

Grand alliance

Jacqueline and Matthew Dunton have combined their passion for French-style furniture – repro and antique – and a neutral palette to transform a neglected Victorian villa into a sophisticated home

WORDS ANNE ARMSTRONG PHOTOGRAPHS VIV YEO



KEY FACTS

Location London

Period Late Victorian semi-detached villa with some Edwardian architectural details

Size A substantial three-storey house with six bedrooms and three bathrooms

Owners Jacqueline and Matthew Dunton and their four-month-old baby son, Rowan

ABOVE Black granite work surfaces provide a classic contrast against the kitchen cabinets, hand-built by Andrew Walsh Joiners, and painted in Farrow & Ball's White Tie

OPPOSITE French antique dining furniture, bought at a London auction, looks very much at home in the elegantly proportioned kitchen. The menu blackboard adds a light-hearted contemporary twist

Jacqueline and Matthew Dunton's graceful Victorian villa sits in the middle of one of the leafiest streets in west London. 'We were willing to take a long time to find a large house because we knew we wanted to start a family sooner rather than later,' explains Matthew. 'This house was both a solution – and a challenge.'

Today its interior is light-filled and inviting – in stark contrast to what the Duntons encountered when they first stepped over the threshold. Their initial viewing was hurried as the estate agent's call had come just as they were setting off on holiday. Jacqueline recalls: 'We were on our way to the airport but we decided to call in en route. It all looked unbelievably dark inside, as it was

divided into tiny flats, occupied by 30 Polish workers in total! There were also a few stray cats around the place, and the garden was more like a forest. We could see that all the original architectural features were intact, but after 50 years of neglect, the place was in need of tender care.

'As we climbed the stairs we noticed two lovely old mirrors, fixed to the wall, and actually, they were what sold the house to us,' she adds. 'They were just our style – it seemed like a sign it was meant to be.'

Jacqueline's family have plenty of home renovation and building expertise, so the restoration needed to turn the house back into an elegant home wasn't too daunting. After the architect, Jack Cruickshank, drew up the plans, >





ABOVE The walls in the sitting room have been painted in Limestone by Fired Earth to create a calm backdrop for an appealing mix of antique and contemporary furniture. The gilt-framed overmantel mirror was bought during a romantic weekend break in Paris and brought back home via Eurostar. 'That was when we decided we wanted to start furnishing with French furniture,' says Jacqueline. The classically-simple fireplace came from English Fireplaces – 'We think the original fire surround must have long gone,' says Matthew

Jacqueline's father stepped forward as project manager, with Matthew and Jacqueline helping out every night and every weekend. 'The house needed gutting,' explains Jacqueline. 'One room was so nicotine-stained – it was pure yellow – and I remember putting a plastic bag over my head to protect my hair as I carefully stripped its walls. But when I came back the next day my father had taken the ceiling down as he thought it was beyond repairing.' 'We made a few good discoveries along the way, too, though,' she reveals, 'such as uncovering a couple of original fireplaces that had been boarded over for years.' The large light-filled kitchen, which has a conservatory with doors opening out into the rear garden, has definitely become the heart of this home. 'I'm from a family of eight children and the kitchen was always an important place when I was growing up,' says Jacqueline. 'It means a lot to me to continue that tradition.'

The pair decided to design the kitchen themselves and commissioned a local company to produce made-to-

measure furniture. Matthew says: 'By the time we had reached the kitchen stage, we were running out of funds, so it made practical sense to have our cabinets constructed from a mix of wood and MDF.'

Within a few months all the fundamentals were finally taken care of, and Jacqueline and Matthew, who love antiques, especially 19th-century French furniture, were able to start thinking about decorating, although they decided against having a strictly Victorian look.

'We were determined to respect the age of the house,' says Jacqueline, 'but when it comes to furnishings, I enjoy mixing period, reproduction, and contemporary pieces. As for colours, we both prefer neutrals, with black accents here and there.'

