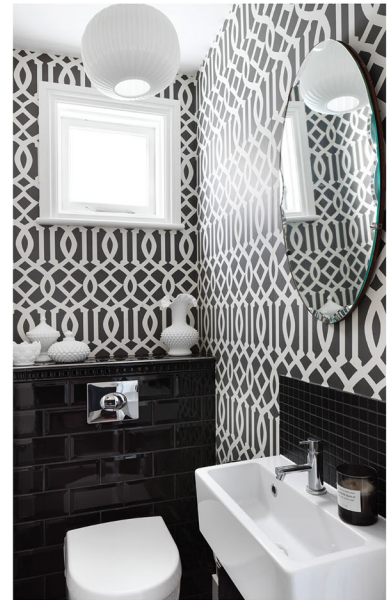
Wabi Sabi designed the matte, black one I wanted. He also sourced the reeded glass you see in Irish pubs for the cabinets. **WHAT IS THE MOST TRANSFORMATIVE PIECE IN YOUR LIVING ROOM?** I love the piece hanging over the marble mantelpiece. I was in Paris and saw a photo by a Korean artist in a magazine produced by Rubelli. I rang the gallery and ordered a copy straightaway. Once that was in place, everything in the room popped. I don't buy artwork for people because it's such a personal thing but it makes a huge difference. **WHAT SPARKED THE COLOUR THEME?** A set of vintage Pyrex flamingo-pink bowls sourced in the US kick-started it. The chairs in the living room window are from a shop in Boston that I passed all

OPPOSITE: Layered cape curtains and blinds, custom-made by London company Downers Design, were chosen for the warmth they bring to the living room. The sofa is from Bray Design. **LEFT:** When the house was purchased all original plasterwork in the living room was covered with plasterboard. Over the Arabescato Oro marble mantelpiece hangs Korean artwork, the inspiration for the colour scheme. **ABOVE:** Vintage Scandinavian table and chairs were picked up in an antiques shop in San Francisco.

HOUSE



LEFT: In collaboration with the client, the kitchen was designed by Patrick McKenna of Irish company Wabi Sabi with whom Chambers had worked on a previous project in Dublin. The stained black matte finish is softened by reeded glass panels that refract the light, and a shot of bold pink on the double-sided island. Antique brass handles complement antique brass lighting in the dining area and ripple-fold curtains prevent a “black box” effect looking into the garden at nighttime. **BELOW FROM TOP:** Chambers’ advice is to have fun with the guest bathroom and for her own, she chose a Schumacher paper in Imperial Trellis, purchased through Turnell & Gigon. The original, white master bed from Oly Studio was reupholstered in velvet by French textile brand Creations Metaphores from London’s Abbott and Boyd. Lamps from Porta Romana sit atop bedside tables from Arte Veneziana.



the time. After thinking of ways to copy them, I realised I should just buy those ones - upholstered in their original fabric - and have them shipped home. **SOME ADVICE?** People sometimes want everything to be brand new but I encourage them to have a few old pieces to work around - to bring comfort and for their sentimental value. My mother keeps an eye out for me in charity shops in Dublin and I look around antique markets in London. Vintage lighting is easy to mix in for example, and tends to be priced quite reasonably. The waterfall chandelier in my living room was a wedding present: a group of our friends collected money and I bought it in a London market. **DO YOU HAVE A SIGNATURE FLOURISH?** I really love fabrics; textiles and patterns are my strong point. I’m much happier doing living rooms and bedrooms than bathrooms; they’re less interesting to me, probably because there’s less fabric involved. In saying that, I had great fun with my guest bathroom which I modelled on an American powder-room. I really believe that a good interior design project involves layering - in my living room for example, we have cape curtains. The top layer is satin with fringing and underneath is a more matte fabric. **FAVOURITE PROJECT?** So far, it was my last for Carden Cunietti in 2014. A family home in Barcelona, for really brave clients who weren’t afraid to push boundaries and were up for anything. Crucially, they had a really great art collection. I’m working on an exciting project in a house in Wandsworth. People tend to go for white ceilings but we’re going with a blue and gold geometric pattern. ■ www.sarahchambersinteriors.co.uk

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