

Bohemian Residence

METROPOLITAN APARTMENTS & INTERIOR DESIGN



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Hubert Zandberg

A collector turned interior designer, Hubert Zandberg curates the houses of the cosmopolitan elite. Just like his home base London, his interiors are the result of an international outlook.

Photography: Simon Upton, Nicolas Mathews and Marc Lascombe Whyte



A long corridor, gray walls, and many doors without signs—the hallway of this office building in Notting Hill, West London, feels as anonymous as that in a government agency. Is this really where one of London's most highly feted interior designers has based his business? It is indeed. Everything changes once you are invited into Hubert Zandberg's personal office, which feels a bit like stepping into the wardrobe leading to Narnia: on the other side, an astonishing world awaits. Here, the concrete walls are painted in an alluring dark blue, providing a calming backdrop for the art, taxidermy, and artifacts from all continents that hang on the walls or are stacked on shelves.

Zandberg's work space immediately reveals his deep passion for collecting. "An architect once said to me, "Thank God you found a way to turn your illness into a career," he admits frankly. At the core of Zandberg's

HUBERT ZANDBERG creates sophisticated interiors, building layer upon layer using a wide range of textures and tones (opposite). There is such a high level of complexity in his designs that every single element is considered in detail and contributes to the whole.

work is his passion, and skill, for selecting objects and arranging them in eclectic compositions that enhance the character of a house and reflect the personalities of the people living there. While he denies having a signature style—"I deliberately try to avoid a red thread, or at least don't want to see it"—this drive manifests itself in stunning interiors. His projects share an emphasis on modern design mixed with carefully picked vintage pieces on layers of different materials that ask to be touched, using a combination of neutrals and vibrant colors.

Finding the best objects for a place gives him the greatest joy. An example: the living room of a London townhouse faced a wonderful green garden. "The whole space had a green tinge because of the garden. We wanted to bring that in." To achieve this in a charming way, he paired real cacti with complementary cactus shaped metal vases from Morocco





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and intricate paper flowers. “It was a playful take on what is real and what is not real. What is fake; what is real?”

This question has a wider significance for Zandberg, who arrived in London in 1996. He grew up in the Karoo, the dry lands in central South Africa, where he was exposed to two kinds of beauty: that of the wilderness and that of the grand country estates of the ruling white elite. “As a kid I would go with my father to all these different farms and discover great houses. That gave me this enormous sense of discovery and fantasy,” he recalls. It was also in childhood that he started to collect things.

Can you remember the first objects you collected?

HZ: I have been collecting things as long as I can remember. As a kid, I would go into the barns of farms, climb up to the attics and find amazing things: an instrument, an old bottle, or a basket. Ultimately, I believe that there are collectors and non-collectors—and never the two shall meet. It fascinates me to see for what reason people collect. Some collect to order the world. Others only collect one special thing and they want every single example. Then you have the aesthetic collectors, who only collect the beautiful things or the things they consider to be beautiful.

Where would you place yourself?

HZ: I collect only to determine and to investigate connections and relationships between the objects. I am interested in contextuality: what happens to an object when you take it out of its context and put it in a new context?

How does this translate into your work as an interior designer?

HZ: To me, interior design is a process whereby you solve problems and find responses to practical realities, but it is also about identifying the soul of a house and showing it. Every

house, every space that you walk into has a spirit, an energy. Once you identify that energy, you must decide if you are going to fight it or to enhance it. If you fight it, you need to replace it with something. But, in the end, my true passion is placing objects.

Within a room—and sometimes an entire apartment or house—ZANDBERG restricts his palette to just one or two colors—browns and purples (opposite). Yet, within his palette, the depth of hue, shade, and tone is incredibly wide-ranging.



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How would you describe this process? It sounds almost sacred to you?

HZ: That sounds a little bit dramatic. It definitely is intimate, because you display your obsessive compulsion, your view of the objects, and that is very exposing. People might look at what you've done and say, “That is such a banal relationship. Really?

He thinks that is sophisticated?” Actually, sometimes I don't think anything, it just works for me and for my eye. Sometimes it is just about texture.

