

A DESIGN FOR LIFE

Allegra Hicks as a girl, left; now, main; and with her daughter Angelica in 2012, below



will hate me saying that and find it really embarrassing. Angelica is an artist, completely; the way she thinks and reacts to things. They both learnt to draw because they always made presents. There was always something they could munch on creatively at home.

Divorce is very unfortunate. One beautiful thing is that Ashley and I stayed friends after we separated. Having these amazing girls is an incredible blessing.

I never thought I would remarry [she married entrepreneur Roberto Mottola di Amato in 2014] but it happened. And my kids are happy for me.

I was incredibly busy in the Nineties but less effective and structured than I am now. I've stopped doing fashion, and I've just launched a collection of fabric and a collection of wallpaper. I do a lot by commission. My

style now is eclectic. I like being decorative, which is at odds with how I grew up with always modern design. My patterns are a conversation with the past.

When I'm in Italy I feel very British (even though I've never had a British passport; it never seemed necessary). I like the rules to be applied!

But here everyone thinks I'm fantastically Italian. I have this horrible trait of inviting people on Monday for Wednesday, when all my English friends are busy. But it's nice to do things at the last minute. There's a great sense of spontaneity in Italian social life.

On a deeper level though, we are each of us a collection of the things we've learned, and I have learned a lot in England. I don't think I would be who I am without having lived here.

Interview by Boudicca Fox-Leonard

Allegra Hicks's new fabric the "Gems Collection" is available at Turnell & Gigon; turnellandgigon.com

What would your younger self make of your life today?

Every birthday as a child, I would be given a new set of Caran d'Ache pencils, which was always the most fabulous present ever. I would draw all the time. Nowadays, though, I do a lot more watercolours than drawings.

As a child you're so pure that there isn't an awareness of a sense of self – that comes later when you form your character. A lot of character is formed in reaction to things.

I was a very friendly and very shy child at the same time. My sister was born seven years after me, so I was alone for quite a while. I liked to listen to my grandmother's stories. I was very greedy; every time she finished one I asked her for another.

My parents were modernists. At our home in Turin, northern Italy, the dining-room cutlery, the glasses and the china were all by wonderful designers of the time. Somehow that level of design becomes part of your visual vocabulary.

My father [a doctor and musician] played the piano a lot. I remember lots of great musicians coming to take lessons with him. My mother gave me lots of discipline. She was adamant that if you started something, you finished it. It's stayed with me. Last night I was working on drawings, which I had to stop to go to see a movie. When I got home I carried on until I was finished at 1am.

I went to a classical lycée, where we didn't do drawing and art; we did Greek, Latin and mathematics. I always had a bit of me that wanted to paint, though. I went to design school in Milan and then art school in

IF I COULD SEE ME NOW

ALLEGRA HICKS

57, interior designer

Brussels where I learnt to do frescoes and trompe-l'oeil; painting on a really big scale. Then I came to England to study history of art at Sotheby's.

When I arrived here, my English wasn't so good. I remember being in this huge city, staying at a friend of my mum's in Cornwall Gardens. One of the first places I saw on the map was Pimlico, so I walked to Pimlico. From there I went around, learning different neighbourhoods. What I learnt was that the aesthetics here were so free. We didn't have that in Italy, because there's a great saying, "buon gusto" – good taste – which is such an "urgh" phrase. When you're trying to

and you could be who you wanted to be. It was an incredible moment in my creative development.

I was 24 years old when I met Ashley [Hicks, the architect] and we married in 1990. Then we went to New York and Angelica arrived two years later, followed by Ambrosia. Now I'm a mother I can't imagine my life without kids.

Ambrosia has just finished at Oxford. She's very good at drawing and painting, but she's more of an intellectual type; she

