

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

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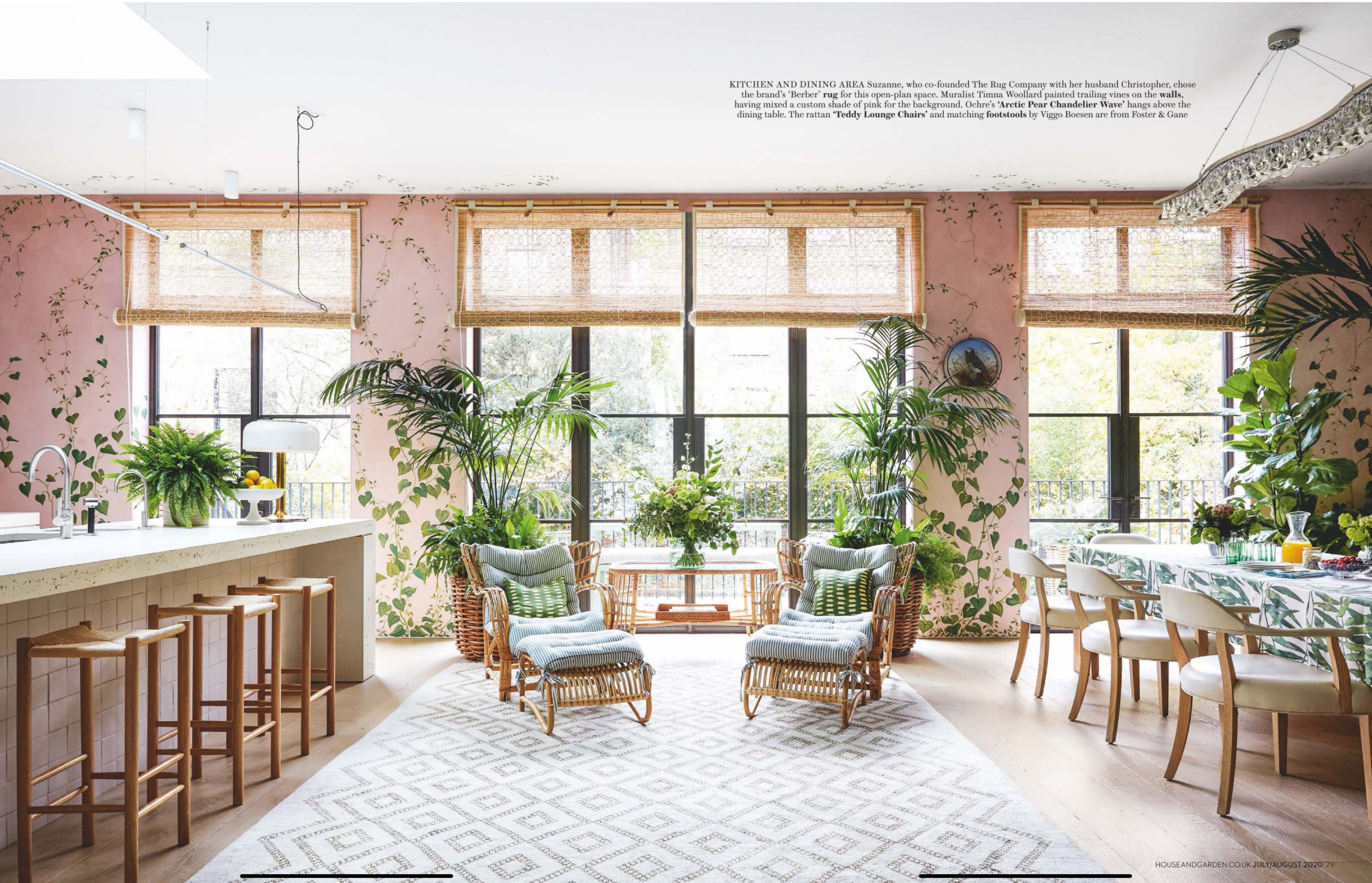
When Jos and Annabel White bought a Victorian house in London after 15 years living in New York, they knew exactly who to turn to for help – architect Basil Walter and designer Suzanne Sharp



