

Interiors

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Inside the London home of artists Georgie Hopton and Gary Hume



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Georgie Hopton with her vegetable-printed kitchen wallpaper

Step into the couple's artfully curious Bloomsbury townhouse, once the offices of *The Spectator*

Photographs by *Neil Mersh*

Almost a decade ago I saw a picture of Georgie Hopton's home in a magazine and ripped the photo out. It has been stuck to my desk ever since. It was beautiful, obviously, but perhaps not obviously beautiful – a combination of Bloomsbury Group-ish pattern and hand-painted wallpaper punctuated cheekily with imposing pieces of contemporary art. It's an odd and lovely feeling then, having looked at her home every day for years, to be standing today in Hopton's kitchen as the morning breeze outside bothers her tulips.

Hopton and her husband Gary Hume, both artists, moved into this Georgian townhouse in Bloomsbury 15 years ago. It had previously been the offices of *The Spectator* and was painted entirely cream. They ripped up the front step and installed a marble and mosaic panel of intertwining artists' palettes; the editor's office became their living room. Hopton was surprised by how many of their "lefty" friends (she says, eyebrows raised) said they'd previously visited for parties.

When Hopton and Hume first met in the 1990s, just before his success as a YBA with his work in household gloss paint, he was living in a shed. “It was his studio, too, with a tent in the middle where he slept,” she remembers. “I was repelled by it. You had to stand up and wash in the kitchen sink! So when he said, ‘I need you in my life’, I said, ‘Well, you’re going to have to really do something about your domestic setup.’ Anyway, the next day there was a roll-top bath installed.”

A pattern emerged. They would move house and they would begin with the art. Then they would add the comfort, the beauty, the baths. Until last year they split their time between London and upstate New York, where they slowly transformed a little farmhouse into a grand modern home.

“That was where my relationship with the garden changed,” Hopton remembers, in “a series of revelations”. She started growing vegetables, the act of which involved “small agonies and enormous pleasures, though eventually it became too all-encompassing and I had to scream at the vegetables that it was their turn, that they had to work for me.”

She wheeled them into her studio. First, she took photographs of the vegetables against her body, and later she would use them to print with. “I’d grow radishes so they deliberately became oversized and weird, so they’d make these blobby shapes instead of perfect circles.” Walking through the landscape, making prints with vegetables and broken stalks, she turned them into a wallpaper of abstract figures in yellow that covers her kitchen. “It felt like a sort of recycling, a very cyclical thing. Everything seemed to wind itself into everything else and then come out differently.” Apologetically, she says, “You get ridiculously poetic when you’re in the countryside.” She’d never made potato prints before. “I’d missed that bit of childhood.”

‘Well, why wouldn’t I put that green with that yellow? Anything less than a lot of colour disappoints me’



Born in Harrogate in 1967, she was raised first by her mother who died when Hopton was 10. “And I basically inherited her palette.” A single parent, her mother sold handmade jumpers and patchwork quilts made with neighbours’ offcuts. “The living room was covered in piles of coloured wool and fabric. We had a fake gas fire, and every year my mother had to re-wallpaper the bit of wall above it. It made a big impression on me that you could change the wallpaper. Ever since, I feel like, well, why wouldn’t I put that green with that yellow? Anything less than a lot of colour disappoints me.”

Nature taught her about complementary colours, too, “and what you learn to be acceptable. Yellow with purple, orange and green – you see these opposites and you see how they work.” Then, after that slow education, “I married a man who’s incredible at colour. It’s an instinct. And my instinct is definitely away from white. It depresses me if I see it in an interior. Because I think, why wouldn’t you?”

It’s an instinct that’s immediately evident at [No 1 Royal Crescent](#) in Bath, where Hopton is currently showing collages, new wallpaper and fabric designs in an exhibition of collaborations with the artist Mary Delany, who died in 1788. [The Botanical World of Mary Delany and Georgie Hopton – A Domestic Arrangement](#) opens alongside a sale of her vegetable prints, at Berdoulat down the road, and cushions for outdoor furniture brand Munder Skiles, inspired by her New York garden.

