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TRENDS



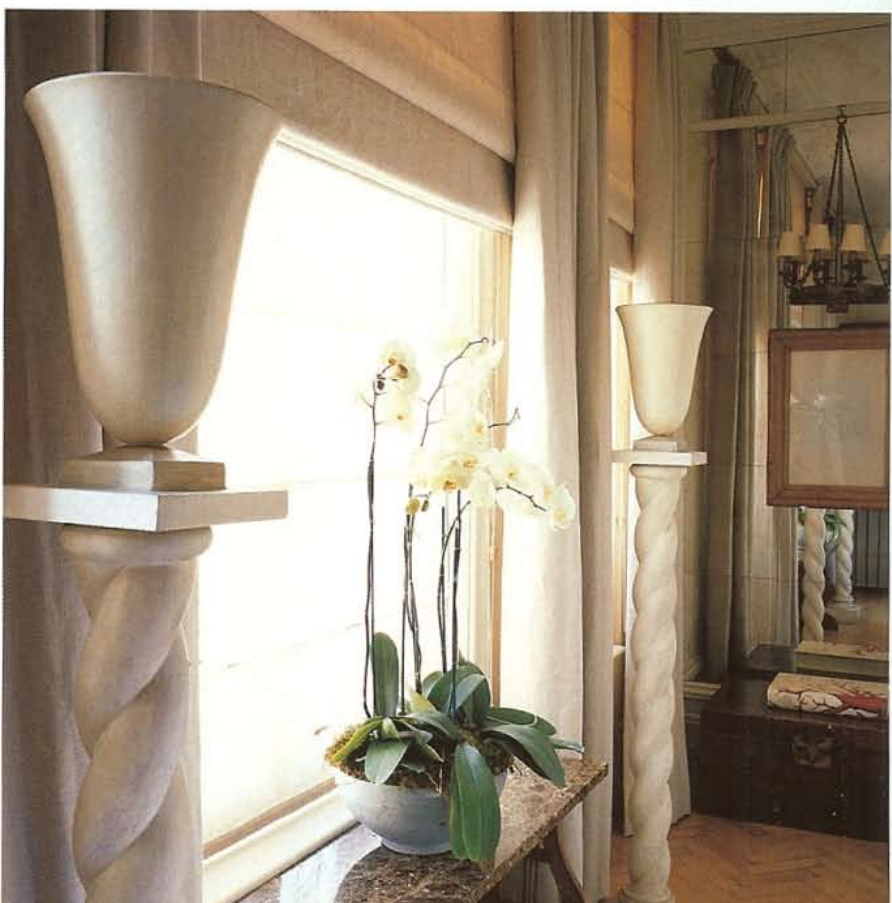
COMPARE, CONTRAST, APPLAUD

Contrary to much current decorating, this flat is full of contrasts – united by unfaltering attention to detail and its decorator-owner's elegant taste





ALL PICTURES Pale and near-monochrome, this end of Paolo Moschino's double drawing room is in total contrast with the farther end, shown overleaf. Here, Thirties sconces (hung against mirror), graphic pictures – many by Jean Cocteau – and, flanking the window, plaster floor lamps by Jean-Michel Frank (below), reflect Paolo's interest in mid-twentieth-century art and design. Seating, covered in 'Eugene' (natural) linen from his shop, is grouped around a leather coffee table





ALL PICTURES Paolo made a wide opening between the flat's two main rooms to create his dual-personality drawing room; the two ends of the room are loosely divided by chinoiserie screens and a Louis XVI desk (top left and bottom left). Paolo's boxer, Ty, can just be seen beneath the desk. Compared with the 'pure', white end, the newly paneled part of the room exudes indulgence, with warm colours and textures seen in the waxed pine walls, the caramel linen-velvet-covered sofas, the chairs covered in 'Wallis' chenille (bush babe) and the Oriental, silk carpet. The scale of the panelling was determined by the size of the early-nineteenth-century portrait above the chimneypiece; the cupboards to either side house books and a television. The decorative objects, which have all been chosen simply because they intrigue Paolo, include a pair of handsome, marble urns (centre left) which, unusually, have mounts made of carved wood

