

**STUDIO**

Postcards of paintings of women, from old master to 20th century, line the walls of Alice's studio. 'Sometimes when I'm trying to solve a problem with a painting, I look at the postcards and they hold the solution,' she says.

**Get the look** The paintings below and opposite are by Alice Instone. Find a similar chair at Treacle. The swivel chair (opposite) was an eBay find, with cushions made by Alice, but Ooh La La sells similar. The stool is covered in fabric from Fabrics Galore.



**\*Home profile**

**THE OWNERS**

Alice Instone, an artist, her husband, Hugh Billett, a banker, daughter Beatrice, two, and cat Mittens.

**THE PROPERTY**

A double-fronted Victorian house in south London. It has a living room, dining room, study and kitchen-diner on the ground floor; a bathroom, bedroom and master en-suite bedroom above; then a bedroom and studio on the top floor. >

# Life meets art

Artist Alice Instone approaches her home as she does a new painting – as a giant blank canvas on which to add rich colour and mountains of personality

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**LIVING ROOM**

Colour and comfort are vital ingredients in Alice's home, and the living room is a favourite place for the family to relax or Hugh to play guitar. Rather than spend on new pieces, Alice frequently has furniture reupholstered. 'We bought this sofa about 10 years ago. It's had various incarnations,' she says.

**Get the look** The rug and sofa fabric are from Designers Guild. The white sofa is from Ikea. The walls are painted in Oak Apple by Fired Earth. For a similar ottoman, go to The Peanut Vendor.



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'My look is eccentric granny,' says artist Alice Instone, describing her London home. 'Some people like things all white and minimal, but that's not me.' What is Alice, though, are rooms brimming with colour, vintage pieces painted or re-covered in vibrant fabrics, and a handful of the beautiful paintings she creates in her studio upstairs.

As is fitting for an artist, Alice sees the home she shares with husband Hugh and daughter Beatrice as a blank canvas. 'I think of it as a place to experiment,' she says. Walls frequently change colour – the living room used to be red – and Alice is currently musing on the hall. 'I've been so into greys, but maybe I'll use some bright, egg-yolk yellow,' she says. 'It used to be fashionable. I think it's ripe for a revival!'

You sense that if *Livingetc* were to photograph Alice's home in a few months' time, it might look totally different. 'Everything is a work in progress,' she agrees. 'I'm always thinking of the next thing. I'm compulsive. I'm constantly planning to change something, or moving stuff to create little still lifes with objects.' What if the house *were* finished? 'I'd have to move!' she laughs. 'I deliberately keep the spare room undecorated, so I have a project to think about.'

The house is full of pieces gathered over the years, some inherited, some picked up on travels. In 1999, Alice followed the silk route from eastern Europe to Nepal, collecting >



**KITCHEN**

'I'm not into ripping out whole kitchens and having new everything,' says Alice. 'I prefer to recycle.' She simply painted the existing kitchen doors and added marble worktops to create a whole new look.

**Get the look** The units are painted in Mid Lead from Little Greene. The worktops are Carrara marble, available from London Marble. The tap is from Holloways of Ludlow.

**\*What they did**

- Reconfigured the space by blocking some doorways and altering access to rooms.
- Replaced two windows with doors that open onto garden.
- Pulled up the carpets and restored floorboards.
- Created an en suite in what was a spare bedroom.
- Repainted the kitchen units and fitted new worktops.



**HALL**

'When we first saw the house, I fell in love with the original features,' says Alice, 'especially the fretwork in the hallway. It's a really dramatic touch in what can be a transitory space.'

**Get the look** For a chandelier like this, go to The Vintage Chandelier Company. For a similar paint colour to the fretwork, see Ideas To Steal.

**BATHROOM**

'I love pattern in the bathroom,' says Alice, 'it's unexpected.' The bath and basin are from a favourite source, which has a good range of unusual designs.

**Get the look** The bath and basin are from The Bath Works. The Royal Flush wallpaper is by Lewis & Wood.



treasures along the way. 'I threw out my towel so I could fit a rug from Iran into my backpack,' she says. Pretty much everything is second hand, too, with a bit of Ikea thrown in. 'Older pieces are made well and don't date,' she says. And as for Ikea? 'It's brilliant value for things like china, and then you don't have a heart attack when someone breaks a plate.'

