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THE BEST OF LONDON

Facing page, from bottom: Emma Roig with her three children in the living room of their Kensington home, which was decorated by Blathnaid Behan; the vintage lounge chair is by Fritz Henningsen, the 1940s floor lamp was an Avignon find, and the artwork is by Ana García Pan. An antique chesterfield is upholstered in silk, the Grégoire stool is by Pierre Frey, and the folding screen is 19th century; the Sputnik light is by Venini, and the 19th-century chaise longue is embroidered by Lesage. This page: A floor lamp by Serge Mouille strikes a pose near a vintage cocktail table and mid-20th-century chairs; Behan designed the Paonazzo marble fireplace, the sofas, and the sliding mount for the triptych by Josep Vallribera (which conceals a flat-screen TV). See Resources.





OPEN SEASON

TO RECONCILE A VICTORIAN HOUSE WITH THEIR MODERN LIFESTYLE, A LONDON COUPLE ORDERS UP A GUT REHAB THAT'S ANYTHING BUT OLD-FASHIONED

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Once upon a time, Emma Roig's mother would gather her children together to help rearrange all the furniture in the house. Since the materfamilias was a gallery owner with a lifelong penchant for beautiful paintings and intriguing artifacts, those moving days left her offspring with a lasting impression. And one that goes some way toward explaining the verve and energy that Roig—a journalist and mother of three who was a correspondent for the Spanish newspaper *El País*—has dedicated to filling her new home in London.

Working with designer Blathnaid Behan, she and her young family now live amid a heady assemblage of soft colors and playful detailing accented by an eclectic collection of art (from Old Masters to Richard Prince) and quirkily elegant furnishings (a chandelier that once sparkled in the ballroom of the Berkeley Hotel; metal office chairs sumptuously reupholstered in silk velvet). Behind the handsome stucco façade of the 1847 house in Kensington are four gloriously remodeled floors, the culmination of lively discussions between Roig, her British-Iraqi banker husband, and the architect Níall McLaughlin. The goal was to re-create a bit of the loft-style living the couple became accustomed to after spending 11 years in New York.



The 1950s faux-bamboo dining chairs are upholstered in Veranda silk by Groundworks, the bronze-and-lacquer table was designed by Blathnaid Behan, and the 19th-century Chinese screens were a wedding present to Roig and her husband. See Resources.





WHEN THE TIME CAME TO DEVELOP
A COLOR SCHEME FOR HER FAMILY'S HOUSE IN KENSINGTON,
EMMA ROIG GAVE DESIGNER BLATHNAID BEHAN A
SURPRISINGLY SUBVERSIVE CUE:
"THINK THE QUEEN MOTHER ON LSD"

An award winner known for shaking up the status quo—tops in his portfolio are a fiberglass bandstand for the historic De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea and a daggerlike glass seaside house in County Cork—McLaughlin completely gutted the warren of Victorian rooms and drastically reoriented its layout. The sunny, south-facing rear of the building, with its welcoming garden, is now the front, thanks to the architect's moving of the entrance hall, master bedroom, and living room. The space-hogging central staircase was shifted and redesigned to include a dumbwaiter for luggage and laundry. Rounding off the new sense of openness and drama is a double-height glass-box extension with views of the garden. It's a cinematic touch entirely in keeping with the effervescent client's silver-screen brief.

"I wanted a house that looked as if Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire could live there," says Roig. "You know, elegant, dressed for cocktails,

shiny but not too shiny." She also told Behan that she had a slightly subversive notion regarding the colors: "I told her to think the Queen Mother on LSD." Translation? Soft splashes of candy-box pastels like lavender and daffodil-yellow and lots of crowd-pleasing warmth, including a leather banister on the glass-and-oak staircase and majestic floor-to-ceiling fabric-sheathed doors everywhere else. There's plenty of sultry glitter to boot. The Berkeley Hotel chandelier, which resembles a cascade of Arctic ice, dominates the poker room, and pearly metal cocktail tables by French superstar Hervé Van der Straeten dot the living room like silvery pods from outer space.

A chance meeting at a christening was what brought Roig and Behan into each other's orbit. "I could tell she had exquisite, well-balanced taste," the journalist says, recalling the Irish-born, London-based designer's soignée ensemble that day. It was Behan who came up with

In the poker room, 1960s office chairs surround a leather-clad table by Behan; the walls are covered in grass cloth, and the 1970s chandelier is a relic of the Berkeley Hotel. Facing page, clockwise from left: A sunken courtyard connects the kitchen and dining room, and the teak outdoor furniture is by Julian Chichester from Henry Hall Designs. Now the main entrance, the rear façade was redesigned by Niall McLaughlin, and the garden was revamped by Behan. In the kitchen, a Chippendale-style chair with a linen seat stands at the end of an island topped with Calacatta Oro marble; Behan designed the light fixture, which has a silk chiffon shade. See Resources.





the button-tufted, silk-upholstered headboard in the master bedroom, which incorporates adjustable reading lights and clever folding screens for keeping bedside paraphernalia at bay. The elegantly tapered, ingeniously adaptable dining tables (depending on how they are combined, they seat anywhere from 4 to 14) are her creations, too. So are the stunning pair of Paonazzo marble fireplaces in the living room, their flamboyant veining a potent mix of copper, slate, and ivory tones.

Behan, who also oversaw the house's restrained clipped-box garden, is a dab hand at marriage counseling, too. Faced with a wife who didn't want a television in the living room and a strong-willed husband who can't live without one, the designer came up with an elegant but low-tech solution straight out of the playbook of Sir John Soane. The telly is hidden in a wall behind an abstract triptych by the Catalan artist Josep Vallribera, which has been mounted onto sliding bronze frames: Now you see BBC Three, now you don't.

As for the furnishings, it took Roig and Behan 18 months and more than a dozen trips to furniture sales and showrooms on two continents to fill this engagingly original house. Their booty came from as far afield as New York and San Francisco, Avignon and Paris, Parma and Montpellier, though some pieces were harder won than others. Just as a rare Fritz Henningsen leather wing chair on their wish list was proving elusive, Roig got wind of one coming up for auction the next day in Brussels—a trip that meant a predawn start. "If you love me, please take me," she told her husband. He did, they triumphed, and the coveted Danish icon is a supporting player in the living room.

Most people would labor to keep such treasures on the down-low, far from prying eyes. Fortunately, Roig likes to share her good fortune. As far as she's concerned, the more people who can enjoy her family's splendid place, the better. "I can't stop giving parties," she confesses. "My husband says, 'What's the occasion?' And I say, 'I don't know, let me think about it.'" ■



The 1940s iron bench in the master bedroom is cushioned with a David Hicks fabric from Lee Jofa; the Behan-designed headboard is upholstered in Shantung Malibran silk, and the Lesage-embroidered curtains are of Faille Hamilton silk, both by Claremont; the artwork is by Sabrina Skinner, and the bedcover is vintage. Facing page: A wall of lacquered doors provides storage in the master bathroom; the counter is limestone, and the tiles are travertine. See Resources.

