



# BRIGHT SPARK

Handcrafted pieces, design classics and vintage treasures are underpinned by a palette of uplifting brights in a classic Dutch townhouse

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Colour, texture and shape collide in the living room, where a vintage Ploum sofa from Ligne Roset takes centre stage



Gato, the family's cat, finds something to catch his eye amongst the verdant foliage of the garden



On a corner of the terrace, an upcycled wooden pallet has been turned into a vertical planter



For artist and interior designer Sandra Keja Planken, a sense of playfulness lies at the heart of her work. Bold colours cohabit with ease, found items blend with design classics and her own multimedia pieces, including rugs and wall hangings, sit side by side with commissioned one-offs from small makers. Much of this is a reflection of her creative atelier, Studio Noun Amsterdam, a hotbed of ideas that test the boundaries of traditional craft. 'I like to add depth and boldness to a space,' she says. 'So my schemes are pretty confident.'

Sandra's work encompasses commercial interiors too, including hotels and pop-ups, which offer plenty of scope to push the envelope. As a result, her home is frequently switched up with prototypes and offcuts, such as the vivid orange velvet fabric remnants from a recent restaurant project that have been reworked into statement-making curtains in the sitting room.

Located in the city's Jewish quarter, the Amsterdam home that Sandra shares with husband Job and stepchildren Mellis, 15, and Siep, 18, was built in 1906 and is characterised by graceful lines and airy interiors. The family occupies the basement and raised ground floor, and when Sandra joined them four years ago there was little structural work to do. They only extended at the rear of the property with a simple *serre* (conservatory) and removed a wall between the upper floor's living spaces for a greater sense of flow. But they felt that its interiors should herald the start of a new chapter,

and together, led by Sandra's instinct for combining colour and texture, they created a place that spoke to their collective sensibilities.

'We found that we all loved green, and after trialling several variations, we chose a bold yet natural tone that served as a fitting anchor to several other hues and finishes,' she says. 'We also have a passion for old furniture, from mid-century chairs to pieces made by my father-in-law. The challenge was to create cohesion around them, so that the eye drifts easily from one vignette to another.'

Sustainability is something that chimes with the whole family – many of Sandra's pieces are made with recycled or evergreen materials, such as lighting that incorporates vintage frosted glass, or rugs woven from eucalyptus yarn. Having previously worked for Greenpeace and the Red Cross, as well as for architects and fashion brands, Sandra says she's contemplated the issue from every angle. 'I've come to the point now where it's simply a way of life,' she reflects. 'Reusing pieces feels right – the trick is to come up with surprising combinations.'



Sandra on the wisteria-clad terrace of her home, which was built in 1906 in Amsterdam's Jewish quarter



Tones of green and red add punch to the main bedroom, which includes Sandra's bed linen made from remnant fabric

# Colour instincts

Vivid primary colours, from earthy green and sunshine yellow to burnt orange, play a vital part in this home. 'We simply kept on testing what colours made us happy,' says Sandra. 'People often see neutrals as serene, but sometimes the bolder colours of nature can offer great peace of mind. You only need look at the treetops against a bright blue sky to see the palette offered by the natural world.'

That ethos is represented by the botanical-green walls of the sitting room and the deep-blue finish of the dining room. In the hallway, bright orange walls are picked up by the graphic lines of Sandra's own vibrant wallpaper designs. 'The orange velvet curtains in the sitting room bring instant warmth too,' says Sandra. 'Certain elements of design, such as creating a mood board or learning how to draw architecturally, can be taught, but when it comes to combining colours, I think following your instinct is the most important ingredient. And having one anchoring colour - green in our case - helps pull a colourful look together.'

Green is the family's favourite colour, which features as a bold botanical shade in the living room



A feature wall in the dining area is painted in Farrow & Ball's Stone Blue Estate

## Layer it up

'Try to think of a scheme as a painting, rather than a room,' advises Sandra. 'There are actually very few clashing colours within paintings, despite their tonal diversity, whether you look at a Modernist work or a Van Gogh. I find that oranges, reds and greens do work brilliantly together. But the key is to link them, through fabric, trims and softening touches. A primary colour alone can feel too aggressive, but as part of a layered approach, it can really add interest.'

# Shape shifting

Throughout this period duplex, bold silhouettes add a crisp note, from graphic wall hangings and softly curved sofas to the fluid shape of the dining table and the angular lines of pendant lighting. It's a deliberate aesthetic that helps inject colourful schemes with a sense of cohesion. 'When I first moved in, we tried adding a large design-led leather sofa to the mix, but it just didn't work,' recalls Sandra. 'What the rooms needed was more definitive shaping. I like to be playful, and I think a home feels cosier with a combination of graphic shapes and soft curves rather than straight lines.'