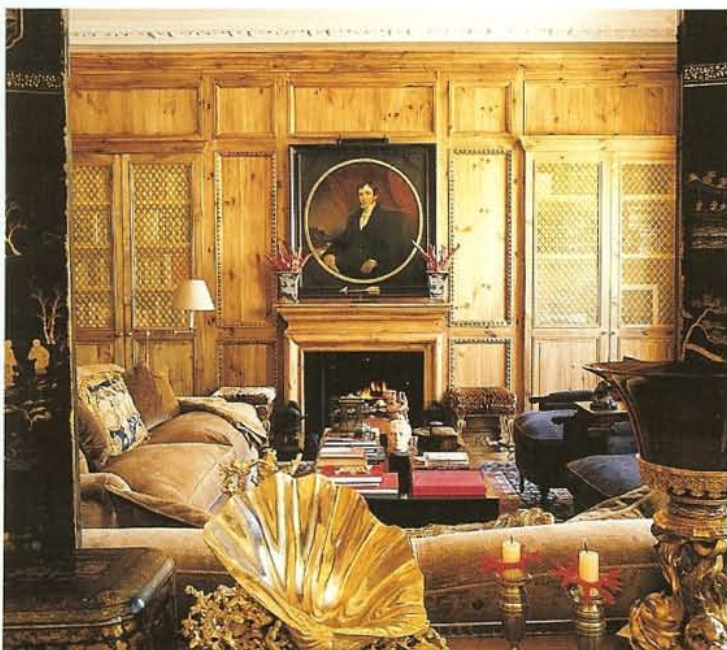


Of all the interior-design theories currently doing the rounds, the one given greatest credence is 'continuity'. The idea behind it is simple: if you decorate each room to be consistent with the next – and the next and the next – you will arrive at a state of decoration nirvana, where the twin gods of harmony and serenity reign supreme, unchallenged by the mischievous, difficult spirit of contrast.

That's all very well, but endless continuity can result in an atmosphere that is not so much calm as comatose and I, for one, long for a bit of 'life'. Thank heaven, then, for nonconformist designer Paolo Moschino, whose stunningly contrastive flat is shown here. Its style is unquestionably the antithesis of bland continuity, yet – and here is the real paradox – it still seems harmonious, even serene. The reason for this is surely that all the rooms, however different their decoration, are linked not only by subtle detailing but, more subliminally – and importantly – by the dynamism of the taste and interests of the person who created them.

The double drawing room most obviously makes the point. One end is dark, enveloping, cosy and intimate, with newly installed, waxed-pine panelling, velvet-covered rounded sofas and a dense assembly of mainly eighteenth-century objects, reflecting Paolo's appreciation of 'the antique'. The other end is a light, luminously mirrored space, with linen-covered, angular seating and a collection of mid-twentieth-century artworks, mostly by Jean Cocteau, whose line drawings and plates Paolo has collected for many years. Although the two ends of the room are at the spectral and textural extremes, they feel perfectly balanced, two sides of the same coin. Depending on your mood, or perhaps the time of day, you may choose to sit in one part of the room rather than the other – but the main thing is that you enjoy both areas in equal measure because each has an individual, interesting stamp.

'Individual' and 'interesting' are adjectives that apply to Paolo himself as much as to his design style. He was born in Italy and studied political science at university in Florence, which is hardly a predictable background for someone acclaimed as one of the best decorators in Britain. (His own flat was the winning entry in the Best Traditional Residential category of the prestigious Design and Decoration Awards 2003.)







MAIN PICTURE and TOP RIGHT Paolo added panelling to the dining room and painted it in a French grey. Reclining in front of the inset panels of mirror is a classical terracotta figure. The door to the left of the mirror is a fake, as is the left-hand window, which were both introduced to give a sense of elegant symmetry. The curtains are in 'Silk Stripe', which also covers the chairs beneath the linen loose covers. The only fabric in the flat that is not from Paolo's shop is the one used here for the blinds – 'Peony' by Hodsoll McKenzie. CENTRE RIGHT In the kitchen, which Paolo uses for informal entertaining, a painted-pine cabinet houses 'silvery' things. BELOW RIGHT The corridor leading to the bedrooms goes from white to black and is lined with original panelling. The wooden floor is also original