DINING AREA Teamed with bespoke oak and leather chairs by Rupert Bevan, the dining table is covered in a tablecloth that echoes the abundance of greenery in this room. The 18th-century dresser is from Brownrigg and Bert & May supplied the reclaimed Georgian floorboards. KITCHEN The terracotta tiles are from Domenico Mori in the bianco tela colourway. Designed by Basil's team, the kitchen was made by Robert Timmons Furniture



KITCHEN AND DINING AREA Suzanne, who co-founded The Rug Company with her husband Christopher, chose the brand's 'Berber' rug for this open-plan space. Muralist Timna Woollard painted trailing vines on the walls, having mixed a custom shade of pink for the background. Ochre's 'Arctic Pear Chandelier Wave' hangs above the dining table. The rattan 'Teddy Lounge Chairs' and matching footstools by Viggo Boesen are from Foster & Gane



Once upon a time, Annabel White worked for Suzanne and Christopher Sharp – founders of The Rug Company – as a director of the growing American arm of the business; they remained friends after Annabel left the company in 2010. Then Annabel hired the architect Basil Walter to redesign the townhouse that she and her husband Jos, an entrepreneur, had bought in Manhattan’s West Village. They, too, became friends. In fact, Annabel introduced Basil to her best friend, Jill, and the two are now married.

A few years ago, Annabel and Jos moved back home to the UK and brought Basil on board to work his magic on the house they had purchased in west London. It was a big project in an area where big projects are known to cause tensions between neighbours. Luckily, Basil happened to be friends with the people who lived next door and they helped navigate potentially tricky relations on the street.

While the house was being done up, Annabel and Jos needed somewhere to live. Suzanne and Christopher, who lived round the corner, had decided to do some travelling in the aftermath of selling The Rug Company in 2015. Annabel and Jos offered to rent their Notting Hill house from them, thus adding the dynamic of landlord and tenant to their relationship, which soon evolved yet again. Annabel had always admired Suzanne’s style, and she and Jos loved living in the Sharps’ house. It occurred to Annabel that her former boss (her friend and now her landlady) would be the perfect person to help decorate the new house. So the two adopted the roles of designer and client. Are you keeping up?

Apart from the occasional blurring of boundaries between its protagonists, this tale is actually a pretty straightforward one: a mid-Victorian villa has been reconfigured to suit the lives of its 21st-century inhabitants. But perhaps it is the longstanding relationships between the owners, their architect and their designer that makes it such a compelling story. ‘The whole process was like being with family,’ says Annabel. ‘It was fun.’

The fun started when Basil realised that little more than the façade could be saved. The brick and timber structure would not support the large open spaces Jos and Annabel wanted to create. What is admirable, however, is how Basil has carved a path between respecting and reworking the original architecture. ‘It was important to have something that spoke to the history of the house,’ he says. ‘We wanted to create the feeling of it having somehow always been like this.’ He pauses and then adds, ‘But also, not quite.’

The original owners would indeed have come through the porticoed entrance on the raised ground floor into a hall with fine rooms on either side. What they would not have seen were architraves and panelling that feel simultaneously Victorian and modernly minimal. They are painted in the same light grey as the walls and are like subtle, ghostly impressions of what was once there. There would certainly not have been brass palm-tree standard lamps, or armchairs upholstered in what looks like yak hair.

These two pieces are evidence of Suzanne’s hand at work. The combination of her eclectic, colourful and joyful aesthetic with Basil’s rigorously researched and restrained architecture is a potent one. It also expresses the tastes of their mutual friend and client. ‘I knew working with Basil and Suzanne would bring out the best of what we would like,’ explains Annabel. ‘I wouldn’t be working with someone who saw my home as an extension of their brand.’

