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## FOR DESIGN



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Art Collector's Retreat sitting room

Inspired by  
mena



Art Collector's Retreat bedroom

# interiors

**M**ELANIE RADEMACHER IS THE DRIVING force behind boutique interior design agency Mena Interiors... and a passionate art collector. "When buying art, my parents taught me to follow my heart and buy what I really love. My parents are keen art collectors and my two sisters and I were bitten with the bug from an early age. We started off with a joint collection, by clubbing together with our pocket money. I still have the first painting we ever bought hanging on my bedroom wall!"

Mena Interiors specialises in high end residential projects, from new builds to refurbishments. Melanie established the practice in 2003 with a passion for design and architecture at the core of her work, and a commitment to creating tailor made projects for each client. With a team of three experienced designers, Melanie oversees each project, never taking on more than six at any one time, to ensure a personalised style and dedicated service.

Melanie's design aesthetic is always inspired by her clients' tastes. "I feel strongly that a home should represent the person that lives in it and not the designer that creates it." Rather than impose a certain style she works to create bespoke projects that complement the resident's everyday life. "I feel my strength lies in helping my clients realise their dreams. I am aware that some people like to have a home where everyone knows who the interior designer is when walking into the room," but that is not how Melanie operates. "Clients only come to me by referral, so they will already have quite a lot of insight into how I work."

All photos © Tom Mannion



Melanie's clients often have art collections they want to display in their homes, something she is a dab hand at. This was the case in the project, An Art Collector's Retreat, in a converted schoolhouse in London, where Mena Interiors was enlisted to completely transform the space for residential use while also ensuring the owner's extensive art collection was displayed in its best light. "It was a close collaboration with the client as they had very strong opinions on where the art was to be placed," says Melanie.

The entrance leads into the breathtaking double height living room, originally the school gymnasium and one of the main reasons why the client bought the property. With the benefits of the height and lofty windows, which follow an entire side of the room and allow for a constant stream of light during the day, the space is worked to accommodate the larger pieces of art in the collection. All the furniture is made slightly larger to fit into the overall scale of the room. Matching traditional 17th century Knole sofas, upholstered in a flannel fabric for a contemporary twist, sit facing each other providing the principal seating. Upstairs a mezzanine offers a balcony view of the art collection on display, including work from artists Tony Cragg, David Batchelor, Jason Martin and Herbert Hammack.



Art Collector's Retreat staircase



Art Collector's Retreat sitting room



Art Collector's Retreat bathroom





Central London Apartment dining room



In the formal living room two large sofas are upholstered in soft caffelatte chenille and punctuated by round walnut side tables by Robert J Scott with a hint of Art Deco, topped with spun glass table lights in vibrant turquoise. An antique Persian rug, and vintage crystal pendants and chandeliers complete the period feel.

The client fell in love with a de Gournay wallpaper, so Mena Interiors gave it pride of place in the dining room, with a twist – the exquisite hand painted twined leaf branches, blossoms and exotic birds on the gleaming silver background ‘growing’ onto the staggered floor length linen blinds.

The bedroom is decorated in shades of beige and brown and wallpaper in a traditional embellished fleur pattern. Circular glass seventies table lights stand sentinel either side of a buttoned headboard. The bitter chocolate colour scheme continues into the bathroom, where accents of dark brown ribbon adorn the blinds. The dressing room mirrored doors create the illusion of width in the narrow space, while linen covered doors with glass globe handles soften and warm the space.

Melanie has lived in London since 1993, and was immediately drawn to the international feel of Chelsea. After renting various apartments she decided it was time to buy her own home. She chanced upon her flat when she walked past the building and noticed that it was being redeveloped. When she viewed the garden flat, it was still a building site, but her collector’s eye spotted its potential. “The floorplan wouldn’t appeal to everyone because it has a large entrance hall that runs like a broad spine through the apartment,” explains Melanie. Most people would have wanted to reclaim this as living space, but for the designer this is a fabulous area for displaying art.



Chelsea Garden Flat



Chelsea Garden Flat sitting room

By the time Melanie purchased the property, the shell was complete. All that was left to do was install a new kitchen and a couple of bathrooms, and then decorate. Her approach was to create a neutral scheme that serves as a backdrop to her art. It also allows Melanie flexibility to adjust the interior design without needing dramatic alterations. The entrance hall and living space have stained oak floors and the white painted walls create a gallery style backdrop for her art collection.

Large windows open from the sitting room onto a patio garden, allowing the sun to flood the space with light and offering attractive views onto the garden. A three-dimensional architectural artwork by Tadashi Kawamata hangs above the soft grey chimney breast, its mantelpiece populated by a procession of spindly vases and figures. The space also doubles as a small home office, so Melanie used seating to delineate the two areas, the neutral cream sofas dressed with vivid yellow silk cushions. “A muted background is more adaptable to the changing nature of a growing collection;” explains Melanie, “this also allows for splashes of colour to set the mood.”

The kitchen was created with Melanie’s love of entertaining in mind, a large island unit providing an area for guests to congregate while she is cooking. A collection of food-related art surrounding the island includes a delicate paper sculpture of a fruit bowl and an image of a fort, made entirely from coffee beans. “Everything in here had to be able to cope with the strong sunlight, and also with the fact that it could be splashed when I’m cooking!”

In the master bedroom light colours and sheer curtains soften the appearance of the space, a rich and sumptuous bedcover adds luxury and coral cushions a splash of colour. Chocolate silk wallpaper in the guest bedroom is the backdrop for dramatic Renaissance style portraits.

“When I moved in, I didn’t focus enough on the lighting,” reflects Melanie, “and now I am adding more layers to my lighting scheme. Light is very important in all my schemes whether as a natural source or an artificial one. It is important to layer the various light sources as this allows you to create different moods. A good lighting scheme allows you to transform the character of the room to suit the time of day or its function. I would always recommend that money gets invested in that part of the project.”

“I love the intimate relationship that you create among a team on a residential project. It is great fun to help people visualise what they would like to have around them and guide them to ensure that it comes together as a whole. A dream of mine would be to work on a holiday home on an exotic island, or in the mountains, though I may have to find another dream soon as this one looks like it might be happening in the near future!”

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Chelsea Garden Flat bedroom