

Sarah Chambers

DAVID NICHOLLS talks to the designer about the decoration of her Victorian terrace in south London

PHOTOGRAPHS CHRIS TUBBS

‘It’s good to try something out on your own house before doing it for a client,’ Sarah Chambers says. We are sitting in the newly completed kitchen in her tall Victorian terrace house in south London, and the designer is referring to the gentle hit of dusty pink between dark wood cabinets and pure white Corian worktops. The alluring finish of this custom-made splashback is created with silver gilt, uniformly stipple-painted onto strengthened glass. ‘Now that I’ve seen what can be achieved, I’m specifying something similar for a client’s house in Putney.’

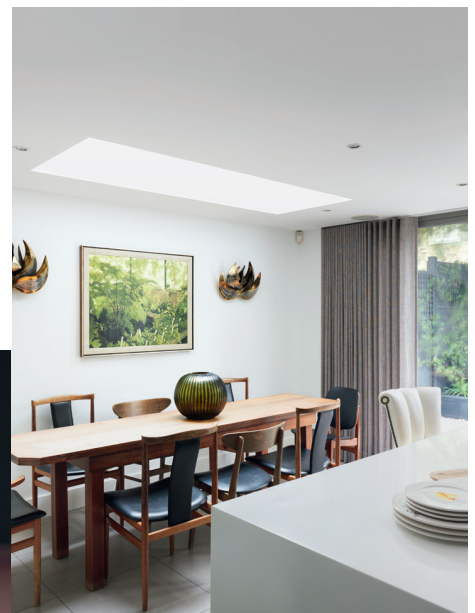
This reassuringly practical approach would certainly make Sarah’s clients feel as if they were in safe hands. And while it is never wise to promote national stereotypes, there is a warmth and charm that comes with her Irish accent, softened by over 20 years of life in London. When asked what she would consider one of her strengths, she says with a laugh that she is ‘a good intermediary between couples that don’t agree’. A skill not to be undervalued.

Looking at her house, however, it would seem that Sarah also has rather a knack for introducing texture. The curved headboard in the main bedroom is covered in printed velvet by Créations Métaphores and edged with antiqued-brass studs; the concrete tiles in the large walk-in shower feature a raised damask motif, adding interest to an otherwise blank expanse. A particularly clever detail on the tall white doors to the sitting room is the addition of geometric mouldings inlaid with mother of pearl and paper wallcovering by Nobilis. Similarly appealing decorative flourishes catch the eye throughout.

The starting point for the pink in the kitchen came from a set of vintage Pyrex bowls that she bought during a year spent living in Boston. The pink of the spare room – the Vanners fabric on the ▷

INTERIOR DESIGNER

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The kitchen was custom-made by Wabi Sabi, with features including an inset in the island for displaying vintage cabbage ware (bottom right). Designer Sarah Chambers





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT An internal garden divides the back sitting room and kitchen extension. Nobilis's 'Seychelles' wallpaper has been used on the sitting room door. The spare room



NEED to KNOW

After a career in the City as a foreign-exchange trader, Sarah Chambers studied interior and spatial design at the Chelsea College of Art & Design. Upon graduating in 2000, she landed a job as a designer at Carden Cunietti, one of *House & Garden's* Leading 100 Interior Designers. 'I learnt absolutely everything there,' she says. After five years, she became a director of the company. 'Sarah is really devoted and spends a lot of time on the designs and preparation,' says Eleanora Cunietti. 'Interior design is a people-person job, where you also have to be organised and creative. That's why she's so good at it.'

After the birth of her daughter and an opportunity to spend two years living in San Francisco and Boston, Sarah left Carden Cunietti, and upon her return to London in 2014, decided to set up on her own. Her projects range from single rooms to extensive refurbishments.

headboard, custom bedlinen from Heirlooms and piping on Wemyss velvet curtains – was taken from a section of a water-colour painted by her artist mother, which also hangs in the room.

The spatial-design aspect of Sarah's training means that she can offer clients a more involved service than mere decoration. An example of this can be seen in the unusual way she tackled the side-return extension. Rather than closing off or completely opening up what became the meeting point of the back sitting room and the new extension, Sarah has created a miniature internal garden, which is open to the elements above, with french windows on both sides. There is enough room for a tall and bushy potted bamboo, and light can pour into an otherwise windowless back sitting room.

Sarah's previous career as a foreign-exchange trader saw her dealing in hundreds of millions of pounds, so she has long been accustomed to needing every penny accounted for. She prides herself on providing accurate estimates:

'You can't afford to get them wrong at all. Nothing upsets a client more – and rightly so. If I am given the budget for a project – even if it is just one room – I can work out where the money needs to be spent.' She finds it useful to spend a day with a

client making the rounds of show-rooms, where they can test the comfort of sofas and feel fabrics. That said, many of her projects include custom pieces made to her design.

'If I don't show a client something that surprises them, I'm not doing my job. Interior designers can be expensive. If they're paying me, why would I give them something they'd do themselves?' □

Added insight

Describe the ideal client. I like a client who has an idea – even a single tear-sheet – that I can develop into a fully specified design scheme they couldn't have come up with themselves. When it's installed and they're happy, that's the most satisfying thing.

What's your motto? Question everything.

A lot of interior design is about trying to foresee what could go wrong. Is something comfortable? Will it last? Does it work? What might the client not like about it, and if that happens, how can I change it?

Share a contact from your address book. I use the curtain and blinds specialist Downers Design (downersdesign.co.uk) for all of my projects. I think it's the best company in London for custom window treatments.

Sarah Chambers Interiors: 07939-037107; sarahchambersinteriors.co.uk. To see more pictures of this project, visit houseandgarden.co.uk/sarahchambers