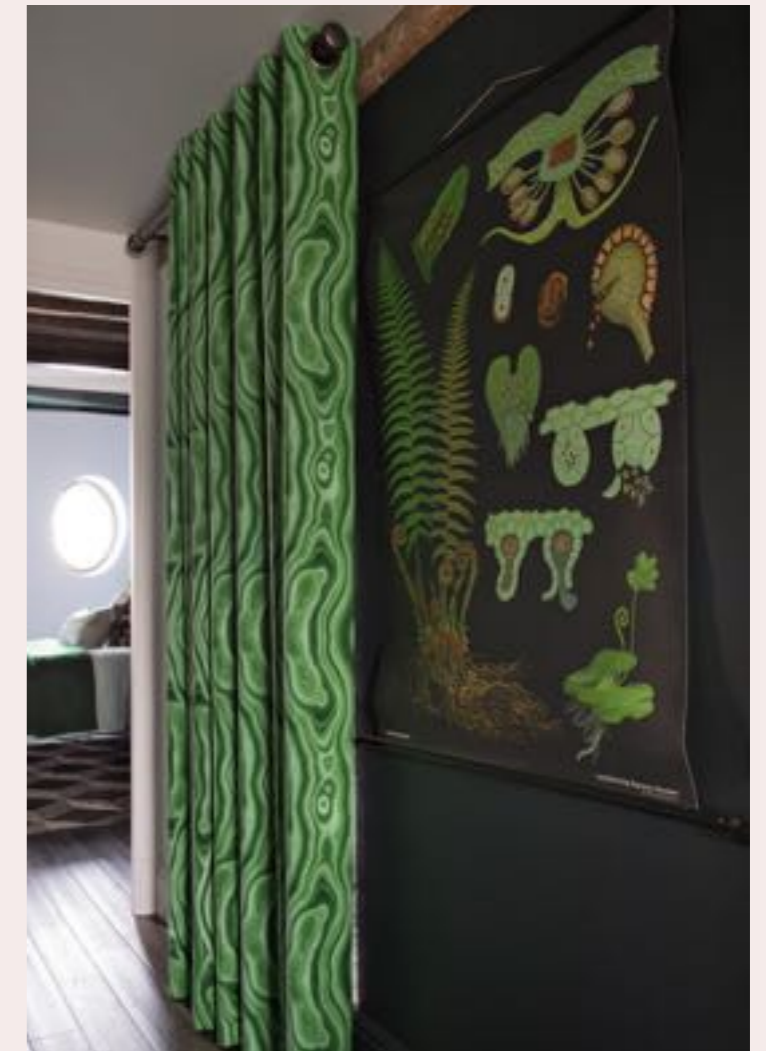
There is no doubt that Zandberg's approach appeals to the owners of estates in big cities all over the world. In his first years in London, he worked with business partner David

To gain an understanding of the complexity of ZANDBERG's layering, consider his use of green in this Parisian kitchen. You'll find it in organic objects (cacti and zucchini), in the print of the drapes, in basketry and ceramics, in the focal color of a photograph or botanical drawing, and in the delicate forms of mounted insects.

Champion in a small West-London interiors shop, before going solo in 2002. Today, his studio's projects range from chateaus in France, chalets in Switzerland, and hotels in Iceland, to Russian dachas and canal houses in England. The location always affects the spirit in which he approaches a project: “I am a little bit

Scottish in Scotland, a little bit contemporary in a brutalist Zurich house, then a bit French, industrial, or contemporary. That is what keeps it interesting for me.”

It is also what keeps Zandberg's interiors interesting to look at. With colors, he treads carefully. “Actually, I wish I could do more white spaces. The issue is that there are not that many



In the bedroom of this Marais apartment (opposite), the color scheme is predominantly green and brown, as elsewhere in the home. An exotic, almost African vibe runs throughout, epitomized by the ebonized woods and vibrant green of the malachite-print drapes (above).

good white spaces. A bad white space is bad because it just looks like a bad gallery." He has also tried the opposite: rooms all in black. In his old house in Notting Hill, he used black to even out odd proportions: "By

painting it all black, the walls disappeared and you couldn't be quite sure what was holding them up." Astonishingly, the interior still felt effortless. Why? Because Zandberg is a master in layering furniture, fabrics, and objects in such a way that the result feels light, open, and comfortable.

Do you follow a certain principle when layering?

HZ: It has all to do with where you stop. Is it one layer or six layers? It is like dressing. Sometimes you can get all dressed up to go to a ball; sometimes you go to a summer party and you don't have to layer. A beach house does not have to be overly layered. Well, it can be layered in a very whimsical, very diaphanous way. Sometimes you even add antique stuffed animals to a project.

What do they bring to an interior?

HZ: The interest here, in Europe, is that they are out of context—they become an abstraction. An object out of context creates a vibration, a certain frisson that is quite edgy. I am a lot



In this Little Venice townhouse in London, contemporary colors and mid-century furnishings are juxtaposed with the homeowner's extensive collection of pre-Islamic artifacts.





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The owner of this Little Venice townhouse also owns a significant collection of contemporary art. ZANDBERG has gone to great lengths to tie together colors, textures, and patterns in his interior scheme—from wall colors and bed linen, through to textiles and furnishings (opposite, above, and previous page).

less interested in the natural history surrounding me [when I'm working] in South Africa. There, I am shipping all the furniture and objects from here and bringing Europe to Cape Town again. You experience one culture in another culture and feel the clash, which brings in its own dynamism.

Are you trying to achieve a dynamic effect with industrial lighting?

HZ: Industrial lighting is a very easy way to bring soul into a room because it informs you of a certain history. I like the scale that it brings—it is a little brutalist in that way—and that it does not take itself so seriously. Plus, I like the fact that it is very pragmatic: it is functional. It makes a very interesting, soulful statement that works on many levels: patina, shape, scale, form, soul, history, narrative.

In a way, these words also describe Zandberg's chosen home: London, a stark contrast to his upbringing in the midst of wildness. Today, he owns flats in East and West London because he doesn't want to miss out neither on the creative buzz of the East End or the tranquility of the West. It also keeps him close to the sources that sustain his collecting addiction:



ZANDBERG's own home in Ladbroke Grove is like a huge curiosity cabinet. The many layers reflect his passion for collecting and include everything from taxidermy and tribal art, to intriguing objets trouvés and Zandberg's own designs.

vintage markets. "In West London, Portobello Road Market is still good on every Saturday—in the arcades you can still find some amazing things such as beautiful silver, prints, and books." He

dismisses the idea that these markets have all become tourist traps. "Golborne Road and Church Street are also great and, in the East, I try to go to Columbia Road every Sunday." After all, could there be a more suitable home for a passionate collector than London? It is, after all, the home of great collections such as that of the British Museum, which, come to think of it, would also be the ideal location for Zandberg's office. |



