

ARENT & PYKE'S *SUBLIME STYLE*

# belle

*Nick Tobias on* ART MEETS LIFE

DESIGNER  
DRIVES  
WITH  
Charlotte  
Cote



LUXE & REDEFINING THE  
RURAL AESTHETIC  
METROPOLIS

# COLOUR EAST

Words JUDY PASCOE Photography SIMON BROWN



Admired for her exuberant, colourful decorating style seen in hotels in London and New York, Kit Kemp's refashioning of her own home has proved to be another masterstroke.



**This page** A bedroom on the first floor has a headboard and pillows upholstered in a bespoke colourway of Baker & Gray 'Monkey in Fig Tree' with an antique Indian bedspread. Artworks by Anna Raymond. **Opposite page** The new front-to-back drawing room has walls covered in Casamance linen in Pink. Armchairs and curtains in Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth 'One Way', with sofa upholstered in a pomegranate print by Raoul Textiles. Coral embroidered cushions by Schumacher. Antique Spanish bureau beside the window was one piece Kit couldn't part with in the revamp. Hanging above is a work by Duncan Grant. Bead stool under the window from Mud Studio, South Africa. Artwork above the fireplace is by Winifred Nicholson.



**K**it Kemp, creative director and co-founder of Firdale Hotels, along with husband Tim, has lived in the same London house for more than 20 years. The couple are shining stars in the design pantheon, having created hotels in London and New York, including the Ham Yard and The Whitby, as well as a shop in Bergdorf Goodman.

They were originally attracted by the pre-war property's width on the block, allowing for several rooms on each floor, and its tiny, pocket handkerchief-sized garden. "It's not as grand as lots of London houses but what we loved is that laterally it's wide and it seems to embrace you as soon as you come in, making it feel quite welcoming," says Kit. As well, it possesses a desirable airiness, facilitated no doubt by her lively approach to decorating.

Despite being 'utilitarian', the house was the perfect blank canvas for Kit to indulge her signature idiosyncratic style, layering her own fabrics and wallpapers in a rich melange, accessorised by whimsical objects, vintage pieces and artisan touches.

Understandably the Kemps are very busy and builders are a constant presence in their properties, so when it came to refurbishing their home "we left it and left it until the paintwork hadn't been touched in years and we felt we really had to do it", explains Kit.

Having already made a few changes to the property over the years, such as replacing the original metal windows and moving the kitchen to link it with the garden and a newly built orangery and dining room, it was time for a complete overhaul.

The major step was relocating the front door to the side of the house and turning a room at the front into Tim's study. The reconfiguration allowed the creation of a front-to-back drawing room that now links with the kitchen and dining area. "It's made a huge difference," says Kit. "It's like one-room living – great for the two of us. It's a very social area because you're not locked away in the kitchen. Tim can be reading a book or we can be doing something together."

Of course, when you have decorated a house in a style you love it becomes quite difficult to change it but the new entrance gave Kit the opportunity to use her decorative wallpaper 'Mythical Land'. "I thought it would look glorious going around the walls and up the staircase," she says. "It goes with almost any colour and also tells a story, so as soon as you come into the house you are engulfed in a story, as it were." >



These pages, from left The kitchen cabinetry is bespoke, repainted in a mix of orange and red with one cupboard remaining in the original blue. Kit relished the opportunity to inject more colour into the house, referencing the colours in the adjoining drawing room. The wing chair is available to order from [shopkitkemp.com](http://shopkitkemp.com). A collection of beaded Kirdi light fittings add another layer of texture and colour. The dining area is in the orangery, linking with the kitchen and the garden. Raoul Textiles fabrics on the pelmet and chairs. Antique oak table under Tord Boontje 'Ivy' chandelier for Porta Romana.



