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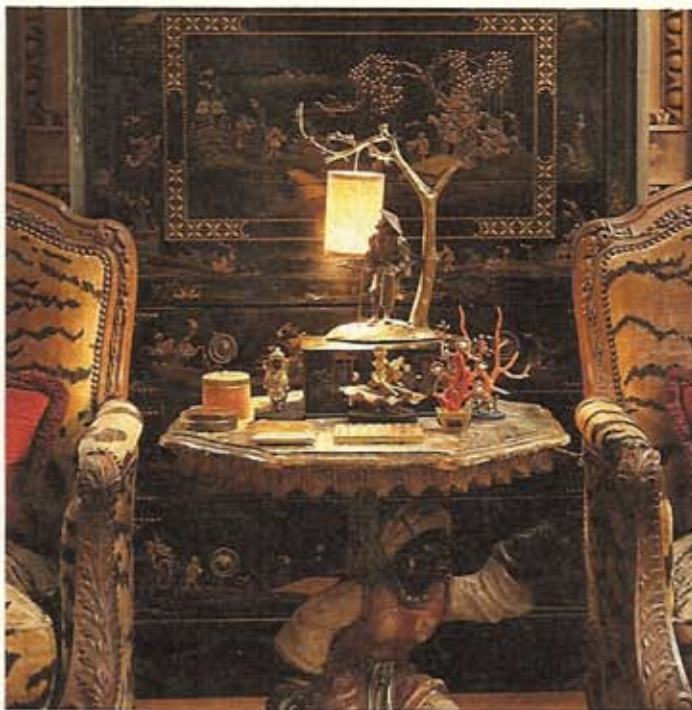
A drab company flat has been transformed into interior designer Paolo Moschino's opulent urban retreat

REPORT VINNY LEE PHOTOGRAPHS JAN BALDWIN





This page: the wood-paneled sitting room, looking through Chinese lacquer screens to the pale linen-clad part of the room. Opposite: a place setting with antique glass and vintage linen



Clockwise from above: a Moor table with Chinese lantern figure in front of a lacquered cabinet in the wood-paneled sitting room; the formal dining room, with a faux door to the left and real door to the kitchen on the right; antique Madonna figures in the entrance hall; the pale linen-clad half of the sitting room, with mirrored insets on either side of the fireplace; wall of Cocteau drawings; Paolo Moschino

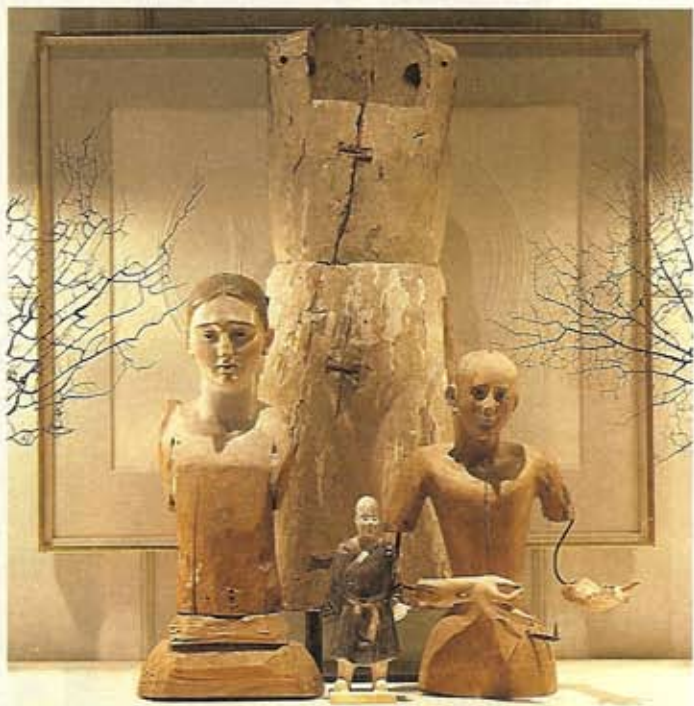


Italian interior designer Paolo Moschino used to live in a perfectly nice three-storey house in Earls Court, London, but found that he longed to revert to the continental habit of apartment living. At first he ignored the most obvious location. "I work in Pimlico but didn't bother looking in neighbouring Victoria because I thought it was an area for offices and transitory living," he explains.

But, in spite of his misgivings, Victoria proved to be the right location when, six years ago, he was urged to look at a mansion flat in a block near Westminster Cathedral. "I walked in and decided instantly that I wanted it," he says. "The place had been a company flat divided up into dormitory-like rooms; there was even a visitors' book by the door with the names of those who came to stay."

Making the lodgings into a home took six months' hard work: "We moved in with the builders," he says. But for Moschino, this sort of undertaking is a regular occurrence: he is the man behind design company Nicholas Haslam Ltd (he worked with Haslam for many years before buying him out while retaining the company name).

