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THE NEXT STEP

NEWLY SINGLE FABRIC
DESIGNER ALLEGRA HICKS TAKES HER
LONDON TOWNHOUSE IN A
FRESH DIRECTION EMBLEMATIC OF HER
BLOSSOMING CAREER

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FACING PAGE: Designer Allegra Hicks stands outside her London home. THE PAINTING: The living room, the coffee table is by Allegra Hicks, a pair of Louis XV chairs is upholstered with pieced fabric, the trio of wall paintings is by Amah Kapoor, and the bar cart is from the 1940s; the sofa pillow, rug, fabric, and rug are by Hicks. See text on page 104.



The dining table and chairs are from the 1940s. The mobile is by Condon, and the Venetian mirror is from the '50s. Hicks designed the rug by the Rug Company, as well as the silk and covering and curtains. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The designer, near her home in Chelsea. The benches in the kitchen are based on a form by Hicks, and the artwork is by Ingrid Dittler. Artworks by Donald Baechler, Anish Kapoor, and Joan Mitchell. Balustrade on the second-floor landing; the galvanized-metal stair railing was designed by Tom Dixon. See Resources.



To add warmth to the rooms, Hicks used rich, evocative colors such as ochre, aqua, and mauve because, she says, "the light here can be very white and cold." She filled the walls with paintings by artist friends like Anish Kapoor and Donald Baechler. But there's nothing formal about the arrangement: A Basquiat might hang next to drawings by her two daughters, Angelica, 19, and Ambrosia, 14. And every attempt is made to steer clear of traditional English townhouse design. Hicks replaced the Victorian balustrade with a playful, galvanized-metal one made for her by the designer Tom Dixon, another good friend. "This house is very much me—there's a freedom about it," she says. "It's not constricted in design order, or aesthetic. If you move a piece of furniture, it doesn't upset the whole room."

What every room has in common, however, are elements of pattern, texture, and color that speak to one another. In the dining room, for example, a delicate mobile designed by her friend, artist Julia Condon, mimics the delicate, beaded, abstract roses embroidered on the mauve silk that lines the walls. For Hicks, who pays special attention to the use and treatment of fabrics, the idea for the walls was to create a dreamy feeling—almost in the spirit of the famed 20th-century French couturier Paul Poiret, whose fabric draping evoked romance. "If you could give an image to a scent, that's what it would look like," she says.

In the sitting room the subtle pattern painted on putty-color walls plays off Hicks's abstract design in a turquoise-and-pale-blue rug, which was inspired, she says, by a pair of unusual insect wings that she found in her garden. "The rug is strong and graphic, and the walls gently reflect that," explains Hicks, who made a sketch of the strange insect, then incorporated it into the pattern of the rug.





AN EGYPTIAN PHAROAH'S HEAD of cast bronze greets visitors who knock on the front door of designer Allegra Hicks's Victorian rowhouse in London's Chelsea neighborhood. That's just the first sign that this is not your ordinary English home. The door knocker, a flea-market find, is typical of her idiosyncratic style. While the outside of her townhouse may be designed in the traditional vernacular of the city's terraced houses, inside Hicks has given the interiors a decidedly personal and eclectic feel. Each room is swathed in a moody palette and punctuated by Hicks's own organic designs on fabrics, rugs, and curtains.

"It's such a different way of living in a house than the Italian way that I grew up with, which was on two floors in a very modern home," says Hicks. The designer was born in Turin, the daughter of a physicist father and a stay-at-home mother, both of whom adored modern architecture and design, and passed this passion on to their artistic progeny. "Now I find myself on five floors in a traditional house, going up and down and trying not to forget things." But Hicks has brought some of her native Italy to London in the whimsical mix of textures and patterns that punctuate her home.

"It's not a house put together in order to look good," says Hicks, who recently refurbished it after separating from her husband, Ashley Hicks, an architect and the son of the late decorator David Hicks. "It has been put together to remind me of my life. To me a house should be like the way you dress—it should reflect your personality."



The walls of the sitting room are finished in a patchwork pattern; the mirror is from the 1930s, watered by Francesco Clemente; lamp by Luigi Einaudi; sofa upholstered in a fabric by Hicks; the bench is by Arne Jacobsen; the chair is by Tom Dixon; **FACE** by Arne Jacobsen; a light fixture by Durrell; a French console from the 19th century; a photograph by Jack Pierce; portraits of Hicks and her two sons by Julia Condon. See page 124.

The library's banquette is covered in fabric and pillows by Hicks, the Italian nesting tables at a moment in the 1950s, and the collection of artworks including paintings by Carlo Carrà and Rosalind Wiseman; the rug is a Hicks design for the Rug Company. **FACING PAGE:** In the master bedroom, the bedspreads by Hicks, and the artworks are, from left, Victorian collages of butterfly wings and comings by Alberto Di Falco and Cristoforo Banti.



"IT'S NOT A HOUSE PUT TOGETHER IN ORDER TO LOOK GOOD," SAYS ALLEGRA HICKS. "IT HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER TO REMIND ME OF MY LIFE"

Upstairs, in her bedroom, Hicks went to town with celadon, one of her favorite colors. She painted the walls a soft green, and then used similar tones in the curtains, bedding, upholstery, and even the artwork. Every fabric hosts a different organic pattern drawn by Hicks, many for her new collection for West Elm, and each was inspired by nature—drops of rain, dahlias, Egyptian cactus.

Painting murals and frescoes on walls comes quite naturally to Hicks. After design school in Milan, she studied trompe l'oeil and fresco painting in Belgium. When she had finished her studies, she painted frescoes in private houses throughout Europe before moving to New York to attend the Parsons School for Design. She then as-

sisted Baechler in his studio for six months. Hicks finally opened her own design business after settling down in London in 1989. By 2003, she was also creating fashion collections and showing them on the runway during London Fashion Week. But the recession of 2008 forced her to shutter her fashion business and focus on interiors. In addition to her eponymous collection of fabrics and tabletop accessories—and her affordable pieces for West Elm—Hicks also designs for the Rug Company, as well as for private clients. Many of these items naturally turn up in her own home. "It's the disease of the designer," Hicks says with a laugh. "You always want to change and put your own designs in place." ■