

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE

BALANCING GLORIOUS
GEORGIAN DETAILING WITH
THE DEMANDS OF MODERN
FAMILY LIFE HAS ALLOWED
THIS EDINBURGH DWELLING
TO EXPRESS ITS TRUE
PERSONALITY

Photography ZAC and ZAC Words Judy Diamond





[Left] Pared-back simplicity in the family bathroom. [Previous page] “We like to produce interiors that are as individual as our clients, so we love to ‘bespoke the bespoke’, taking specialist finishes and giving them an additional twist,” says Ampersand’s design director Jackie Fiskien. “Here, we scaled up a wonderful Phillip Jeffries wallpaper to perfectly fit the master bathroom and give a magical, calming mountain-scape view from the CP Hart bath. Its high-quality vinyl finish made it fit for purpose in the bathroom without compromising on aesthetics.”

omes usually evolve slowly. Bit by bit, we add new pieces to old favourites; we try out different colours (and often keep them, because it’s easier than repainting); we display quirky treasures brought back from our travels, whether or not they complement or clash with the rest of the decor. Layer upon layer, almost by accident, we end up with rooms that tell the story of our life. It’s this gradual accumulation that gives an interior its character; the result might be uneven or mismatched in places, but the personality at the root of it is priceless.

Bringing in an interior designer to fast-track that process, then, comes with a degree of risk. Yes, you get all the many benefits that a professional can bring, but isn’t

there a risk of ending up with a sterile showpiece that’ll never feel like a lived-in home – particularly when the commission involves an entire townhouse, as in this case?

Jackie Fiskien, design director of Ampersand Interiors, has been in the business long enough to have developed the necessary skills and strategies to avoid such dangers. “It would have been easy for everything to look very samey, with almost interchangeable rooms,” she agrees. “We knew it would be essential to give each area its own identity, but without tipping into the ‘magpie effect’, where everything stands out too much and the whole thing lacks cohesion.”

The property in question, in the heart of Edinburgh’s New Town, had recently undergone a full-scale refurbishment at the hands of high-end developer Villet & Co, at which point its new owners, a family with two young sons, moved in. Very quickly afterwards, the Ampersand team embarked on the year-long task of furnishing and decorating the freshly finished rooms. There was no existing scheme or furniture to accommodate – the family had brought nothing with them, to the extent that they were willing to sleep on mattresses on the floor until their new beds were delivered.

The brief was to create a home that felt calm, comfortable and tactile. It was to be modern but classical in style, and to blend natural fabrics and finishes with ►



B&B Italia's four-poster is big enough and striking enough to hold its own in the master bedroom. The light is from David Brown Lighting, and the Wychwood Designs armchairs are upholstered in two Mark Alexander fabrics, Cayoosh and Rocky Blizzard

[Below, left] Bespoke Ampersand wardrobes have Stereo's Suede Effect Touch wallpaper on the door fronts. The four-poster is by Turnpost, the Dedar cushions have a luxurious Samuel & Sons trim, and the Bristol wall lights are from Visual Comfort. A Thibault grasscloth covers the walls.

[Middle] The bath and sink are from Duravit's Cape Cod range.

[Right] Porta Romana's Flynn Caged Stairwell Lantern makes an elegant statement

original and eclectic detailing. For cohesion, Fiskin devised a core neutral palette throughout, adding textures and key colours – copper, inky blue and black – to define specific areas.

There is a large kitchen and dining room on the lower-ground storey; the ground floor has the drawing room, the study and a utility room; the first floor is given over to a magnificent master bedroom suite; and bedrooms for the children and guests are on the top storey. A small, south-facing garden leads to a separate mews house containing the garage, cinema room, sauna and steam room.

The townhouse has held onto its original features, including distinctive curved

walls in the ground-floor rooms, and the designer was keen to make the most of the period detailing. “I love Georgian architecture,” she says. “The proportions lend themselves to modern and traditional designs, and as long as you get the scale right, you can do anything. In fact, I’d say the biggest mistake you can make when dealing with large rooms such as these is to wimp out on the scale of the furniture and lighting. Don’t be afraid of them.”