The work Moschino carried out was extensive. First, the fine box-pattern parquet floor was unearthed from beneath two layers of



'I'M A SHOPAHOLIC, AND I BUY MORE THAN I HAVE ROOM FOR'

carpet, and then the two front rooms were knocked through to provide a grand entertaining space. These two rooms are in contrasting styles. One is decorated in a relaxed and muted mix of grey-white Belgian linen curtains and upholstery with aged mirror panels and a collection of framed sketches, while the other, partially separated by ornate lacquer screens, is a dark, rich retreat with detailed pine panelling and animal-print upholstery and cushions.

"A team of Polish carpenters did the panelling, but a lot of my friends and colleagues were against the idea. They said that pine was very common in England, but I didn't know. I like the grain and knots, which make it interesting," says Moschino. A specialist painter "aged" the panels and softened the yellowness of the pine,

but Moschino confesses that the fact that he is a smoker has also helped to mellow the finish.

The wood panelling gives the room a warm and intimate feeling and it also conceals a door to the hall. Elsewhere, the panelling is adapted to frame wire-faced doors over recessed bookshelves. More panelling is found in the hall, this time in a simple classic style painted grey-blue. "Some of it is original and the rest was copied," says Moschino.

The corridor is long and windowless, but the designer used this to his advantage. "I created a focal point at the end by painting the walls black and placing a bust of Madame Du Barry under a spotlight." The trick is repeated at the other end with a console table that's dressed with 18th-century Italian and 14th-century Flemish wooden figures and fine fronds of coral, again highlighted by a spotlight.

Double doors lead from the corridor to the dining room, formerly a bedroom. Here Moschino has used the tricks of his trade to create an interior that appears to have symmetry and balance. He put a false door next to the window (creating a pair with the functioning one that leads to the kitchen) and a dummy window >>

<< with blind, full pelmet and striped curtains, which conceals a row of deep shelves used for storing china.

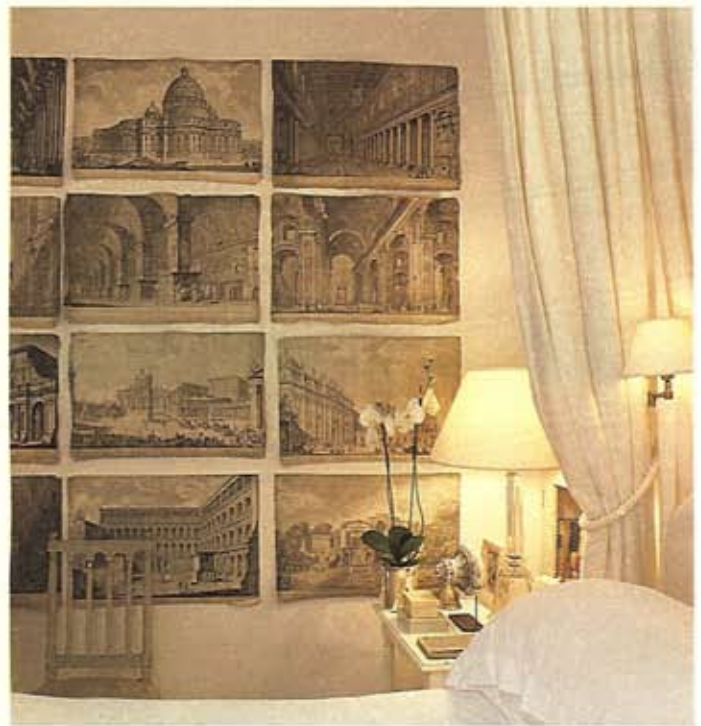
When entertaining is less formal, there is a small French-style stripped wood table in the kitchen, under an ornate antique centre light and in front of a dresser filled with pieces of old silver tableware. Moschino admits that storage is important in his home, "because I'm a shopaholic, and I buy more than I have room for. I haven't changed the decor since moving in; the rooms just get fuller."

Moschino's skill and artistry can also be seen in his bedroom, where his passion for Belgian linen is again indulged. "The great thing about linen is that it is hard-wearing and easy to launder. The drapes around the bed, the cushion on the footstool and the curtains can all be thrown in the washing machine and rehung when dry – a few wrinkles just add to the character."

The impressive bed dressing consists of a pelmet attached directly to the ceiling with the curtains hanging from a concealed rail. This design gives the full grandeur of a four-poster but without the need for posts, which would take up valuable space in this small but tall room. The remaining wall space on either side of the bed was made into deep cupboards, with doors inset with panels of fine bronze-coloured metal gauze. Wardrobes line the narrow corridor leading to the marble-clad shower room. "This space was originally a boiler room," Moschino says.

Not only did the designer find his perfect city apartment, but he also moved closer to his offices and shops in Pimlico. "The shops and business are like a family; everyone knows each other and I am blessed with my job. I love going to work," he says. ■

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A group of unframed prints on the bedroom wall