



Jacquie Dunton with husband Matt and nine-month-old Rowan — even his nursery is a “mini-Versailles”

# Inspired by a palace

When a London couple bought a Victorian villa in Ealing, little did they know it would hold the key to their future, dealing in French furniture, says **Katie Law**

**B**EFORE Jacquie and Matt Dunton bought their large Victorian villa in Ealing three years ago, there had been no fewer than 20 people living in it, most of them migrant Polish workers. “It was in a terrible state, rooms divided in two, fireplaces all boarded up, rooms stained by nicotine and some really weird objects, including huge glass jars of pickled snakes,” says Jacquie, shuddering. This is difficult to imagine since it is now both a comfortable six-bedroom house, with the original details lovingly restored, and also something of a showcase for Sweetpea & Willow, Jacquie and Matt’s fledgling business, which specialises in selling reproduction French furniture.

“Although there were a lot of really nasty things about the house when we bought it, we were inspired by two enormous French mirrors that had been left behind by the previous owners. They were our starting point, our first taste of

**‘Even the nursery looks like a mini-Versailles, with a scroll-ended cot and French damask wallpaper’**

French furniture,” says Jacquie. Since then the couple, who now have a nine-month-old son called Rowan, have expanded their business and have just opened their first furniture showroom, in Isleworth.

The Sweetpea & Willow look, which is reflected throughout the house, is French Rococo, pale and interesting but with occasional colourful, modern twists. Even Rowan’s nursery looks like a mini-Versailles, with its scroll-ended cot, French grey damask wallpaper and sophisticated jute and silk mix curtains. “He can change it when he’s older,” Jacquie laughs, “but for now he has to put up with my taste.”

Next door is Jacquie and Matt’s bedroom, which, like the two spare bedrooms across the landing, is elegantly



A blackboard creates a charming background to an elegant table

Pictures by David George

furnished in restrained Marie Antoinette style. But the attention to detail is everywhere, even down to the lampshades, with their silk trim and beaded edges. Downstairs the house feels magnificently “period” and authentic, with its colourful leaded-glass front door and side panels, imposing dark-



The six-bedroom Victorian villa, with original details lovingly restored, is now a comfortable family home and showcase for Jacquie and Matt’s fledgling French furniture business, Sweetpea & Willow

stained wooden beams and black-and-white tiled hallway. It might feel gloomy, were it not for the lightness of touch in the sitting room, achieved by barely off-white walls, a glittering chandelier, a pair of faux suede sofas and a couple of chairs from Sweetpea & Willow that have been upholstered in bright pink damask.

A baby grand piano sits in the window and various antique cabinets are dotted around the room, which give the impression of being heirloom pieces but were actually picked up for next to nothing at Chiswick and Lots Road auctions.

Jacquie, in her early thirties, grew up in Ealing and comes from a family of eight children, all of whom live nearby. “We’re a tight-knit family,” she says, “always seeing each other.” Before setting up her own line of furniture, Jacquie worked in graphic design, having studied it at Newcastle Polytechnic, and ran her own company designing everything from CD covers to dating adverts. But after she and Matt had bought the house and inherited the two huge French mirrors,

she began to think about how she might be able to come up with something similar, pieces that would be desirable yet affordable. “The first time the telephone rang and a customer wanted to order something, I couldn’t believe it. I thought it was a joke,” she says.

**S**OMEHOW she makes it all sound so easy, even though she was heavily pregnant and Matt was working full-time in finance. “We didn’t have much money, so both the business and redecorating the house were done on very tight budgets. Matt used to help me in the evenings and at weekends until we decided it made financial sense for him to work on the business full-time,” she says. “Now he’s the brains behind it all, while I do the fluffy stuff.” Fluffy she certainly is not, however, judging from the kitchen, which she designed with the help of architects Jack Cruickshank. It is a chic affair, with

smart black granite work surfaces above limestone floors and sleek, cream-painted units, a mixture of wood and MDF, that conceal everything, from the dishwasher to the fridge.

The central island has a large industrial mixer tap coming out like an imposing post-modern sculpture which, she says, she wouldn’t be without, even though her mother thinks it is hideous. It makes a sharp contrast to the curly-legged painted wood table and silk upholstered dining room chairs, yet the hard and soft surfaces work well together.

The kitchen looks out on to the original conservatory, which still has its pretty encaustic floor tiles and glass side panels, while beyond it is a decent family-sized garden. It seems the ideal beginning for Jacquie and Matt and their new family.

**H&P** FOR MORE BEAUTIFUL HOMES, VISIT [homesandproperty.co.uk](http://homesandproperty.co.uk)



Off-white walls and chairs from Sweetpea & Willow in pink damask keep the sitting room light and airy



The chic kitchen, with its industrial mixer tap and smart black granite worktops, contrasts starkly with the rest of the house

**HOW TO GET THE LOOK**

The bedrooms are elegantly furnished in restrained Marie Antoinette style

- Sweetpea & Willow’s showroom is at 17 Pembroke Place, Isleworth, TW7 (0845 257 2627; [www.sweetpeaandwillow.com](http://www.sweetpeaandwillow.com))
- Cabinet and door handles from Chloe Alberry, 84 Portobello Road, W11 (020 7727 0707)
- Kitchen design by Jack Cruickshank Architects, 4 Evelyn Road, W4 (020 8742 7213; [www.jcarch.co.uk](http://www.jcarch.co.uk))
- Industrial kitchen mixer and faux suede sofas on clearance from FCI, Rays House, North Circular Road (east of Hanger Lane gyratory), NW10 (0870 977 8778; [www.fci.uk.com](http://www.fci.uk.com))
- Antiques from Chiswick and Lots Road auctions. Chiswick, 1 Colville Road, W3 (020 8992 4442; [www.chiswickauctions.co.uk](http://www.chiswickauctions.co.uk)) and 71-73 Lots Road, SW10 ([www.lotsroad.com](http://www.lotsroad.com); 020 7376 6800)



Elaborate French Rococo style is reflected through the house, with modern twists