

House of the Month

BLUE VELVET

Luxe finishes, dramatic decorating ideas and striking artwork contribute to Danielle's surreal yet surprisingly grounded apartment

Photography / Rei Moon * Production / Mary Weaver * Words / Jocelyn Warrington



GUEST SUITE

'The made-to-measure sofa bed was inspired by John Galliano's love of the bias cut,' says Danielle. 'The diagonal lines elongate its perfectly square two-metre dimensions.'
Get the look The velvet fabric for the sofa bed upholstery and curtains is by JAB Anstoetz.

HOME PROFILE

THE OWNER Interior and furniture designer Danielle Moudaber.
THE PROPERTY Two floors of a Victorian terrace house in south London. The ground floor has an open-plan living/dining/office area, plus a kitchen and cloakroom. The main suite and studio/guest suite are on the first floor.



Behind the ever-so-polite façade of a typical Victorian terrace house lives a home that both delights and contradicts. At once bohemian and baroque, classic and contemporary, it defies definition – as does its owner. A Lebanese native raised in Nigeria, interior and furniture designer Danielle Moudaber is figuratively – and literally – impossible to pin down. ‘I can’t sit still for a second,’ she says. ‘I’m obsessed with the movement and energy of Africa. But, like any true Levantine woman, who has the entire household dressed and ready for the day by 8am, I crave order and equilibrium too.’

Never one to turn down a challenge, the self-proclaimed ‘room artist’ spent the better part of two years refining her vision for her south London flat, which she bought after a friend convinced her to relinquish the search for a modern loft apartment. ‘It was the best advice,’ she says. ‘My friend would tell me, “London is an old city. Why not make the most of its assets?” So I kept the good, strong bones and palatial volumes of the apartment, but gutted it inside, opening it up to let in the light and create flow.’

The ground floor was purchased seven years ago during her aptly named ‘blue period’ and the upper floor was seamlessly added when it became available a couple of years later. The home’s interior is all soft edges and sinuous curves thanks to the liberal application of plaster, Danielle’s favourite medium. ‘I don’t like hard shapes or straight lines – they make me uneasy. Instead, I’m inspired by the physiologies of nature, the vegetable qualities of the organic world.’

Of the swathes of blue with which she painted her entire home, Danielle says, ‘I bought the flat at a personally challenging time in my life when my soul needed calm. Friends said I was mad when I told them I wanted to “live in blue”, but I associate the colour with happiness – that blissful feeling of being submerged in water.’

If the aquamarine expanses conjure up the joy of swimming in breakers, the white twists and turns of the mouldings that frame all doorways and ceilings are their frothy crowns. But the tour de force is undoubtedly the enormous staircase, whose rippling balustrade is a veritable wavescape in plaster. Like cascading →

‘SPACE SHOULD BE USED ACCORDING TO SEASONS, NOT SITUATIONS. I CHANGE IT ALL AROUND EVERY THREE WEEKS’

LIVING AREA

‘My obsession with Dulux’s Blue Poppy shade was the starting point for the entire house,’ says Danielle. ‘It reminds me of the Mediterranean – good for the soul.’

Get the look The coffee table and white chairs are by French sculptor Jean-François Buisson. The decorative wall mouldings, cornices and mirrored ceiling light were designed by Danielle and realised in fibrous plaster by Fullbrooks of England. For similar radiators, try Castrads.

← LIVING AREA DETAIL

‘My artworks are all pieces gifted by friends, each with meaning and a special place in my heart,’ says Danielle.

Get the look The painting, *left*, is called *The End of Summer* by Danielle’s friend Georges Bassil. The print is by Alvin Booth from Hamiltons Gallery. The small bronze sculptures – one a portrait of Danielle – are by Nigerian artist Olu Amoda, whose work is available at Art Twenty One gallery in Lagos.



LIVING AREA

'The Forties wall lights took me all of 15 seconds to buy,' says Danielle. 'I replaced the original grey shades with these poppy red drums as a contrast to the pervading blue.'
Get the look The plaster wall lights are antiques salvaged from a French bank and purchased in Beirut. Danielle designed the deep-buttoned sofa, upholstered in Kentia velvet in O2 Aquamarine by Wemyss. The Serge Roche-inspired female figurine on the living room arch was designed by Danielle with Fullbrooks of England.

