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## SMALL AND PERFECTLY FORMED

*Having worked with the owners on two of their previous houses, Paolo Moschino redesigned this terrace house in Chelsea to make the most of the compact space, while adding a touch of continental charm*

TEXT CHRISTOPHER STOCKS | PHOTOGRAPHS TIM BEDDOW | LOCATIONS EDITOR LAVINIA BOLTON

Say 'a small house in Chelsea' and the image that instantly comes to mind is of a chic little Georgian red-brick box, or perhaps a former artist's studio from the greenery-yallery years of the late nineteenth century. What one is less likely to imagine is an undistinguished terrace of post-war housing, of the kind that can be seen from Bracknell to Basingstoke. Yet step inside this particular house and you're in for a big surprise. For it's an object lesson in how

to conjure up a striking amount of grandeur in a relatively small space, within an outwardly unpromising shell.

The magician in this case is Paolo Moschino, the charming, Italian-born decorator who learned his tricks with Nicky Haslam and who, in 1995, bought the Nicholas Haslam brand, enabling Nicky to concentrate on interiors under the name of NH Design. The owners, like Paolo, are no strangers to *House & Garden*:

their house in Cornwall, which Paolo also decorated, featured in the August 2013 issue. But it was thanks to a much larger previous house, also in Cornwall, that this London scheme came about; though, in fact, it all really started in rather more exotic surroundings.

'We first met when I was on holiday in Parrot Cay,' explains Paolo. 'The owners came over to our table and asked me whether I would be able to take a look at their country

OPPOSITE In the drawing room, a pair of antique sang-de-boeuf Chinese vases, now converted into lamps, stand on a nineteenth-century console table. The mahogany table was bought from Christie's, then painted white. ABOVE The spacious, L-shape entrance hall leads to the drawing room



house in Cornwall. Of course, I said I would be delighted to, though at the time I didn't have the faintest idea where Cornwall was. It was only when I got back and visited that I realised quite how far from London it was.

'When we were discussing the Cornwall project, we always met here in Chelsea,' he continues. 'It was a small two-storey house and they needed more space, so first I suggested adding a basement, and then we ended up redoing the whole house. The challenge was to make it look grander, to open up the spaces and make more room for entertaining.'

The owner and her husband bought the place from an old friend of theirs, Sarah McAlpine, around 15 years before they met Paolo. 'It was already in extremely good nick,' remembers the owner, 'but it had started to look a little tired and in need of a facelift, which is when we called Paolo in.'

Digging out the basement was the usual dusty and disruptive job, but it was the only structural work that needed to be done, and it meant that the house could be refashioned in a logical way. So today the front door opens into an L-shape hall, roomy enough for a small French sofa and commode, with the drawing room directly ahead. In the arm of the L to your left are the top-lit stairs to the first floor and basement, and the door to the owner's study, which looks back to the street.

This small square room, with its bold striped paper from Ralph Lauren Home, could in other hands have ended up feeling cluttered and poky, but Paolo is particularly pleased with the results. 'It's more of a challenge to make a small space work, but I think it's one of the most charming rooms I've done,' he says. 'The furniture is quite big, but I didn't want to have dolls' furniture, which only makes a room look smaller still.'



LEFT In the drawing room, chairs covered in 'Ripple Ridge Steel' by Beacon Hill, flank the chimneypiece. The sofas, covered in 'Cigaro' linen, are from Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam. RIGHT FROM TOP The study (top and centre), with its collection of eighteenth-century prints, is papered in 'Spalding Stripe Red' from Ralph Lauren Home. The enclosed garden provides an additional dining area



The parquet-floored drawing room takes up the remainder of the ground floor, with paired windows overlooking the courtyard garden, which Paolo created too. 'I'm not a garden designer,' he points out, 'but as it functions more like a room, we treated it as part of the house.'

Though it's neither large nor high, Paolo has somehow made the drawing room feel spacious and grand. The owners' pictures are shown to great advantage against soft buff hessian-covered walls, but what gives the room its sense of repose is the symmetry of its layout: paired chairs framing the chimneypiece, two nineteenth-century English chests of drawers on either side of them, paired lamps and twin linen-covered sofas.

It could all have looked a bit too English country house, but here and throughout the house Paolo has subtly varied the look by introducing giltwood frames and painted furniture, such as the mirrors in the drawing room or the Italian bench at the foot of the main bed. 'I'm keen on paint effects,' he says. 'First of all it's more continental, and of course I can't help being continental myself. To me, mahogany and dark wood always look very English. In the drawing room, for example, the painted console table is actually Irish mahogany, which we bought at Christie's then painted white.'

The basement, by contrast, is informal and relaxed, with a comfortable dining area and a galley kitchen, both well lit from a skylight discreetly set in the ground beside the front door. 'Every room in the basement has a window,' Paolo explains, 'and we tried to make the rooms as high as possible so that you don't feel as though you're underground.' At the back of the house, one set of steps leads up to the garden, while another leads down to a second study, which is cleverly tucked under the

garden and has its own adjoining bathroom, both naturally lit from above.

This is a house whose colours get richer as you climb. The basement is pale and light and painted in 'Not Totally White' from Papers and Paints; the ground floor is buff and cream; but the bedrooms are a rich dark brown. Both have en-suite bathrooms lit by lanterns from above, with paint effects by Paolo's long-standing collaborator Dawn Reader: floral in the main bedroom and faux striped wallpaper in the spare room, complete with 'peeling' corners.

'What I love about the owners,' says Paolo, 'is that they are always up for a challenge and they never say no.' What better clients could a decorator hope to have? □

*Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam:*  
020-7730 8623; [www.nicholashaslam.com](http://www.nicholashaslam.com)

**LEFT** A curved banquette, custom designed by Paolo, allows for flexible seating arrangements in the basement dining area. The prints depict Roman emperors and came from the owners' previous home. **ABOVE** In the main bedroom, the sisal wallcovering is 'Sable NC07' from Clarence House. The bench is nineteenth-century Italian, while the mahogany dressing table is English, from the same period

## PRINTS



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The dining table is presided over by a collection of rather stoic-looking Roman emperors. The owners of the house sourced these in Italy, but for something a little closer to home, try the National Portrait Gallery shop (020-7306 0055; [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)). These unframed prints of 'Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor' by Hieronymus Wierix and 'Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor' by William Faithorne are available in a number of sizes. The smallest measures 29.7 x 21cm, and costs £15.

## WALLCOVERING

Rather than opting for wallpaper in the drawing room, Paolo Moschino has used this textured hessian wallcovering from Lines of Pinner (020-8866 2462; [www.linesofpinner.co.uk](http://www.linesofpinner.co.uk)). The soft buff colour provides a warm backdrop – it costs £175 a seven-metre roll.



## FABRIC

The impact of the red-and-white wallpaper in the study (top) is softened by Paolo's choice of fabric. He has used 'Via Krupp', part of his range for Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam (020-7730 8623; [www.nicholashaslam.com](http://www.nicholashaslam.com)), a geometric pattern in the same colour palette that costs £99 a metre. Similarly, in the bedroom (above), pattern plays a starring role. This unusual leaf-trellis design, also from Paolo's range, has been used for the curtains, bedhead, cushions and chairs. It, too, costs £99 a metre □