In her London kitchen, a giant Sarah Lucas self-portrait covers the vegetable-printed wallpaper and a mammoth sculpture, a gift from Jake and Dinos Chapman, gazes over the marble island, opposite a collage by Hopton and a painting by Cecily Brown of “an endless, recurring feast”. Hanging from a hook is a battered pan, a present from Giorgio Locatelli for Hume’s 50th birthday. Hume gave him a stirring stick in a paint pot for his and, in return “Giorgio said, you gave me your tool, so here is mine. There are lots of swaps in this house.”

Before the YBAs, says Hopton, “there wasn’t really a contemporary art scene. There was a scene of drinking and then they all went to work doing their separate things.” And then came Hume and Lucas and the Chapman brothers... “Everybody’s invited to each other’s openings and we all want each other to be successful and happy. So we work towards that.” First it was a scene, now it’s a community, sometimes a family. “It’s just got stronger really. Before, there was so much attention and pressure – when the YBAs got their money it was like a miracle. So they spent it on everybody who was there. There was a lot of debauchery and nonsense and generosity. And total fun.”

The light from the garden, where Hume’s limestone “Bud” sculpture grows alongside a medlar tree, leads us through the house, which is layered with rugs and paintings and stories about friends. A pair of bright orange armchairs upholstered with jacquard silk sits upon a rug designed by Hopton (“At some point I said to Gary, ‘Imagine if this collage was a rug!’” and so it became), and by the window leans a plaster penis, complete with handle. “This is a Sarah Lucas – it looks like a primitive tool.” On a side table there is a paintbrush that was once Lucian Freud’s and upstairs on a landing is a bronze cardboard box by Gavin Turk, an anniversary present.

‘If I’m really lucky, the things I fall in love with work together. So I just have love affairs. That’s what I do’

The first-floor living room is carpeted by another of Hopton’s rugs, huge and almost alive. “I thought: what a brilliant thing to have a rug that got in the way!” This is the room where they entertain, overseen by an Allen Jones sculpture. Once, Turk’s ex-wife wrote and directed a play here, another time a hypnotist came and put on a show. “Our newish friends at the time, [actors] Megan Mullally and Nick Offerman, both pretended that they were hypnotised and it was so funny that I sat here,” on a sofa upholstered in one of her bright poppy-ish designs, “and honestly thought I was going to die.”



One day, Gary Hume received “what he thought was a whimsical and ridiculous request from Elton John, to do some pictures in his shower. And Gary said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous’, until eventually Elton said, ‘Where the fuck is my shower, Gary?’ And Gary went, ‘Oh, well, if you really mean it, I’ll go and think about it.’ And out of nowhere came these marble pictures.” By chiselling channels into marble, Hume created what look like lines in pencil – it was such a success he did their shower here at home, too. Beside it is a framed photograph from when the YBAs were still Y, of Sarah Lucas and Don Brown in flowing gowns, having a cup of tea in a field. “It sort of reflects what a moment that was, doesn’t it?”

Clopping down from the top floor, talking about distant plans to design stair runners, Hopton says other people describe her style as “eclectic”. And how does she describe it? “Well, I would say that I fall in love with something and I get it. And then I fall in love with something else. And then if I’m really lucky, they work. So I just have love affairs. That’s what I do.”

It’s almost impossible to imagine this rich and playful home was once an office, but they still receive letters for *The Spectator*, sometimes poems, too. The earlier history of the house is less clear. “Once we had an upholsterer drop off a chair and he stood here and said, ‘The children, the children.’ And Gary went, what? Anyway, this street used to have a lot of orphanages in it and it turns out the upholsterer could feel the children. Then he went, ‘Don’t worry, they are happy.’” We stand still for a second, listening to the silence. “I love it,” grins Hopton. “Sometimes when I’m on my own I’ll go, all right then, kids. Are you coming to play?”