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House & Garden

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TEXT LIZ MORRIS AND HATTA BYNG PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON UPTON

the world in black and white

DESIGNER HUBERT ZANDBERG TURNS A HOUSE ON ONE OF LONDON'S MOST ACCLAIMED SQUARES INTO A REFUGE OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGN PRECISION AND BREEZY MODERNISM



The owners of the house next door suggested us to their neighbours, as we did their house.' So Zandberg recalls the very beginning of this project, and for a designer who relishes getting in right at the beginning, this couldn't have been a better starting point. The project saw the total style turnaround of a six-storey, typically space-jammed family home – with a lift shaft taking up precious space in the middle of it – to an open, light-filled contemporary living space.

If doing away with the lift was a crucial step, so was blowing out the basement (Zandberg told the owners he wouldn't take the job unless the basement's busy floorplan went) because it started a process whereby the house could be designed around what was needed for the family to function rather than around what was already there. Zandberg believes 'getting the bones right' with structural changes first and interior detailing second, is the key to success.

'The second layer of architecture is the grammar of the space, the glue: the interior architecture and detailing which as interior designers we're responsible for and take meticulous care with. I don't understand how one can decorate and not design beforehand,' says Zandberg. The third layer is the bigger picture of the décor composition and the final layer is the fine tuning, Zandberg believes. He has made this process something of a *modus operandi* and clients appreciate the system behind his creative input.

The owner grew up in Jamaica, and in keeping with her taste, many rooms have an island flavour, sharpened up for the urban location. ▶

designer savvy

■ **STUDY** • *Colour:* The icy blue of the Alberto Pinto stripe curtains, the blue of the globes collected by Zandberg for their colour, and the Sinclair Till carpet (www.sinclairtill.co.uk) – are 'thrown' into a chocolate, black and sand scheme.

■ *Furniture:* The library table and bookcases were custom-designed and have an architectural quality which Zandberg likens to the New York skyline and add structure to the room. The chairs are Mies van der Rohe.

■ **FAMILY ROOM** • *Colour:* Black, white and a touch of green, the latter referring to the garden into which this room leads.

■ *Furniture and Accessories:* An interpretation of a Jean Michel Frank sofa with slightly 'improved' proportions is now a Zandberg standard. Here it is covered in a Rubelli houndstooth. The cushions are in cow and springbok hide and a Raoul delicious monster pattern available from St Leger & Viney.

ABOVE The basement was opened out to create the family room OPPOSITE The study

designer savvy ■ DRAWING ROOM

• **Colour and Textures:** A subtle layering of tones – mother-of-pearl, taupes and pinky mauves, are offset by deep aubergines, such as the cushions, the Romeo Gili fabric on the armchair, the shades on the wall lights. Everything is chosen for the significance of its colour – the 1930s round occasional table with pink-glass top and the pink rock-crystal bowls on the table. A dark-chocolate wenge floor, wooden louvred blinds, wenge shelves, and even a chocolate trim on the bespoke mirror console, are the graphic bones of the scheme. A crisp white ceiling also adds structure, strongly contrasted against the shiny lacquer-like walls ('People forget white is almost as strong as black when contrasted against a colour,' says Zandberg). Zandberg uses 'severe contrasts' to give backbone to this unashamedly stylised Hollywood look – pearly, almost glitzy walls versus a pair of 18th-century matt zinc urns, a convex mirror against a linear console, light fabrics against dark.

• **Furniture Notes:** Zandberg shops all over the world: the urns are from an Antwerp antique dealer, some of the cushions from South Africa and the 1940s nickel wall lights were found in New York. The custom-made day beds, in silk velvet from Bruno Triplet, can be intimate and casual for 'draping on' or formal and contrived for 'sitting pretty cocktail society'. Unlike sofas, these backless, armless chaises draw the eye into the sitting area.

• **Curtains:** Deeply chic, these hang on bronze poles just below the cornice and stretch dramatically along the entire wall. Zandberg uses a Lelièvre silk, in contrasting shades that are sewn together in wide bands, with his own special 'un-pinned' goblet heading which creates elegant flutes and an unfussy look.