One area of the house where the antique distinctively merges with the contemporary is the sitting room. The ceiling is heavily beamed, and the space created by a curved bay window – complete with leaded glass – is the ideal spot for an antique baby grand piano. Matthew has >



LEFT Many of Jacqueline and Matthew's antiques were bought at local auctions including the Queen Anne-style walnut sideboard, which provides room for a pair of rewired, antique stone and silver lamps, with shades from Laura Ashley, chosen to complement the walnut **RIGHT AND ABOVE** The vintage tobacco-coloured leather chair comes from The Old Cinema in Chiswick. The ornate cabinet with brass inlay dates back to the 19th century, while the painted, aged resin and glass table lamp is from Sweetpea & Willow



RENOVATING TIMELINE

- **Jan 2005** Found property
- **March 2005** Purchase completed within six weeks. Plans drawn up to include the creation of a self-contained suite and a games room at the top of the house. Worked on design of new kitchen
- **May-June 2005** Ripped out plumbing and electrics. Completely rewired and re-plumbed the house. Stripped wallpaper. Replastered most rooms and ceilings
- **July-August 2005** Tiled bathrooms and kitchen floor. Kitchen installed. Rooms painted and carpets fitted
- **September 2005** Moved in. Threw a huge party to celebrate
- **April 2006** Repainted hallway and bedroom
- **November 2006** Fireplace installed in sitting room

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE
The French reproduction furniture in the master bedroom from Sweetpea & Willow is complemented by an understated pale mushroom shade, mixed by Jacqueline, chosen for the walls. The velvet throw, bought from John Lewis, adds more sensuous colour



BELOW The pièce de résistance of the appealing family bathroom is the distressed antique dresser, which was a salvage find from another old house. 'We were so pleased when we spotted it – the sink was already in place. All we had to do was to clean it well and then enjoy using it,' says Jacqueline

'A former bedroom has been converted into a family bathroom, with the house's original roll-top bath in situ'

tracked down its provenance. 'It was manufactured by Hopkinsons of London, and sold initially by Harrods back in 1870,' he says. And while several other Victorian pieces are evident, the pair of café au lait faux suede upholstered sofas in the centre of the room are Italian and add a more contemporary note.

The same philosophy has been applied on the floor above. The master bedroom, for example, is beautifully finished in creams and pale gold – a restful backdrop for a restrained arrangement of French-style furniture including an upholstered bed, a mirror-fronted armoire and a chaise longue. And while the painted fireplace is original, a new gas fire has been installed. Another modern touch was the addition of an en-suite bathroom. Matthew explains: 'There was a bathroom next door so we turned it into an en suite simply by creating access from the bedroom.'

Further along the landing, a former bedroom has been converted into a family bathroom, with a roll-top bath original to the house, although now re-sited. 'We've >





painted it and had it re-enamelled as we wanted to preserve the original bath,' says Jacqueline.

Antiques also blend with modern furnishings in the guest rooms, which look out onto the garden. Matthew and Jacqueline find that placing modern over-sized lamps beside antique or reproduction period beds is a cheap but effective way to bridge the gap between the eras.

One of the guest rooms also contains an especially treasured antique – one of Jacqueline's all-time favourite pieces. 'I love black lacquered furniture, and a while ago a friend tipped me off that there was a screen coming up for sale at a local auction,' she recalls. 'Matthew pretended that he had bid furiously, but hadn't managed to win it – and then he produced it later as a really memorable surprise birthday present.'

There's no disputing that furniture is something of a passion in the Duntons' lives, but because prices can be high, both in antiques shops, and even on the high street, they have often found it difficult to buy within their budget. 'That's what gave us the idea to start our own company,' says Matthew. Recently they've moved their makeshift office out of their home, which means they can now appreciate the pleasure of living in this elegant house without the accompaniment of constantly ringing telephones and clickings of computer keyboards. ↪
Matthew and Jacqueline run Sweetpea & Willow, specialising in repro French furniture (0845 257 2627; sweetpeaandwillow.com).

ABOVE The cherrywood sleighbed was found by Matthew at Holly Johnson Antiques; the bedside tables came from Chiswick Auctions. The dramatic lamps are from Sweetpea & Willow while the lacquered screen – one of Jacqueline's favourite pieces – was another of Matthew's auction successes

RIGHT The mirror on the first floor landing was one of a pair left on the wall there by the previous owner. 'We loved them so much we bought the house,' quips Matthew. 'We couldn't get them off the wall, but we like the way the diamond-paned window is reflected here, so we just gave the frames a coat of white paint.' The French-style, prettily buttoned sofa came from Chiswick Auctions



JACQUELINE SHARES HER DESIGN IDEAS

'The style's the thing,' stresses Jacqueline. 'We've never been worried about the condition of pieces we've bought – we accept that antiques may need to be repaired. We particularly love French-style furniture, like the buttoned sofa (left) on our landing.'

'We always advise people to look for something unusual. I have a design background and tend to look at antiques as pieces of art. For me, colour and shape are important; Matthew tends to be interested in provenance.'

'It's always great to find something old and original but we are just as happy if a piece turns out to be a reproduction after all!'