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LEAP *of* FAITH

Paolo Moschino and Philip Vergelyen saw hidden potential in a drab flat near London's Victoria station. The revamped property is now the design pair's stylish in-town address

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Above: The London foyer of designers Paolo Moschino and Philip Vergelyen brings together a painting by Ernst Eller, a small watercolor by Christian Bérard, a garden statue of Mercury, and an 18th-century Swedish console. **Right:** The drawing room features a work on paper by Jean Cocteau over the mantel, a pair of brass bookshelves custom made after a Billy Baldwin design for Cole Porter, a vintage console by Jansen, and a sofa by Moschino's firm, Nicholas Haslam Ltd. For details see Sources.



Paolo Moschino and Philip Vergeylen cannot help acquiring beautiful and unusual things.

This may be because, as one of London's leading interior-design teams, they are constantly scouring the rich and rare for their clients. Or simply because, as Moschino says, "we're both—what's the word? Shopaholics. You see, I have lived in London for 30 years and I still cannot speak the language."

In fact Moschino's English is excellent, as is Vergeylen's. (Their origins lie in Italy and Belgium, respectively.) But it is doubtful born-and-bred Londoners would have seen much potential in an apartment in Victoria—an area of the city more associated with budget hotels than with the sumptuous, eclectic style that is the pair's trademark.

"We weren't really looking here," Moschino admits, and indeed, the property they stumbled upon conformed to the Victoria stereotype. A flat with five bedrooms and only one living room, it was little more than a depressing dormitory. Nevertheless, the two saw possibilities in the generous dimensions and Continental feel. "It didn't look like a London apartment, it looked like a Parisian one," Vergeylen says. "The ceilings were much higher, the rooms much wider. We thought, This is what we want."

They began by gutting it, keeping only the original 19th-century cornices and an oak parquet floor they found hidden beneath dreary carpets. The five bedrooms were reduced to two, the drawing room was doubled in size, a dining room was created, and the back of the flat was given a new corridor, with the master suite on one side and the guest quarters on the other. In the revised layout, the rooms have become airy spacious and no two are alike—the dining room ornate and mysterious with its black-lacquer paneling; the kitchen simple and full of light—though all are arranged with a scrupulous curator's eye.

The changes reflect Moschino and Vergeylen's lifestyle. Their principal home is a farmhouse in West Sussex; time in London is spent dealing with the demands of the business they run together. "So we're here three or four nights a week, and only really use it in the evenings," Moschino says. And because the farmhouse, for all its Tudor charm, has small rooms, "this is our place for entertaining."

The apartment's most intriguing feature is its double drawing room, which is divided by a 19th-century Coromandel screen. To move from one side to the other is to travel in time: One half is glamorously 20th century, with gilt leopard-skin stools and gleaming brass-edged tables, lamps, and bookcases; the other evokes the 18th and 19th centuries, with dark pine paneling, heavy silk curtains, and a splendid cabinet of curiosities, whose contents range from branches of coral to a small marble bust.

Dinner parties follow an established pattern—preprandial drinks in the modern drawing room, coffee in the antique one after the meal. "We would hate to live somewhere that was consistent throughout," Vergeylen says. "Some people are obsessed with using the same color from room to room, but to me that shows a lack of imagination. I hope I don't have a single style—it's a mélange of everything."

For Vergeylen, interior decoration is a second career; up until a few years ago, when he grew tired of perpetual business travel, he was a senior marketing executive for American Express. Moschino is a design veteran who spent eight years working with Nicky Haslam, known for his flamboyant spin on British traditionalism, before the decision was made to split the firm in two. Haslam retained his decorating business, while Moschino took over Nicholas Haslam Ltd., which sells furniture, fabrics, lighting, and antiques just off Pimlico Road. Eventually Moschino and Vergeylen started taking on interiors clients as well. "You do a pair of curtains for somebody," Moschino says, "and they end up asking you to do the whole house."

One thing he and Vergeylen have learned from renovating their own place is that no room is a lost cause. The dining area (formerly a bedroom) proves the point: With a single corner window and a pair of doors in impractical positions, the space was, says Vergeylen, "as wrong as it could possibly be." Their solution—moving one entry and adding both a trompe l'oeil window and door—created a pleasing balance.

For all the apartment's variety, there are unifying elements. The parquet flooring is one; a collection of Jean Cocteau works is another. There is also an abundance of large paneled mirrors. "I like them," Moschino says, "because they double the size of a room—and space is luxury."

He adds that every room needs to feel welcoming, and every room should contain a surprise. In the guest quarters this takes the form of an elegant bed corona; in the kitchen, a humble dresser filled with silver; and in the master bedroom, a tapestry—"Flemish, like me," says Vergeylen—covering the wall behind the bed.

The apartment is continuously evolving, largely in response to the couple's ever-growing collection of furniture and art. "You get to the point where you can't just go on adding things," Moschino says. "You have to make a radical change. We try to be restrained, but..."

"As you can see," finishes Vergeylen, with a contented sigh, "it just doesn't work." □

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Moschino (left) and Vergeylen. The dining room paneling is lacquered black; the Italian dining chairs are antique; the table's centerpiece is by Buccellati, and the terra-cotta sculpture is 18th-century French. The other end of the drawing room, with pine paneling and a 19th-century mahogany bookcase, has a clublike air; the sofa is by Nicholas Haslam Ltd., and the chairs and cocktail table are all vintage Jansen.





Clockwise from top left: The guest room's gilded bed is 19th-century French. The tapestry in the master bedroom is 17th-century Flemish; the liners are by D. Porthault, and the throw pillows are of a Georges Le Manach cotton. The guest bath's vanity, tub surround, and paneling are faux marble.