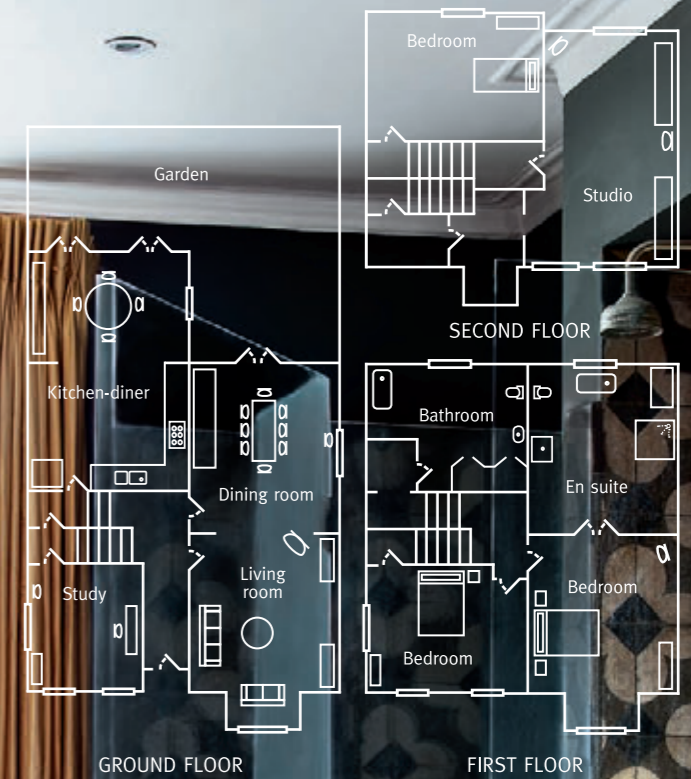
Alice's approach to life as an artist is as unpretentious as her approach to decorating. She only became a painter five years ago, having worked as a teacher and in advertising before. 'Then someone asked, "If you could be anything, what would it be?" I said a painter.' Hugh bought her some oils and she was hooked. 'I became completely obsessed.'

Now, just five years later, Alice is highly sought after as an artist and she was shortlisted for the Shell Women Of The Future award and celebrated at the 2010 Women Of The Year awards. Fascinated by how we consume images of women, Alice's subjects are almost always female. A recent collection, *The House Of Fallen Women*, depicts contemporary figures as infamous women from history, starring Emilia Fox as Marie Antoinette and Cherie Blair as Eleanor of Aquitaine.

However starchy the sitter, Alice paints them all in her unpretentious top-floor studio. 'I don't care about light or space,' she says. 'I'll paint anywhere. I'm just so happy when I'm painting – it's the best drug ever!' And this creativity is not confined to canvas. Alice's life seems to be one glorious act of self-expression. 'Everything around me is an extension of me,' she laughs, 'from the way I dress or cook to how the house looks.' Eccentric granny doesn't quite do it justice. *See more of Alice's paintings at [aliceinstone.com](http://aliceinstone.com).* >



**THE BLUEPRINT**



**EN-SUITE BATHROOM**

'I wanted the bathroom to be exotic, like in Turkey or Morocco, where bathing is so beautiful,' says Alice. She spied the bath outside an antiques shop. 'It was being used as garden furniture and was full of holes.'

**Get the look** The bath was repaired by Sherwood Tinning. The salvaged tiles are from Le Magasin. Alice bought the rug while travelling, but find similar at Bazaar Velvet.

### MASTER BEDROOM

The tapestries, stitched by Alice's great grandmother, soften the dramatic walls, while the chair – re-covered in rich-blue silk by Alice – shines in the corner.

**Get the look** The walls are painted in Mercury by Fired Earth. For a similar chair, go to [thefrenchhouse.co.uk](http://thefrenchhouse.co.uk). This chair is covered in silk from Fabrics Galore. The miniatures on the mantelpiece and the framed silk print are by Alice Instone. The mirror is from Braemar Antiques.



### MASTER BEDROOM

'I love our bedroom,' says Alice, 'it's one of my favourite places.' An antique kimono is a creative alternative to a framed print. 'I thought it was far too beautiful to hang in a cupboard,' says Alice. 'I love the way the birds are knocking the petals off the blossom and chrysanthemums.'

**Get the look** Buy a kimono at [fujikimono.co.uk](http://fujikimono.co.uk). The bed is from Le Magasin. For bedside tables, see Ideas To Steal. The walls are painted in Fired Earth's Mercury.

### BEATRICE'S ROOM

The Minnen bed from Ikea has extra princess-factor when draped with a simple mosquito net canopy. The wallpaper is playful but grown-up, too, so will work as Beatrice gets older.

**Get the look** The Flamingos wallpaper is by Cole & Son. Ikea sells mosquito nets. Buy a similar sofa from [thefrenchhouse.co.uk](http://thefrenchhouse.co.uk).



### \*Home truths

**If you could go back in time, which period would you visit?** I don't really want to go back to the past! I like the fact that we have medicine and rights for women now.

**Favourite colour to wear?** Red. I always wear red lipstick, too, or perhaps shocking pink.

**Coffee or tea?** Tea. I like Lady Grey and Rose Pouchong. It's like tea, only with roses in it.

**Any plans for the next five years?** I'd love to have a home in the countryside. I dream of moving to Mousehole in Cornwall and obsessively look at property for sale there on the internet – it's like porn.

**What should every woman have in her handbag?** Money, keys, lipstick.

**If you could own one famous painting, which would it be?** *The Burial Of Count Orgaz* by El Greco, painted in 1586. It's to die for. I love the subject matter – it's so sad and tender – and the composition. And there are crazy marks of paint all over it. El Greco was so ahead of his time – abstract before people were doing abstract.

### ONLINE EXTRA

For hundreds more inspiring homes with ideas to steal, visit [livingetc.com/houses](http://livingetc.com/houses).

For stockist details, see 181

