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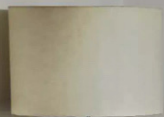
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IDÉAS FOR KITCHENS + DINING

A SENSE OF

This north London mansion flat provided the ideal fresh start for designer Virginia White, who wanted a new home with fewer superfluous rooms but enough wall space to display her extensive art collection

TEXT VIRGINIA CLARK | PHOTOGRAPHS CHRISTOPHER HORWOOD



COHESION

SITTING ROOM An armchair in Anni Albers' 'E' green linen from Christopher Farr Cloth is opposite a 'Temple House' sofa and 'Tray Top' table, both from Virginia White Collection. Rose de Borman and Soie de Lune cushions and Seth Cardew bowls add unusual touches



SITTING ROOM Vitsoe shelves (previously seen reflected in a Dominic Schuster mirror above the Jamb chimney piece) are the backdrop for an old Italian monastery table from Lorfords. This is partnered by Marcel Breuer 'Cesca' chairs with seat pads in Virginia's fabrics and Claesson Koivisto Rune pendant lights. A 1960s Knoll lamp stands behind a Kaare Klint 'Safari' chair

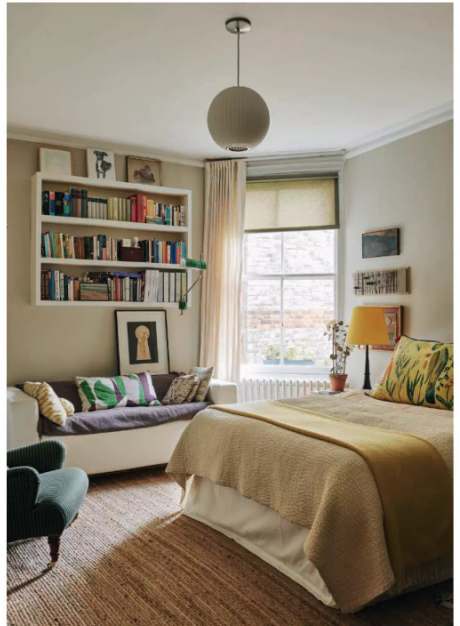
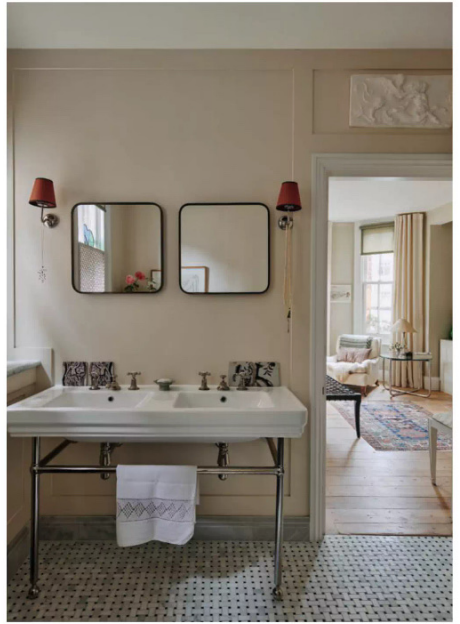




If **SIMPLICITY** is what drew the couple to the **FLAT**, then simplicity, or a feeling of **CALM CONTINUITY**, is what Virginia has brought to the **DECORATION**

STUDY The opening from the sitting room, lined in Carrara marble, reveals Howard Hodgkin's **etching and aquatint** *Venice, Evening* above an **Aram unit**. On its surface is Porta Romana's 'Gourd' **lamp** alongside a Sidney Nolan **sketch**, a John de Pauley **sculpture**, a Delft plate and an architect's model. The Kaare Klint **chair** is on a **rug** by Sigvard Bernadotte. **KITCHEN** Marcel Breuer's 'Cesca' **chairs**, with seat pads covered in Virginia's 'Robins Egg' fabric and a **cushion** from Town House Spitalfields, **artwork** by Fred Dubery and Howard Hodgkin (a Barry Cook can be seen in hall), and **ceramics** by Seth and Michael Cardew and Leach Pottery bring a contemporary feel to the kitchen design, which was inspired by classic Dutch interiors. The **cabinets** are painted in Edward Bulmer's 'Jonquil' and the checkerboard **floor tiles** are from Fired Earth





The Edwardians were phenomenal builders,' says the designer Virginia White, surveying the spacious main room of her own flat on the edge of Hampstead Heath. 'These mansion blocks were always intended to be divided into flats – they are not conversions of other buildings and they're incredibly well designed.'

Having lived for many years in a tall, narrow 1830s house in nearby Islington, Virginia and her husband

Robin felt the need to simplify their life once their three daughters were leaving home. They were instantly drawn to this light, airy space when they first viewed it: 'The pros are that everything is on one level, we have immediate access to the Heath and we have this lovely open-plan sitting and dining room, which is what sold it to us.'

The layout is indeed generous and intuitive, and the building itself reassuringly solid. 'It was constructed pretty much at the first point that anyone used concrete for houses, so you can't hear anything from the neighbours,' explains Virginia. It is a striking contrast to their previous home, the attractions of which lay in its higgledy-piggledy, rickety nature. 'Everything had a creak in that house, which was charming, but I feel I've done that kind of charm now and I'm fine without it.'