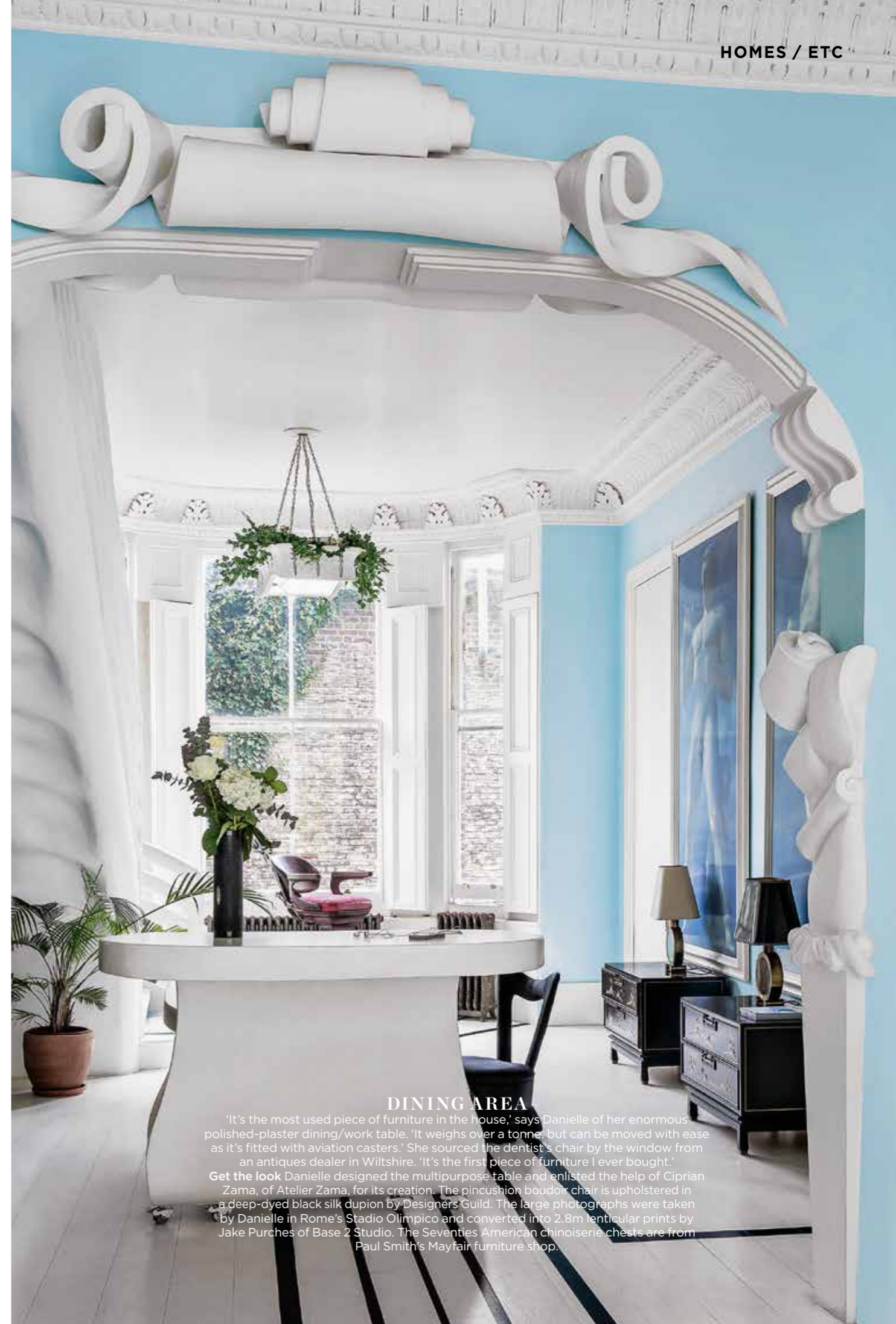


water, a blue silk runner flows down the steps, denying the utilitarian purpose of the showpiece that consumes a good 20sq feet of internal space.

The upper storey, once the building's top-floor apartment, is now Danielle's bedroom and studio. Here, an oak sprung dancefloor pays homage to her mutual love of Fred Astaire and martial arts. 'It's proved such a good choice, not only because it feeds my longing for movement, but also because it requires little more than soap and water to clean,' she says. True to her orderly inclinations, panelled walls open to reveal hidden storage and screen doors glide seamlessly into wall recesses to separate Danielle's sanctuary from that of overnight visitors and her studio space. Emerald painted skirting boards and matching blinds are the only concession to the overriding azure hue. 'People claim blue and green don't work together, but they're wrong,' she says, describing how the blinds diffuse the afternoon light in summer, throwing a sultry jade cast over her room.

