

# Out of chaos comes order

Jamb director Henry Bickerton has revived a Victorian town house once strewn with pizza boxes with carefully chosen elements of English country-house style



TEXT EMILY TOBIN | PHOTOGRAPHS ALEXANDER JAMES



OPPOSITE Pieces Henry has collected, including a pair of ostrich eggs, are displayed on the chimneypiece in the sitting room. THIS PAGE Accents of red and gold enliven the room's dark walls; the curtains are from Bennison Fabrics



For half a century, antique dealers have gravitated towards the Pimlico Road, flaunting wares of the best quality. These days, it is something of an anachronism – a pocket of London with a tangible sense of community where the shopkeepers know one another well and trade as much in good-natured gossip as they do in objects. Ask anyone along this stretch of road about Henry Bickerton and they will have plenty to say – all good, I hasten to add.

He has been a fixture on the street for almost a decade, joining Jamb – where he is now a director – as a fresh-faced 28-year-old. Jamb founder Will Fisher describes Henry as ‘a natural decorator whose eye for balance and harmony is superb’. The pair share a taste for country-house style – an aesthetic that is clearly at play in Henry’s own house.

He lives in a Victorian house in Parsons Green with his wife Sophie and two young sons, Archie, six, and Hector, three. They bought it in 2011 and spent 18 months doing it up. ‘It was the classic example of the worst house on a good street,’ says Henry. ‘It was essentially six bedsits and we could barely see into what would become our bedroom because the guy living in it had blacked out the windows and was snoring among mountains of pizza boxes.’

Fortunately, the pair had the foresight to see beyond the chaos and, after some building work – mainly focused on extending the kitchen and the addition of a loft – they moved in. Henry is quick to recognise that he is ‘a very bossy husband’, a sentiment that manifests itself in Sophie having virtually no say in how the house looks. ‘She learned pretty early on to keep the receipts for anything she bought,’ he admits.

Sophie clearly has boundless patience: a man once turned up on the doorstep demanding £90 because Henry had bought an antique squirrel cage. On another occasion, her husband was meant to be buying a chest for the kitchen but instead came home with a model of a twentieth-century Romanian chapel. While neither of these purchases are in evidence when I visit, Henry’s penchant for collecting is very much on show. There are ostrich eggs in the sitting room, a turtle shell on the stairs and a wall of French armorials painted on card in the hall, which, incidentally, are illuminated by Jamb’s ever-popular ‘Globe’ light.

The sitting room is a handsome space painted in Farrow & Ball’s ‘Railings’. ‘I chose a really dark colour to make it as uninviting as possible to my children,’ Henry deadpans. Far from stygian, the room is warm and cossetting, particularly when lit by candles – ‘the less my guests can see of me the better’. But the pièce de résistance is the Bennison Fabrics curtains in rich shades of red and gold: ‘I fell in love with the pattern and, by complete luck, they had exactly the amount of fabric I needed.’

By contrast, the kitchen, which backs onto a small garden, is a pared-back affair designed by Thomas Ford & Sons. Planning issues meant a sloped ceiling was unavoidable; Henry did not want any top cupboards, so instead he had a large country-estate-style cupboard installed. It is an elegant solution that hides the fridge and provides ample storage.

Upstairs there are four bedrooms: two for the boys (Archie’s is a jolly concoction of candy-cane stripes), one spare (a pretty loft space decked out in a Bennison Fabrics linen), and Sophie and Henry’s room, which is understated, yet quintessentially English. With typical resourcefulness, their crewel curtains, originally made by the interior designer Hugh Henry, were salvaged from a skip.

The house is testament to Henry’s intuitive sense of what to buy and where to place it. I suspect that, much to Sophie’s chagrin, it will not be long before the Romanian chapel and squirrel cage become part of the furniture □

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OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The other end of the sitting room. Henry had a large, country-estate-style cupboard installed in the kitchen, which houses the fridge and storage. French armorials painted on card line a hall wall. Part of the kitchen has a sloped ceiling, beneath which black and white photographs are lined up along the granite worktops. THIS PAGE FROM TOP Henry and Sophie’s bedroom. In Archie’s bedroom, the striped wallpaper is from William Yeoward. The spare bedroom in the loft extension