She introduced a vintage armoire into the dining area, attracted by its soft profile and aged patina. In the hallway, the strong curves of the classic Terje Ekstrom Ekstrem chair is a favourite item, having survived four house moves, while in the sitting room a vintage red Ploum sofa from Ligne Roset injects a cossetting feel with its rounded edges. 'Curves are quite on-trend right now, but I have always found them attractive,' says Sandra. 'Again, I like to take my cue from nature, which always offers intriguing irregular shapes.'



The dining table, crafted from trees felled during a storm, brings a fluid element to this space



In the hallway, a Terje Ekstrom Ekstrem chair is one of Sandra's favourite pieces

## Curve appeal

*Softened edges are born from natural geometry and these fluid shapes create a less rigid, more welcoming look. Try introducing spheres, arches and lozenges in the form of chairs, tables, sofas and mirrors to add a softening element to both maximalist and simple schemes.*



A classic-shaped mid-century chair sits next to Studio Noun's six-legged side table



Sandra designed these striking pendant lights which were made from recycled materials

# Light touch

From the modernist track lighting initially intended as a wall installation in the family kitchen, to the billowing yellow-fringed pendants over the dining table and the winged shapes hanging off-centre in the sitting room, lighting is a key element to the success of Sandra's interiors. 'As ours is a period home, we wanted to avoid spots in favour of a warm glow from several different light sources,' she says. The family looked at their favourite socialising spaces, including the dining table and sitting area, and lit them accordingly.

'I like opaline glass because of the soft light it throws out, plus our fringed pendants over the dining table, which can be pulled higher or lower, also achieve that effect.' Ceiling lights, such as the angular trio of globes in the sitting room designed by Sandra, are hung off-centre to create an element of informality and surprise. 'They are made from hard materials, so they hang above a dense rug for a softer look.'

Elsewhere, practical task lighting is key. 'We tried to think outside the box,' says Sandra. 'For example, the recycled copper track lighting in the kitchen, made by our friends, has a built-in dimmer that operates by touch. That's very useful in a period home that doesn't have dimmer switches built in.'

This fringed pendant light can be moved higher or lower, adding a practical and decorative touch



In the kitchen, the track lighting is made from reclaimed copper piping, giving an industrial vibe



## Go for glow

Aim to layer lighting with a mixture of table lights and dimmable pendants. Opaline globes add instant vintage appeal. Choose bulbs with a colour temperature of around 2,700K, which provides discreet light and flattering colour rendition, reminiscent of traditional, incandescent bulbs.

# Motifs & contrasts

**T**actile finishes, unexpected materials and playful juxtapositions add the finishing touches to this home. Sandra's graphic designs translate just as easily from wallpaper to rugs and cushions, and several of them use the same repeat across multiple soft furnishings. In the sitting room, her rug design is echoed in a sofa cushion, while her wallpapers have found a home covering the hallway cupboards.

In the kitchen, the mint green splashback, which resembles tiling at first glance, is actually a handblocked piece of woodwork prized for its tactility. 'An artist, Arno Hoogland, created it from recycled wood,' Sandra explains. 'It comprises all sorts of shapes including square, round, pointed and fluid. For us it represents our lifelines and reminds us that the road is never straight.'

These deeply tactile motifs contrast with a poured concrete floor in the upstairs living areas, and terrazzo in the bathroom for retro appeal. 'I always look for contrast,' says Sandra. 'Multiple finishes are a great way to achieve that because they add instant soul. I also enjoy the occasional clash, such as the orange-toned watercolour-effect wallpaper finish in the main bedroom contrasted with a plain green wall. It's a way to make sure that every corner of your home offers a different perspective.'



A tactile wooden piece finished in mint green acts as a unique splashback over the kitchen sink



Practical and hard-wearing, terrazzo flooring lends a retro feel to this bathroom

## A bold blend

*Mixing soft and tactile elements with harder lines can add depth to a scheme. 'You do need to choose one or two base materials,' advises Sandra. 'In our case, that's the poured concrete flooring.' Whether you opt for reclaimed timber, veined marble or vintage stone as an anchor, warm it up with softening accents, such as burnished brass or natural wood.*

### SANDRA'S SOURCEBOOK

**Bestwelhip** Specialises in vintage furniture, from mid-century chairs to industrial lighting (bestwelhip.nl). Find similar at Pamono (pamono.co.uk).

**Burbri** Offers a vast collection of antiques, from industrial lighting to vintage scales (burbri.nl).

**Mariekkevintage** Design-led Dutch collector's pieces, offering UK shipping (mariekke.nl).

**Original Vintage Archive** An Instagram store sourcing sustainable furniture, vintage fashion and jewellery (@originalvintage\_archive).

**Vanouds** Sells unique, handmade wooden furniture, often crafted from naturally felled trees (vanoudsamsterdam.com).

>> Visit Sandra's atelier, Studio Noun Amsterdam, at noun-amsterdam.nl, and follow on Instagram @studionoun\_sandra\_keja\_planken



Contrasting motifs hold sway in the main bedroom, from the watercolour-effect wallpaper to geo upholstered chair