The two en-suite bathrooms are covered in modest floor-to-ceiling metro tiles. 'The apartment may have taken time, but it wasn't achieved on a big budget,' says Danielle, adding that she invested in details over big-ticket items. 'I pimped up simple cupboard fronts with bespoke handles and instead of making expensive covers for the radiators, I had them embossed, so that they now function as sculptural pieces in their own right.'

Furnishings, on the other hand, were purpose-designed by Danielle. 'Metal is my other great love, so most of my designs feature the material in some shape or form,' she says. 'I love the hard-soft contrast it sets up with the plaster.' Among them is a trio of deep-buttoned sofas, all clad in velvet of the deepest aquamarine. Like giant amorphous sea creatures that have happily taken up residence in an elaborate conch shell, they fit to the space with a natural ease. 'They can be reconfigured to seat any number of guests – all but this one,' says Danielle, gesturing to the sole single seater. 'I call it my selfish chair as it's my favourite place to be when I'm alone here. It simply forces one to kick off one's shoes and curl up.' The perfect spot to marvel at this surreal yet deliciously sophisticated home.
 Contact Danielle at danielle@moudaber.com. Available as a location through shootfactory.co.uk



DINING AREA

'It's the most used piece of furniture in the house,' says Danielle of her enormous polished-plaster dining/work table. 'It weighs over a tonne, but can be moved with ease as it's fitted with aviation casters.' She sourced the dentist's chair by the window from an antiques dealer in Wiltshire. 'It's the first piece of furniture I ever bought.'

Get the look Danielle designed the multipurpose table and enlisted the help of Ciprian Zama, of Atelier Zama, for its creation. The pincushion boudoir chair is upholstered in a deep-dyed black silk dupion by Designers Guild. The large photographs were taken by Danielle in Rome's Stadio Olimpico and converted into 2.8m lenticular prints by Jake Purches of Base 2 Studio. The Seventies American chinoiserie chests are from Paul Smith's Mayfair furniture shop.



KITCHEN

'I dressed up simple Ikea carcasses with marble worktops and bespoke brass handles,' says Danielle. 'My entire kitchen budget came to under £5,000.' She designed the leek and carrot, *below*, wall lights as a tribute to her favourite vegetables - 'the unsung heroes of the natural world.'

Get the look For an alternative to this Azul Bahia granite from Brazil, try MKW Surfaces. The door handles are by The Beardmore Collection.

STAIRCASE

Danielle added sand to the plaster to give the impressive Gaudi-esque staircase a textured feel.

Get the look The blue silk stair runner is by Colbourns.



OFFICE AREA

A patinated foxed mirror beneath the staircase displays a beautiful reflection of the prints opposite it.

Get the look The sketch is a portrait of Danielle by French fashion designer Stéphane Rolland. To create a similar wall, try Rough Old Glass.

MAIN BEDROOM

'The entire wall behind the bed is actually a run of concealed cupboards with white mouldings,' says Danielle. 'I like everything to have its place.'

Get the look The floral fabric used for the bedcover is by Josef Frank, available at Svenskt Tenn. The oak sprung dancefloor was installed by Harlequin.

HOME TRUTHS

What's your favourite city in spring? Rome. It's one huge alfresco museum - there's no need to ever go indoors.

Describe yourself in a sentence. I'm as comfortable in lipstick and Louboutins as I am in a market in downtown Lagos with chickens and goats.

Where do you truly belong? In ancient Greece, where Helen of Troy could launch a thousand ships without batting an eyelid.

What's your dream job? To create a mega kitchen. Think Harrods Food Hall on steroids - not that I can cook, mind you.

And your favourite smell? The heady, gritty aroma of Africa. It hits you like a slap.

Your mantra? If you can't buy it, make it!



MAIN BATHROOM

'I like things to be freakishly hygienic,' says Danielle. 'I chose utilitarian metro tiles because they're easy to clean and easy on the eye.'

Get the look For wall and floor tiles like these, try Tile Magic.



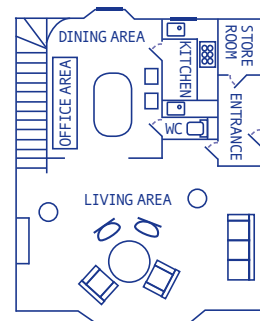
CLOAKROOM

'The muralist was tasked with creating a French jungle - wild but refined,' says Danielle of this compact yet enchanting space beneath the external staircase.

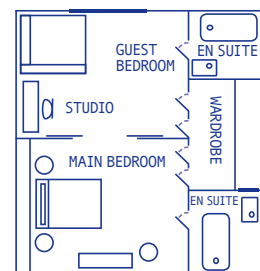
Get the look The mural was painted by Romanian artist Beto Raba.



THE BLUEPRINT



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