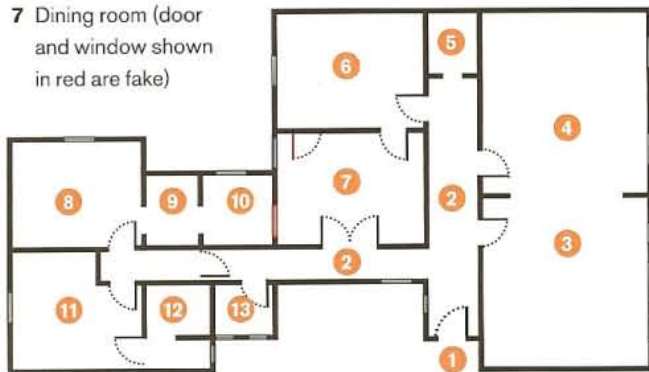
He came to England seventeen years ago, intending to stay for six months, but a chance encounter with Joseph Ettedgui led to a job in fashion retailing. Then he met Nicholas Haslam and started working with him at Nicky's shop in Holbein Place in Pimlico. Eight years ago, they decided to split the business in two, with Nicky concentrating on interior design (as N H Design) and Paolo having the Nicholas Haslam shop, marketing furniture, fabrics and accessories.

Inevitably, some of Paolo's customers coveted the look he put together in Holbein Place and they asked him to advise on their homes – and so began a career in interior design alongside shopkeeping. To a large extent, the location of Paolo's workplace influenced the areas he searched when, a year or so ago, he decided to move from his two-storey flat in Earls Court. He wanted somewhere closer to Pimlico, with generous space on a single level and good ceiling heights. After a lot of hunting, he discovered a run-down mansion flat in Westminster, which offered all the things he had hoped for – and more: despite having been carved up and used as a company 'dormitory', the flat retained most of its original, late-nineteenth-century features, such as cornices, fireplaces (though not always the original chimneypieces) and, in the corridor-hall, handsome panelling.



- 1 Entrance
- 2 Corridor-hall
- 3 'White' drawing room
- 4 Panelled drawing room
- 5 Storage
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Dining room (door and window shown in red are fake)

- 8 Main bedroom
- 9 Dressing area
- 10 Bathroom
- 11 Second bedroom
- 12 Bathroom
- 13 Cloakroom





LEFT FROM TOP Projecting forward to either side of a Russian chest of drawers in the second bedroom are tall, matching 'cupboards' – the one at right provides wardrobe space; the one at left conceals a door to the bathroom. A fragment of Aubusson is used as a bed hanging. The cloakroom is lined with oak in horizontal bands. MAIN PICTURE 'Nivelles' (oyster) linen is used for the bed hangings, bed head and at the window in the main bedroom, where shades of white form a complementary background for parchment-covered books and classical engravings by Piranesi, which are canvas-backed and attached to the wall with seeming casualness. The walls and woodwork are finished in different shades of Paint Library's 'Sand'



Although the interior had great scope, it needed a lot of unravelling, reconfiguring, restoring and redecorating before it could become the sort of place in which Paolo and his partner, Philip Vergeylen, wanted to live. The first thing Paolo did was to rid it of the clumsy accretions and internal divisions that had been installed. Then he made a wide opening between the two main rooms to create the impressive double drawing room. He also increased the height of the doors into the room, in order to give it more elegance. Several other major changes were made, the chief ones being to form a main bedroom suite, comprising a bedroom and bathroom linked by a cupboard-lined dressing area, and to reposition the kitchen and dining room.

From then on, it was a matter of refining the detailing and devising the decoration, which brings us back to Paolo's skilful handling of contrast. This is not just a feature of the double drawing room but a leitmotif throughout: even the L-shaped corridor-hall expresses the theme, with one 'arm' painted entirely white and the other having its farthest section painted black. Opening off the black section is the dramatically polar main bedroom, with walls, curtains and bed hangings all in shades of white. Opposite is the second bedroom, where yet more contrast is achieved with gorgeously rich, Chinese-red walls and dark furniture.



The other, all-white 'arm' of the corridor leads past the drawing room to the practical and aesthetically pleasing kitchen. Paolo enjoys entertaining in this friendly space, but if he has too many guests, or he wants to be more formal, he uses the adjoining dining room, a truly exquisite transformation of the flat's original kitchen. Here, he has lined the walls with panelling – in fact, painted MDF – which has produced a cosseting, subtly French ambience.

Surrounding the dining table is a set of chairs with skirted, linen loose covers. It was these chairs that convinced me once and for all of Paolo's extraordinary concern for detail. The loose covers remain permanently in place, so does it matter too much what the upholstery beneath is like? When I rudely lifted a skirt – to see the chair frame – I was astonished to find that the seat was covered not with plain calico lining, as one might expect, but with beautiful silk, the same as the curtains. For Paolo, there is obviously a certain pleasure in knowing that such a fine detail exists, even if it never sees the light of day □
Paolo Moschino at Nicholas Haslam Ltd (tel: 020-7730 8623)