ABOVE The drawing room RIGHT A glass staircase that leads from ground level to basement level creates a sense of openness OPPOSITE TOP The black, white and blue conservatory BELOW The dining room in the basement

The essence of island style is expressed in the horizontal lines of the shutters, many areas which are escape zones or secret places of repose and a certain upbeat, bold fashionability. Zandberg's signature is a compelling combination of bold strokes and poetic detail. The bold strokes are often graphic, 'the skeleton of the style, and the poetic line is the fleshing out of the skeleton', he explains. He believes firmly in the importance of tailoring, and robustness too, so his interiors typically feature both pronouncement and punctuation. Throughout the house, he has used black and white and a colour – each floor has its own accent: green in the basement family room, blue on the ground floor, off-white on the second-floor ▶





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■ **CONSERVATORY** • **Colour:** The client wanted a Moroccan room but Zandberg still did not deviate from his strict colour control: here black, white and royal blue (not the more usual Moroccan reds) give a fresh feel.

• **Furniture and Accessories:** The fitted day bed was specially made and neatly conceals a radiator. The cushions are an assortment of ethnic, blue-and-white vintage fabrics collected from all over the world, whilst the striped rag rug is by Coral Stephens. The Moroccan plates in their smart white box frames (Maxwood's will make up similar frames) are purely decorative. The two Napoleon III chairs were found in a Paris Flea market and chosen for their colour, whilst the Syrian table is a serious antique.



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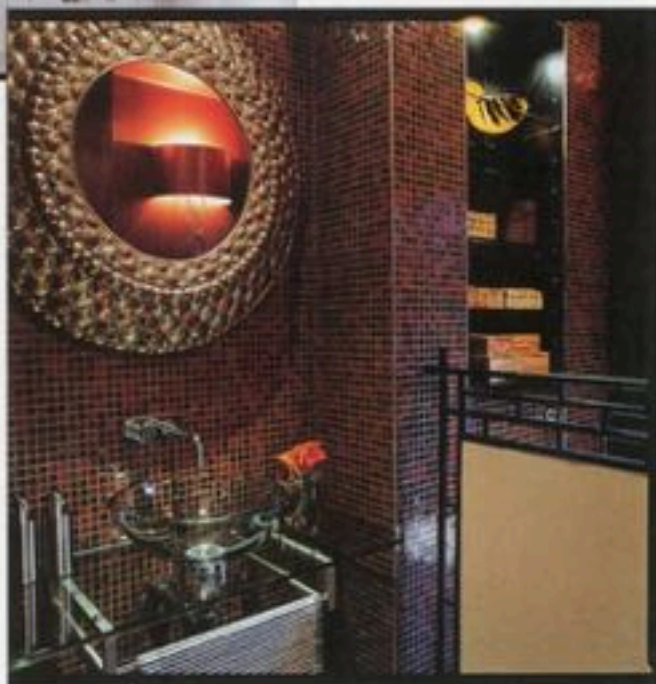
■ **GUEST BEDROOM:** * **Colour:** Here Zandberg takes the monochromatic theme to an extreme - as it is a guest room he could afford to be brave with just black, brilliant white and 'glaring chrome yellow' * **The Look:** Designed with the owner's mother in mind, who visits from Jamaica and is not especially enamoured by London, the look is 'fresh, islandy, totally un-London and different from the rest of the house - a crisp colonial vibe'. There is tongue and groove on the walls and a whitewashed floor. The custom-made four-poster bed, polished black, dominates, and mismatched bedside tables create a casual feel - 'some light relief after the strict formal balance of the rest of the house'. Much of the look is 'in the dressing', the 'ethnic bits', the white-painted Chinese furniture, the stuffed cockatiel and the tropical collection on the dressing table. 'Natural history gone hip', as Zandberg describes it. The cotton bedspread is Ralph Lauren and the bright cushions are in a 1960s fabric Zandberg found at a fair.



reception rooms. The kids' level is bright, and the top-floor en-suite bedroom is flashed with sunny chrome yellow which proves to be a rivetingly chic counterpoint to black and white.

'The owner wanted a new life, a new look,' remarks Zandberg. 'She's glamorous and loves a bit of bling, but not flashy bling. So we took the look towards 1930s and '40s, glam which is about smart, sexy lines: wall sconces, generous but restrained furniture shapes, mirror, rather than the full-on glare of opulent embellishment, because the exuberance would come with the island energy, exotic touches and colour.'

The result is an accomplished and original interior which incorporates both the discipline required of good interior design and the flair that epitomises stylish decorating. And, as an interpretation of the owner's needs at home, using elements which are relevant and resonant to all aspects of their lives, it's top-notch. ■



TOP The dressing table, with tropical-inspired objects ABOVE A dramatic bathroom, with tiled walls and a large convex mirror OPPOSITE The 'islandy' guest bedroom