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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

TANGERINE STEAM

Legendary collector's hammam in Morocco



SHELF HELP How bats save books in Portugal's royal library



This page, clockwise from top: a biting epigram by Roman poet Martial – translation: ‘they praise those books, but read these’ – runs up the side of a bookcase; a bright-yellow 18th-century Chinese-enamel fingered citron punctuates the bank of red and pink spines; a cartouche of Tutankhamun’s wife Ankhesenamun is appliquéd on the seat of the piano stool. Opposite: a tree work in wood, suede and pen and ink hangs over the fireplace



CHARACTERS AND CHARM

Having wearied of anonymous, all-white interiors, artist and 'woman of letters' Kate Daudy decided to make free with her multicoloured felt and pinkish shears on moving in to this Victorian terraced house in west London. The result is delightfully lyrical, with enlightening bons mots and erudite quotes appearing on walls, lampshades, bookcases – and much more besides. As for Charlotte Edwards's reaction, does she really have to spell it out...? Photography: Rachael A. Smith

Left: the virtues of good government, as depicted in the fresco panels in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, are picked out in multicoloured felt lettering over the sitting-room bookcases. Top: the words of wisdom on this paper shade quote Marcus Aurelius: 'Not to feel exasperated or defeated or despondent because your days aren't filled with wise and moral actions, but to get back up when you fail, to celebrate behaving like a human'





KATE DAUDY

has written on ball gowns, in bus shelters, on the sides of shopping centres. Her tall, narrow, condensed script, usually cut from brightly coloured felt, is a playful jumble of upper- and lower-case letters with high crossbars, shepherd's-crook curves and rounded ends, as though a pen has paused and puddled ink there. Informed by the artist's Chinese studies, and shaped both by the sentiment it expresses and the place or material it's written on, her text has a descriptive, almost pictorial quality. Language, of course, has its limits. Whether her writings convey a single word, a passing thought, a scientific formula or a philosophical adage, they reach after ideas that can't be so easily stuck down; that remain as far off as the stars that Kate often scatters around her inscriptions.

She started writing on the wall at home in west London, too, when she had three children under five and couldn't work in her studio or further afield. While they slept, she unfurled lines of poetry, from Catullus to Czesław Miłosz, in loops and spirals of felt lettering, from floor to ceiling throughout the house and all the way down the staircase; she came to think of each room like a chapter in a book. Over a decade, this outpouring has mostly been replaced by larger framed artworks, or by less demanding, more purely decorative felt motifs: showers of multicoloured asterisks, curling branches cut out with pinking shears, friezes of wild flowers and wild strawberries. But you still find yourself reading these rooms as much as looking at them. Spherical paper shades, hanging over your head like

cartoon thought-bubbles, have had song lyrics or the musings of a Roman emperor applied to them, offering consolation and illumination. 'Like everyone I sometimes fall down gullies of despair, and Marcus Aurelius written around my house has kept me loving being alive,' Kate says. 'He is nice on a light as, obvious thing to say, he brings constancy and light to the everyday.'

While her writings here are partly notes to self, they are also communications to her family, 'to bear in mind as we all grow up together', as Kate puts it. 'I want the children to be informed by their home... to look around and think: That's what matters.' *Everything is possible*, the young Daudys' bedside lampshades assure them, while in the kitchen, they're exhorted to *show the people you love with love*. 'A sense of stability and colour and possibility and unconditional welcome,' is what Kate hopes the house offers her offspring; the first of these was sometimes lacking in her own childhood. 'My parents used to move all the time. I was at boarding school, and often I didn't even know,' she says. 'I'd be coming back from school in the car and they'd say, "Oh, we're going to the new house now." So I had this obsession with home and identity – I suppose it's what a lot of my work's about.' Her project *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, begun in 2016 and still touring all over the world, was made in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who arranged for her to visit its sites in the Middle East. Kate covered a UNHCR tent from Za'atari, the Syrian camp in Jordan, with the words of refugees dis-

Top: an old fairground merry-go-round horse gallops through the garden beyond the basement kitchen. Opposite: Kate felt so attached to this old desk after writing a book there that she turned it into a kitchen table with the addition of a marble slab. As well as crockery and cookware, the cupboards behind hold drawing materials, a good supply of M&S mint toffees and a 'library' of different kinds of honey from around the world







cussing home, family, loss and displacement, as well as with cut-felt hollyhocks like those she saw planted around the 'imaginative and joyful' homes she visited there.

Kate and her husband, Clément, used to favour a flat decorated entirely in white, 'like living inside a milk carton' – albeit one that had lots of glitter balls hanging from the ceiling, 'for the sparkling light'. With their third child on the way, she recalls, 'we put a pin in a place we considered to be the centre of town – the Japanese cake shop next to the Royal Academy – and I stretched a length of cotton out from the pin into a radius we considered to be relatively close. Then we bought the biggest place we could afford within that circle.' This turned out to be a tall Victorian terraced house north of Paddington, divided into bedsits, which was then reconfigured to Kate's design. The project overran, and the family moved in only three days before her youngest son was born. 'It was chaos,' she says. 'We were all in one room for about a month, with the baby smelling of plaster and dust and chips and cigarette smoke and fried chicken because he was always being passed around the builders and all of us.'

Following just two decorating principles to the letter – 1. no sharp edges, and 2. it has to not matter if the children break it – Kate filled the house with her work (fortunate that felt ticks both those boxes) and furniture from the shops and market on Golborne Road. Her friend Grant White, an interior designer who has also collaborated with Kate on vintage fashion customised with poetry, encouraged her

to follow her instincts; 'he has this gift for looking at things, talking about light and space and ideas and making everything look easy, that makes you think: Hell, I am going to do whatever crosses my mind.' There are plants in every room: real ferns and bucketloads of flowers, as well as Kate's crocheted or appliquéd trees, her 'tools for thinking', often with giant pompom blossoms. An admirer of the famous greenhouse poems by market-gardener's son Theodore Roethke, she finds that 'having plants around helps give value to every moment that passes by'. In the basement kitchen, where green fabric and furnishings were chosen 'to match the garden', one wall is hung with a portrait gallery of trees copied from late Medieval and early Renaissance paintings, in which twisted branches and contorted trunks were used to express the agony or ecstasy of the scene.

Putting the milk-carton aesthetic still further behind them, Kate stowed the family's many books in scarlet-backed cases in the sitting room, arranging them in blocks of yellows, pinks, greens and blues, with coordinated or contrasting ceramics serving as bookends and paperweights. 'I can always find a book by remembering the colour of its spine, so I put them all like that,' she says, smiling. 'It seemed as good a way to order them as any other. It's really childish, but the effect is curiously restful.' It's not surprising that she refers to the house as 'my rainbow' ■

'Am I My Brother's Keeper?' will tour to the United Nations headquarters in New York and 17 other cities throughout 2021. For more information about the artist, visit katedaudy.com

Top: a friend felt that the words in this artwork in the bedroom encapsulated Kate's character. The paper shade in the sitting room beyond is covered in lyrics from a favourite song, DB Boulevard's 'Point of View'. Opposite: the calligraphic swirl over the mantelpiece is from photographer Shinichi Maruyama's 'Kusho' series. 'It is the only artwork I ever bought,' Kate says. 'I love it more than I can say. I look at it for many minutes a day'