Thanks to Basil’s interventions, when today’s owners walk in the front door, they can see all the way through the house to the back

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garden. A wide opening at the back of the hall leads through to an open-plan kitchen and dining room that runs the width of the building. It is one of the great successes of the house.

Here again is a marvellous meeting place for the ideas of architect and designer. The volume of the room is impressive, with a sculptural staircase snaking its way through the five storeys. It feels like a garden room – not just because of the views through the windows, the plentiful indoor plants and cane furniture that fill the space. Suzanne also commissioned the decorative artist Timna Woollard to paint vines that creep up the walls and onto the ceiling.

‘I’m all about colour and pattern,’ says Annabel. She has certainly had this delivered throughout the house. Fire-engine-red painted woodwork is teamed with densely patterned leaf wallpaper in the games room downstairs; leopard-print carpet sits under blue cabinetry in her dressing room; the bed in her son’s bedroom on the third floor is in the shape of a sailboat and sits against a wall painted like a desert-island seascape. Unsurprisingly, there is no shortage of rugs from The Rug Company. ‘I would still find it hard to use a rug from anywhere else,’ says Suzanne, who was initially nervous about taking on what is technically her first interior-design project. ‘I have decorated my own homes over the years, but spending someone else’s money is completely different,’ she explains. ‘What if I messed it up?’ She need not have worried.

Interestingly, Annabel’s favourite room is the main bedroom, which is a complete gear shift from the more social parts of the house. The walls are painted to resemble raw plaster, on the floor is an enormous white alpaca fleece rug and two Thirties scalloped armchairs add a touch of art deco glamour. ‘It is so calm,’ she says. ‘I love my routine of going in, putting on my creams and getting into bed and reading – it is an escape from the craziness of London.’

Navigating the craziness of London (and a few other cities besides) is part of Annabel’s latest adventure with another friend, Lucy Russell. The two worked together in PR in the Nineties and have recently launched Lubelle, an online directory that highlights places and services – particularly in the wellbeing and beauty sectors – that they have experienced and loved. They are developing their business while raising families and juggling their other commitments. As Annabel says, ‘I love connecting people and introducing brands that our readers should know about.’ Her circle of friends must be expanding by the day □

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Basil Walter: bw-architects.com

Suzanne Sharp Studio: suzannesharpstudio.com

Lubelle: lubelle.co.uk



DRAWING ROOM A Seventies palm tree floor lamp by Maison Jansen from Philip Thomas matches the brass finish of Soane Britain's "The Bookcase Etagere". Howe's 'Foxhound Sofa' and a Seventies coffee table from Fiona McDonald stand on a rug designed by Suzanne for The Rug Company



TELEVISION ROOM (*this page*) Suzanne designed the 'Mohair' rug. The oak and sheepskin 'Cabana Yeti Chairs' by Timothy Oulton are from Heal's. The mirrored panels were sourced from Bie Baert. ENTRANCE HALL (*opposite top left*) This passage leads from the front door through to the garden. GAMES ROOM (*top right and bottom*) Downstairs, a corridor with panelling in Farrow & Ball's 'Rectory Red' leads into the games room. The walls are papered in 'Royal Fernery' by Martyn Lawrence Bullard from Cole & Son. The 'Strips Sofa' was designed by Cini Boeri for Arflex in 1972





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MAIN BEDROOM (opposite top row and this page) The bedside table is from Julian Chichester. Annabel on one of two vintage armchairs covered in Linwood's 'Omega' velvet. DRESSING ROOM The walls, ceiling and cupboards are painted in Farrow & Ball's 'Stiffkey Blue'. George Smith's 'Cockerel Stool' and The Sofa & Chair Company's 'Stanley' sofa are covered in George Spencer Design's 'Spencer Velvet' in aegean. SON'S BEDROOM Hook Design created the desert-island mural and painted the boat-shaped bed, which was designed by Suzanne Sharp Studio