This page: The new entrance to the house was formed when the front door was relocated to the side. Walls papered in Kit Kemp for Andrew Martin 'Mythical Land'. Porta Romana chandelier. Curtains in 'Friendly Folk' in Basil Green by Kit Kemp for Andrew Martin. Flat weave rugs have been turned into a stair runner. Opposite page, clockwise from top: The new entry has a collection of 12 pictures by Jo Waterhouse. On console, vintage lamps with shades made from old maps to Kit's design. The study's walls are papered in a striped fabric by Raoul Textiles. Armchairs upholstered in a Robert Kime fabric. Vintage table lamp with bespoke silk shade. Curtains in Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth 'Tasha's Trip' with trim in 'Small Way'. Kit Kemp stands next to a sculpture by Tony Cragg. Armchair upholstered in Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth 'One Way'.



« Kit has introduced even more saturated hues into the drawing room with the Raoul Textiles linen in orange and yellow on the sofas and her own geometric 'One Way' wallpaper and fabric adding more punch. "Weather in the UK isn't wonderful and you really want it to feel like eternal spring, so I wanted the drawing room to be bright and cheerful and make me think of sunshine even on the dullest grey winter day."

With the kitchen now painted in complementary popping shades of orange and red Kit relished the chance to inject extra colour into the scheme. "An interior should look artless but to get that effect is actually very difficult," she says.

Despite trying to be ruthless in the reorganising of the home there were some pieces that she couldn't let go, such as a beautiful rustic Spanish bureau and a pair of mirrors so rusted that you can barely see your reflection. "They add extra layers of character," explains Kit. "I tried to bring in the traditional as well as saying, hello, it's today!"

Upstairs on the first level, formerly occupied by bedrooms for the family including the couple's daughters who have now left home, there was the opportunity to eliminate one bedroom to create a music room. "We both play the piano – rather badly," laughs Kit, "and we have a grand piano but we didn't know where to put it. So, we took away one of the bedrooms and made a much larger area for the landing and a music room. It's surrounded by books to cushion the sound!"

The top level is an attic space and now the master bedroom. Kit says it's her favourite room. "What I love is that the ceilings are sloping – you really do feel that you are in the attic looking at all the rooftops."

Her linchpins of design are colour, scale and balance and the feeling of being drawn through to other areas. "I love »





**SPEED READ**

» Renowned interior designer and co-founder of Firmdale Hotels Kit Kemp and her husband Tim have lived in their three-storey London home for more than 20 years and last year embarked on a complete overhaul. » Moving the front door to the side of the house was a game changer, allowing the creation of a front-to-back drawing room which connects with the kitchen and orangery and dining area and opens to the garden. » Kit has utilised her signature kaleidoscopic colours and exuberant fabrics and wallpapers in the makeover, so the rooms are vibrant and welcoming. » Her favourite space is the master bedroom in the attic which is embellished with rich textures and colours.



« having a door half open and if you have some colour beyond or something that catches the eye it draws you though,” she says. “It’s all those smaller spaces – corners, corridors, staircases, or even inside cupboards – where you can maximise the character of a house. If you have something where you want to look around you have instantly made your house bigger.”

Her belief in having what she terms a ‘decoy focal point’ underpins the success of her schemes. “It should be something in a room that architecturally has nothing to do with it – something you’ve made yourself or brought in, maybe from the outdoors such as a weather vane. Also, something handmade really brings a room to life.”

Kit’s source of inspiration is “keeping my eyes open and asking lots of questions”. She seeks out artisans, ceramicists such as Daniel Reynolds and Katherine Cuthbert, bespoke furniture makers including Sebastian Cox and Christopher Kurtz, and fledgling creative businesses whose work she can showcase in her hotels.

While Kit’s style is invariably classified as bold her rooms are alive and sing with pure colour and assured pattern mixes and her home is rich with personality and vibrancy. 15

*This project is included in Kit’s new book, Design Secrets, see Library, p129; firmdalehotels.com.*

These pages, from left A former bedroom on the first floor has been reworked into a larger landing area and music room lined in bookshelves painted jade green. Artwork by unknown artist. Vaughan pendant light. Curtains in Kit Kemp for Andrew Martin ‘Friendly Folk’ in Basil Green. Lampshade fabric by John Derian. The master bedroom is now located in the attic and Kit says she loves the sloping ceilings and the views over the surrounding rooftops. Bedhead, pillows and throw in Kit Kemp for Chelsea Textiles ‘Ashenwood’. Walls lined in Susanna Davis linen in Raspberry.