After 25 years in the business, Fiskin has less fear than most. She was undaunted by the impressively tall windows or the high ceilings. To deal with the former, for example, and prevent the window treatments from dominating the





[Left] The buttoned leather sofa curves into the wall of the study, which itself is papered in Phillip Jeffries' Brown Herringbone Rivet wallpaper. The footstool-coffee table is upholstered in Zoffany's Elswick Paisley fabric. **[Above]** The drawing room is a formal, elegant space that is full of personality, thanks to its layers of interesting textures and patterns

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room, she went for soft, textured, unstructured curtains on simple metal poles.

In the master bedroom, likewise, it took some thought to create a sense of intimacy and serenity. “It can be hard to live in such a generous space,” she explains. “This is especially true in a north-facing room – we didn’t want to create something that felt refreshingly pared-back in summer but which would become a bleak wasteland in winter.” Texture and pattern break up the space, as does the four-poster bed, which cleverly introduces variation into the height of the furniture. “As long as you work with the scale of the room rather than fighting it, ceiling height is not a problem,” she believes. “Scaling up items is imperative – there is nothing worse than furniture designed for standard-sized homes being dotted forlornly around large rooms.”

The basement had challenges of a different kind. The developer had envisioned this storey as a large kitchen with a dining nook, with the sitting room adjacent. “Our client worried that this would result in the beautiful drawing room on the ground floor not being used,” explains the designer. “To remedy this, we ►

[Opposite] The designer has honoured the Georgians’ love of symmetry in the formal drawing room but with added playful touches such as the furry Arran armchairs by Fisk.

[Below] The study’s bespoke cabinetry is finished in Zoffany’s Ink paint and fitted with antique brass library lamps by Visual Comfort. A Phoenix Crown chandelier by Porta Romana hangs above the Julian Chichester desk





The kitchen is centred around a huge marble-clad island that works well for family dining. The cabinetry is by Villette & Co and the bar stools are by Philippe Starck for Kartell. [Left] The dining nook was replaced by this laidback seating area. The cushions are all bespoke by Ampersand in fabrics and trims from Mulberry, Manuel Canovas, Fox Linton and Samuel & Sons

replaced the dining corner with a bespoke seating unit and turned the large adjoining space into a proper dining room.” The drawing room, as a result, is well used: “Such rooms are often too formal and don’t encourage people to spend time and relax in them,” says Fiskien. “I was thrilled to hear the boys like to sit in the sheepskin-covered armchairs watching movies and toasting marshmallows at the fire. That’s how a room really should be used!”

It remains an understated, elegant space, layered with different textures that animate the neutral palette. “The client is very interested in natural finishes and ethnic artefacts, so we worked hard with her to incorporate such items,” points out the designer. “She says she has learnt a lot from us working together on the house, not just about how to play with proportion and colour but also about how to look at the whole picture, focusing not on each individual aspect of a room but on how things work together.”

As well as being luxuriously comfortable and tranquil, there is an eclectic ►



feel to the collections that adds individuality and a personal touch. All of this is in evidence in the study too, whose cabinetry, painted in Zoffany’s dark Ink, was designed, made and fitted by Ampersand. It incorporates a separate seating area that precisely follows the curve of the wall. “We created space for interesting artefacts and lighting as well as books – this is very much a place for relaxation and inspiration as well as work.”

Like the rest of the rooms, the study succeeds because its decor is cohesive in all elements. But that’s not the only reason: “While this ensures the scheme hangs together, it is the juxtaposition with some of the more luxurious velvets, furs and cashmeres as points of interest that makes the whole thing work.” ■

[Opposite] “As the dining table was designed to seat 14, we planned a mix of seating to ensure there was not an army of matching dining chairs,” says the designer. “We were able to achieve a much more informal feel with a mix of contemporary leather chairs, some upholstered linen chairs and a couple of large carvers with patterned linen backs.”

[This page] The mews house at the end of the garden contains a warm and very stylish spa suite

