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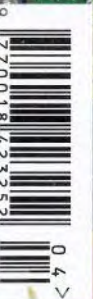
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# BRIGHT SPARKS

Suffused with a host of colourful lacquers, fabrics and wallpapers, the family home of Laura and John Chambers is at once vibrant and welcoming

WORDS ALICE WESTGATE | PHOTOGRAPHS ERIC PIASECKI

## DINING ROOM

*These walls are highly reflective and numerous layers of paint give an incredible sense of depth. The pattern on the floor was created by meticulously masking off the sections then painting with various tones of wood stain.*

**Similar lacquer wall finish.** Alistair Erskine, 07801 395309, [alistairerskine.com](http://alistairerskine.com). **Artwork.** Melinda Hackett, [melindahackett.com](http://melindahackett.com). **For a similar table,** try Elisabeth James Antiques, 01234 713758, [elisabethjamesantiques.co.uk](http://elisabethjamesantiques.co.uk). **Similar chandelier.** Antique waterfall and bag chandelier, £5,400, Fritz Fryer, 01989 567416, [fritzfryer.co.uk](http://fritzfryer.co.uk). **Romano table lamps** with gilt bases, around £1,855 each, Christopher Spitzmiller, 001 212 563 1144, [christopherspitzmiller.com](http://christopherspitzmiller.com). ▶



**ENTRANCE HALL**

*"The hand-painted wallpaper in this space inspired many of the colours used elsewhere in the apartment," says interior designer Ashley Whittaker. "As well as green, it contains hues from teal and red to vivid yellow." The staircase is an original feature, however the stone floor was replaced with wood.*

**Gated Garden hand-painted Chinese wallpaper**, from around £842 per panel, Gracie, 001 212 924 6816, [graciestudio.com](http://graciestudio.com). **Similar ceramic stools**, hand-painted Chinese barrel seat, £255, Oka, 0844 815 7380, [okadirect.com](http://okadirect.com). **Interior design**, Ashley Whittaker Design, 001 212 650 0024, [ashleywhittakerdesign.com](http://ashleywhittakerdesign.com).

**LIBRARY**

*Laura describes this room as "the centrepiece of the house" and uses it for relaxing and entertaining. Its dark brown, green and gold colour scheme was inspired by the Peter Beard collage above the sofa and is complemented by the custom-coloured David Hicks carpet.*

**Syrian side tables**, from around £453 each, Sheherazade, 001 212 539 1771, [sheherazadehome.com](http://sheherazadehome.com). **Hexagon House carpet** in custom colour, from £148sq m, Hicks Collection at Stark Carpet, 020 7352 6001, [starkcarpet.co.uk](http://starkcarpet.co.uk).





## KITCHEN

The bespoke cabinets have traditional detailing that echoes the period features of the property. The ceiling light and tiles inject fresh aqua tones into the classic simplicity of the scheme.

**Similar wall tiles.** Liquid Glass in Mist, £179.26sq m, Fired Earth, 0845 293 8798, [firedearth.com](http://firedearth.com). **Small Tole shade** in nickel and paint, £2,640, Charles Edwards, 020 7736 8490, [charlesedwards.com](http://charlesedwards.com).



## BUTLER'S PANTRY

Opening off the kitchen, this practical space is used for storing Laura and John's collection of fine china and glassware. The cupboards have a deep blue lacquered finish, while a white marble worktop and splashback help keep light levels high.

**Small Blake lantern** in nickel with mesh sides, roof and base, £2,010, Charles Edwards, 020 7736 8490, [charlesedwards.com](http://charlesedwards.com).



## KITCHEN SEATING

Removing a small staircase created space for this informal dining area with French café-style chairs and a banquette in a vivid indigo ikat fabric.

**Similar chairs.** French Bistro rattan side chairs in L1H2, around £224 each, French Bistro Furniture, 001 877 862 5762, [frenchbistrofurniture.com](http://frenchbistrofurniture.com). **Ikat fabric.** Belfour in Indigo, £100m, Christopher Farr Cloth, 020 7349 0888, [christopherfarrcloth.com](http://christopherfarrcloth.com).

Families with young children usually live in supremely practical spaces. Yet Laura and John Chambers, who have five boys under the age of ten, chose to decorate their home with hand-painted panels, lacquered walls and fine furniture. "We had to be brave," admits Laura. "We could have plastic-coated the entire place, but instead we decided to live with beautiful things and encourage the boys to respect their surroundings."

Laura and John, a financial adviser, bought the New York apartment in 2009 as a home for themselves and James, now aged nine, Oliver, seven, and

Robbie, five; Freddie, three, and five-month-old Harry arrived afterwards. The property sits on the seventh and eighth floors of a duplex that was designed by the celebrated architect James ER Carpenter in 1927. "His buildings are wonderful and have the prettiest sweeping staircases," says Laura. "We were keen to keep the look authentic while accommodating the needs of our sons."

To help strike this balance, the couple enlisted the help of architect Tom Felton and interior designer Ashley Whittaker, who is renowned for decorating in neo-classical style. "Ashley and I worked together at Ralph Lauren many years ago

and we have been friends ever since," says Laura. "John and I really like her style – she had worked with us on our two previous homes."

