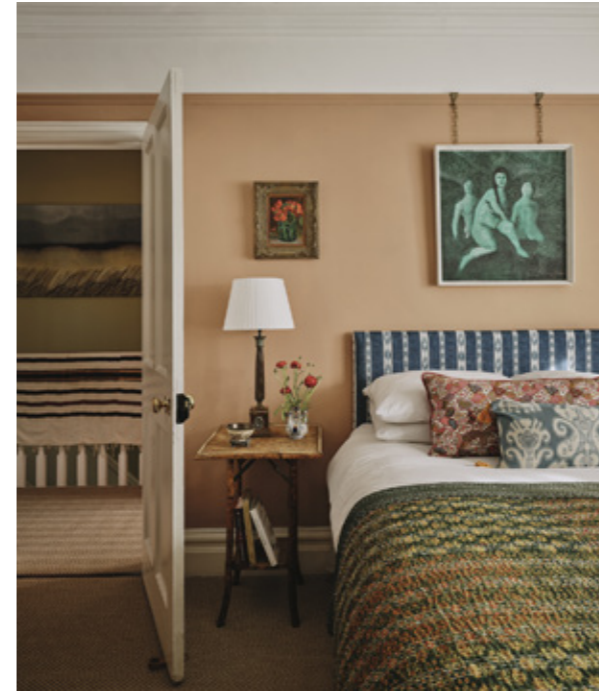




"The living room feels quite English to me and is great for getting cosy by the fire in the winter," Arkoulis says. The curtains are trimmed in Volga Linen's Ruslan dual-use red and natural fabric, and the charred English oak coffee table is by Petrel Furniture

Right James Arkoulis. Below Layered textiles and cherished artworks give the guest bedroom a rustic feel. Bottom The bathroom walls are painted in Mylands' Chester Square



Treasure trove

When it came to decorating his own home, the interior designer James Arkoulis had no interest in following the latest trends

Photographs **Christopher Horwood** Words **Emma J Page**

Not many people settle on an ideal wall finish by colour-matching it to the packaging of their favourite aftershave, but James Arkoulis is not your usual renovator. The interior designer, 40, was determined to go the extra mile from the get-go when it came to overhauling the Edwardian terrace he shares with his husband, Stuart Spice, in west London.

"We spent ages searching for the perfect shade of pink for the guest room — neither too sugary sweet nor too terracotta-based," he says. "Eventually we took the packaging of a Tom Ford fragrance to our local DIY store for scanning and were able to narrow it down to our ideal hue." That room, where earthy pink walls serve as a backdrop to layers of patterned fabrics, collected artwork and vintage furniture, sets the tone for the rest of the couple's home, a deeply personal space that eschews trends and celebrates the quirky and the meaningful.

"Everything ran on that premise," Arkoulis says. "We wanted to respond to

the house itself and create rooms that are a reflection of where we are in our lives rather than go for a prescribed style."

Another left-field choice was to forgo the ubiquitous rear extension complete with open-plan layout and instead embrace the original structure of the house. "That wasn't always the plan — we did intend to extend, but once we moved in we realised we had ample space for two people," Arkoulis says. "Plus, though open-plan can be great, sometimes it's nice to have clearly defined, separate rooms. I quite like that we don't have to eat in front of dishes piled in the sink. I've learnt that it's not a question of having large expanses of space, it's how you configure it that counts."

With that in mind, Arkoulis ripped out the kitchen and bathroom with the aim of creating more practical layouts. The bathroom now has room for a separate shower and the rolltop bath he always craved, while the kitchen features a sink under a newly created window and a galley to make room



for a useful demi-lune dining table and rustic plate rack. One concession was to excavate the under-stairs space to create a pocket cloakroom, where the glossy aubergine finish reminds Arkoulis of a “moody underground club”.

The easy, layered look of this home is partly down to Arkoulis’s Greek heritage (his architect father, based in Athens, had a hand in 2004’s Olympic buildings, while childhood summers were spent at his grandparents’ home on the island of Serifos). Reminders of that Mediterranean sensibility can be seen in the colourful kitchen splashback tiles and plenty of Greek art, loved by Arkoulis for its “relaxed classicism and big, bold touches”.

Some of his own work hangs on the walls, including a piece in the bathroom that he admits regularly comes off the wall for tweaking. And then there are the playful, hand-painted elements that riff on English country-house style such as large-scale



Left The dining room chairs were found on eBay and painted red, with the seats re-covered using GP & J Baker’s Nympheus fabric.

Below Arkoulis hand-painted the border around the kitchen window.

Bottom left The hallway has original encaustic tiling. The ceramic stool is by Oka

‘It’s not a question of having large expanses of space, it’s how you configure it that counts’



fronds on the rolltop bath. The elegant white stencilling around the kitchen window, meanwhile, “was inspired by paint effects we’d seen in Barcelona and Portugal,” Arkoulis says. “I thought, washing up is one of the most mundane household chores there is. Why not make it enjoyable by giving myself something lovely to look at?”

Alongside bolder tones such as pops of red, the colours of nature act as the backbone to the house, a nod, in part, to Spice’s profession as a garden designer. The outside world is reflected in the ochre tones of the kitchen walls, Soane Britain’s Scrolling Fern Frond fabric on living room cushions and a headboard covered in the William Morris classic print Willow Boughs.

Above all the couple’s personal treasures spark daily joy. “I call them life souvenirs,” Arkoulis says with a smile. “Everything means something — we know why it’s there, who has given it to us and where it has come from, whether it’s the pink and gold Murano glass lamp base in the living room that once belonged to my great-aunt, or the abstract artwork in the dining room, passed down from my grandfather.”

Those walls in the guest room were not the only ones to come under scrutiny — the living and dining room received at least 30 sample shades of olive before the right



tone was settled on. “Everything we tried had a grey base, meaning that the rooms looked drab at certain times of the day,” Arkoulis says. “Eventually we found one with a warm undertone supplied by a natural paint specialist in Sussex — it feels welcoming and cosy all the time, especially during the winter.” That type of attention to detail is not for the faint-hearted, perhaps, but it has paid dividends. “Planning costs nothing,” Arkoulis reasons. “We’ve ended up with a home that’s special to us and that means everything.” ■

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