

B L U E S K Y



THINKING

Awash with powder blue shades and intricate plaster mouldings, the interior designer *Danielle Moudaber*'s London apartment has a dreamlike charm

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Overscaled plaster wall lights in the living room date from the 1940s and once belonged to a French bank. The sofas are a bespoke design by Moudaber covered in velvet from the Kentia collection by Wemyss
OPPOSITE: Danielle Moudaber in her Kensington apartment



Moudaber designed the contemporary staircase herself; it was fabricated by Atelier Zama. All the plaster mouldings in the apartment were made by Fullbrooks of England to Moudaber's designs





"Colour for me is an emotion," says Danielle Moudaber. "It's like a climate that you want to inhabit, or a scent that surrounds you." She's referring, of course, to the celestial blue shades that suffuse her two-floor apartment in a Kensington townhouse. Many people might shy away from such an intense palette, but not Nigerian-born Moudaber, who is of Lebanese heritage and was educated in France. As an interior designer, she was confident she could make her beloved aquamarine shades feel uplifting

rather than cold – even in London, where the weather is on the chilly side. "The blues I love are natural and dynamic," she declares, "just like the skies on a perfect summer day. We are surrounded by sky, and I find this colour to be so invigorating."

Moudaber works on projects in Paris and London and cites her influences as 1940s French furniture, 19th-century French novels and the work of American designer Dorothy Draper, whose neo-baroque style and fondness for black and white lines is clearly referenced here. When Moudaber first bought the property in 2004 – she occupied one floor at first, before acquiring the flat above a few years later – it was 'ugly and unloved', having been rented out for a long time. She was attracted by the "high ceilings and bright light," and knew that it had the potential to be transformed.

Moudaber was unafraid to make drastic changes. "You should never be worried about what you like," she argues, "as long as it is done very well." Her strongest style statement is the sinuous staircase that now links the upper and lower floors, which she designed herself and had made by London firm Atelier Zama (it also crafted the matching dining table that sits underneath). "The stairs are my *pièce de résistance*," she says. "I love drama. On the practical side, I am scared of staircases, so I designed it to be ultra-wide and safe, with thick blue carpet."

The apartment's architectural mouldings were also overhauled. Cornices were enlarged and new decorations added on walls and around door frames. Moudaber designed all of these herself and had them made by Fullbrooks of England, which specialises in restoring period houses. The result is as pretty as a fine French patisserie. "I really can't get enough of plaster mouldings,"

exclaims Moudaber. "They make me happy, like ice cream or cake. They're the icing on the top."

As for the furniture, almost everything is bespoke, and designed by Moudaber herself. The buttoned velvet couches and armchairs, for instance, whose curvaceous shapes make the apartment's cavernous rooms feel homelier; and the square sofa-bed in the guest room, which is surrounded with theatrical drapes. She did add a few more individual pieces, such as a whimsical metal and sheepskin chair and coffered cabinet by British artist Mark Brazier-Jones, as well as a pair of 1940s plaster wall lights, which once graced a French bank.

Another original touch can be seen on the floors, which are adorned with line paintings rather than rugs. These have a spiritual significance for Moudaber – especially the maze design in the living room – but also allow the colours and textures of furniture to sing out more clearly. "I like velvets, silks and satins – anything that's soft and cool to touch," she explains. Plains are favoured over patterns – the latter are only really glimpsed in Moudaber's bedroom, with its botanical-print bed, and the bathroom, with its graphic arrangement of black-and-white tiles.

A space like this seems tailor-made for entertaining, but Moudaber insists she only holds 'casual' gatherings in her blue palace. "I used to entertain much more, but I am working a lot these days and have become the kind of person who goes to sleep early." She does enjoy visitors' reactions, though. "People are very surprised for a few minutes, then they recover and start to enjoy the friendly blue space. There's really only one thing I would change – I'd love to have a garden. My balcony is so tiny it doesn't count!" Since her home is bluer than the skies in most gardens, it doesn't seem like too much of a sacrifice. □

A pair of sculpted metal chairs and a glass-topped coffee table by French sculptor Jean-François Buisson take centre stage in the living room





CLOCKWISE: The dining area has a bespoke table designed by Moudaber; the unusual square bed in the guest bedroom in another of her designs; she has used patinated mirrors on various surfaces to create subtle layers of pattern. Here, a fuchsia shade adds interest to an original fireplace



“The blues I love are natural and dynamic - just like the skies on a summer day”



CLOCKWISE: A botanical-print fabric by Austrian designer Josef Frank adds unexpected pattern in the master bedroom. In the bathroom, Moudaber has created a twist on the classic black-and-white tile look; Mark Brazier-Jones' Viceroy cabinet provides luxurious bedroom storage **OPPOSITE:** A Princess chair in her bedroom is also by Mark Brazier-Jones. She has used patinated mirror glass to create beautiful reflections in the adjoining dressing room

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