Ashley's brief was to make the apartment "glamorous but child friendly", a task that began by eradicating a back staircase that would once have been used by domestic staff. "This, along with knocking together three tiny rooms, provided lots of space for a new kitchen and a useful butler's pantry," Ashley explains.

Most of the interior had been untouched since the 1920s and, although Ashley and Tom had to renovate some features, they remained faithful

to the originals at every turn. When new materials were introduced, such as the wood-block flooring in the entrance hall, they blended in with ease.

Leading off this graceful hall is a series of formal, grown-up spaces including a sitting room, dining room and library, while the boys' bedrooms and playroom are grouped together on the floor above. "John and I felt it was important to have plenty of smart areas in which to entertain," says Laura. "Dividing the apartment like this was a beautifully practical solution."

All the rooms, for young and old alike, share a palette of bright colours ranging from fresh greens

**SITTING ROOM**

Laura loves the fact that the turquoise silk and linen curtains give the pale grey glazed walls a subtle blue tint. The sofas and chairs have been arranged to allow various seating configurations and to make the space suitable for large or small gatherings.

Join **Jali side table** in Agra marble (centre), around £2,215, Paul Mathieu for Stephanie Odegard Collection, 001 212 545 0205, stephanieodegard.com. **Medium Octagonal Imari Vase lamp base**, E666, Vaughan, 020 7349 4600, vaughandesigns.com. For a similar **Venetian mirror**, try On-Reflection Mirrors, 01963 220723, on-reflection.co.uk. **Bespoke cabinet**, Tom Felton Traditional Architecture, 001 610 892 4828, tradarch.com. ▶



**MAIN BEDROOM**

Soft, textural layers, including fabric-covered walls and a romantic tester above the bed, give this room a rich sense of tradition.

Walls in Kasumi in Blue on Oyster, £70m; tester and curtains in Wheatflower Border in Faded on Oyster, £197m; both Bennison, 020 7730 8076, bennisonfabrics.com. Customised Sara side table, Alexa Hampton at Hickory Chair, 001 800 349 4579, hickorychair.com.

and sunny yellows to jewel-like blues and reds. “The apartment is filled with fun shades that give it a vibrant feel,” says Laura. “They compensate for the fact that green views are rare in New York; using colour inside your home keeps you cheerful in the midst of the city.”

Few of the spaces are decorated conventionally, though. “Instead of using plain paint, we dressed the surfaces with wallpapers, fabrics, lacquers and glazes,” says Ashley. “Walls are my starting point in every scheme because, when they are treated like this, they make a house look properly decorated and

smartly finished.” The walls-first approach works wonders in the library, where expanses of panelling and shelving have a finish as rich and glossy as melted chocolate, and in the dining room, where the red lacquered walls were a real labour of love. “Laura and John requested a red scheme, but this finish is incredibly deep and intense,” says Ashley. “It took a very long time for the specialist painter to achieve this effect, but it is the perfect mood-setter.”

The bedrooms have a softer look, courtesy of fabric wallcoverings; the walls of the main bedroom are lined with a small-scale pattern that cocoons the

**ROBBIE’S BEDROOM**

*The bright yellow grasscloth wallcovering is balanced by the cool blue tones of the curtain and upholstery fabric.*

Similar wallpaper, Shang Extra Fine Sisal in Yellow, £129 a roll, Thibaut at Anna French, 020 7737 6555, annafrench.co.uk. Curtains and headboard in Gorri van Fretwork in French Blue and Navy, £196m, China Seas at Tissus d’Hélène, 020 7352 9977, tissushelene.co.uk.

**ROBBIE’S BATHROOM**

*Ashley devised a charming nautical scheme for this room and sourced monogrammed towels to complete the look.*

Beetlecat wallpaper in Cream, £346 a roll, Katie Ridder at Tissus d’Hélène, 020 7352 9977, tissushelene.co.uk. Custom monogrammed towels (and bedlinen, above left and right), Leontine, 001 800 876 4799, leontinelinens.com.

space and co-ordinates beautifully with the floral curtains at the windows and on the bed’s canopy.

Perhaps most exquisite is the wall treatment in the entrance hall, comprised of several bespoke panels that were individually designed and hand-painted to fit the space. Each one has a delicate Chinoiserie pattern that sits precisely between the dado and the ceiling mouldings; its leaves and flowers meander around each arched doorway and even follow the gentle curves of the staircase.

Ashley also filled the rooms with newly sourced furniture. “We wanted to start from scratch, so that

the style, size and shape of each item would work perfectly in its surroundings,” says Laura. “We thought that 1920s-style furniture would not have been soft enough, so instead we chose pieces from a variety of different periods that together strike the correct balance.”

This sense of balance is very much in evidence throughout the apartment, which is every bit as comfortable as it is polished. And, as the children sit down for supper on an ikat-upholstered bench in the kitchen, it is clear that this interior is also compatible with the rigours of family life. ■