The flat's corridors run in a rough L-shape, with the vast sitting room at one end, where floor-to-ceiling sash windows look out onto the street, and an almost equally large bedroom at the other. The long corridor in between accommodates a bedroom (currently occupied by Virginia's youngest daughter), bathroom, laundry room and kitchen, which is just inside the front door. 'What we were really looking for at this point in life was to have fewer rooms that nobody ever enters. We wanted every single one of them to be open and useful and used,' says Virginia.

If simplicity is what drew the couple to the flat, then simplicity, or at least a feeling of calm continuity, is what Virginia has brought to the decoration. This is a hallmark of her work and her taste, which has been honed over the course of an interesting life. The daughter of a German Classical archaeologist, she grew up in a world of museums and art collections. After studying art history, she worked in the antiquities department of Sotheby's and at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. Later, having studied interior design at Chelsea College of Arts, she started a second career under John Stefanidis, before launching her own interior design studio, and eventually her own furniture and fabric lines. Virginia says one of her formative influences has been Kettle's Yard, the home and now museum set up by Jim and Helen Ede in Cambridge, and she has long been a collector in the same vein.

Just like Kettle's Yard, this flat is characterised by a remarkable collection of pieces set against a graceful backdrop. 'I've got so much going on in terms of books and art and knick-knacks, so I need the rest of the decoration to be calm, classic and simple,' she observes. 'And something that is not going to go out of fashion.'

Virginia is evangelical about using the same curtains and blinds throughout, especially in a lateral layout like this, where there are open sightlines between rooms. The elegant cream curtains in 'Pieris' linen from Etrò Home Textile are a signature: 'I've used them for most of my clients for at least 20 years, but they stand the test of time'. So too are the roller blinds from Sunnex, made up in an old olive green Holland cloth supplied by Virginia's friend Marianna Kennedy. 'I find Roman blinds quite heavy and dressy sometimes, whereas these are very simple and connect

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MAIN BEDROOM Walls in 'Timeless' by Dulux showcase an eclectic mix of furniture, including a 'Klismos' **bench** from the Virginia White Collection and antique bedside tables. They bear vintage KPM Berlin porcelain **lamps** with bespoke shades, in front of **artwork** by Tracey Emin and Mary Newcomb. The Turkish Bergama **carpet** and **pillowcases** in toning Schumacher fabrics introduce pattern and colour. **EN-SUITE BATHROOM** 1950s Italian mirrors and Corston **wall lights** with Marianna Kennedy shades and four Dell'arte manganese tiles stand out against **walls** in Edward Bolmer's 'Mill White'. **Fred Heath** marble **flooring** complements the traditional **basin** and **bath** from Aston Matthews. The **sketch** on the wall is by Roger Hilton and the **painting** on the window sill is by Sarah Baxter. **SPARE ROOM** Eye-catching **cushions**, in Virginia's 'Reeds' on the sofa and by Rose de Corman on the bed, and **artwork** by Stephen Chambers, Fred Dubery and Dreon O'Casey enliven this restrained scheme

the room to the trees outside,' she explains. Most of the walls are painted in a Dulux shade called 'Timeless'. 'It's good when you're going for a contemporary mood. It lacks the grubbiness of more historic shades – it is very fresh, but still has a bit of warmth. And it also works brilliantly with all the pictures – the displaying of art is just as important as the artwork itself,' she adds.

The serene quality of the flat certainly lends itself to display. Above a sofa in the sitting room, she points out a rare surviving landscape painting by Maria Caspar-Filser, an early-20th-century German painter whose works were considered degenerate by the Nazis and were mostly destroyed. A Bridget Riley black-and-white PERSP print from 1965, a monochrome William Scott painting and a mid-century work in steel by Achim Pahlke hang on either side of the Jamb chimneypiece.

Together, these reflect Virginia's own history. The Caspar-Filser landscape was her grandfather's and depicts the Bavarian countryside near his summerhouse, and the steel piece was inherited from her father and came from the period that he spent creating a museum of modern art at Ruhr University Bochum in North Rhine-Westphalia in the 1960s. 'The William Scott was one of her earliest and luckiest acquisitions in her twenties, while the Bridget Riley is her most recent purchase. For such a disparate collection of things, they all get along remarkably well together. 'You wouldn't think an Expressionist painting would hang well with the black-and-white PERSP picture but, to me, they're just made for each other. It's thanks to the white walls, the generous ceiling height and the abundance of space.'

The flat is the perfect backdrop to these extraordinary things, but it also facilitates a peaceful, well-designed life for Virginia and her family. Isn't that what we should all aspire to in our homes? □

Virginia White Collection: virginiawhitecollection.com

DRAWING ROOM In front of consoles made years ago for the owners are **armchairs** in Robert Kime's 'Tynemouth Ticking'. The **mirror** is from Robert's studio and the **painting** by George Smith of Chichester. **HALL** A **table** from Christopher Hodson is flanked by **chairs** in Pierre Frey's 'Cheyenne' in cactus and sable, and **paintings** by Joseph Farquharson (left) and Neil Forster

