

CREAM OF THE CROP

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Georgie Hopton's endearing wallpapers, textiles and prints draw inspiration from the produce of her own vegetable garden, as the London house she shares with her husband the artist Gary Hume, attests. Home-grown courgettes radishes and kohlrabi all serve as stamps for Hopton's delightful hand-blocked designs. while the success of the yield dictates the prints she makes. Laura Freeman applauds a fertile imagination. Photography Fritz von der Schulenberg.

There are certain streets in London that still breathe a Dickensian air. Their gaunt runs of sooted brick ought to be mired in a fog that never lifts. Their lean houses would suit plotters and villains, modern-day Compeysons and Tulkinghorns. Dark secrets and disputed wills seem to lie behind their sober doors.

But keep your eye on one dark 19th-century London terrace and you may spot something quite different. The doorstep is the giveaway. A trio of paintbrushes rocket like fireworks through the thumb hole of a palette, all set in marble. The colours are ochre, scarlet, burgundy

and a startling Colman's Mustard yellow. This is the house of textile designer Georgie Hopton and her husband, the artist Gary Hume, one of the YBA cohort made famous by the 1988 Frieze show. Among rows of bleak houses, Hopton's home is a glorious old curiosity shop.

What could have been a severe and shadowy place, a forbidding residence for a scheming Ralph Nickleby, has been transformed into a home of kaleidoscopic surprises. Hopton discovered the Grade II-listed Georgian house nine years ago, when it was still offices. The walls, says Hopton, were 'dirty cream', and the rooms a tangle of telephone leads. But 'the bones of the house were there; a haven right next to the City'. Leaving her former flat in a wedge-shaped building - 'like a slice of cake' - near a busy roundabout, Hopton, guided by architects Molyneux Kerr, began a three-year transformation. Stone carver Kim Meredew restored and replaced the house's damaged and missing marble fireplaces, and laid out the palette-and-paintbrushes doorstep-surely the most dazzling welcome mat in London.

Hopton, who is bright and lively as a goldfinch, irrepressible in her energy, graduated from Central Saint Martins a year behind the YBAs. 'We were very cross,' she remembers, referring to the attention the golden group were getting. There was a plan, later abandoned, to drive to the Lisson Gallery in a VW camper van and sabotage one of their shows. Over the years, graduate rivalry has become loyal friendship and the house is a Who's Who gallery of the former bad boys and girls of British art, now reformed as RAs and CBEs: Tracey Emin, Gavin Turk, Antony Gormley, Sarah Lucas, and Jake and Dinos Chapman.

Hopton began her career as a painter, but found herself increasingly drawn to sculpture and mixed media. Fascinated by the 'materials of the domestic', she sought out upholstery fabrics, trimmings, embroidery, vinyl and melamine. Growing up in Harrogate, Yorkshire, she was taken to jumble sales by her mother. Her eyes light up at the memory of trips to Betty's Tea Rooms, where the waitresses wore immaculate white broderie-anglaise blouses. Today, antique peasant smocks embroidered with handstitched rabbits, flowers and vines hang on the back of her bedroom door. 'I've always loved craft. My mum would knit jumpers and make handmade quilts.' These jumpers in bold 1970s colours were a 'revelation' to their friends. 'My mum has influenced my whole aesthetic'. I'm not interested in anything matching: I inherited that from my mother's quilts.'

From painting and sculpture, Hopton turned to textiles, wallpapers and prints. Today, she draws inspiration from her vegetable garden at the couple's summer retreat at Accord in upstate New York. Here, they are truly free to work, paint and experiment, away from the demands of diaries and galleries. Hopton's handblocked papers and

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linens are printed with stamps cut from crosssections of the potatoes, radishes, kohlrabi, beetroot and butternut squash she grows and harvests each year. The stems of monarda or 'bee balm' flowers are dried and dipped in paint to make trellislike patterns. Courgettes are cut and de-seeded to give half-moon or crescent shapes. Each print is unique to that summer's crop. 'I consider myself a greengrocer,' says Hopton, smiling. She had 'harboured a desire for a long time to make wallpaper', before alighting on this most organic and seasonal of methods. 'The irony is that I'd never done potato prints as a child.'

The kitchen, in a glass extension at the back of the house, is papered in Hopton's 'Bird Feet' paper, printed with monarda stems and the smallest new potatoes. The mid-century textile designer Lucienne Day, herself a devoted gardener, whose famous 'Calyx' print became synonymous with the Festival of Britain in 1951, would have thrilled to Hopton's zucchini and viburnum leaf prints.

A strange and extraordinary golem watches over the kitchen: a carved wood sculpture by the Chapman Brothers, a squat figure eating a portion of McDonald's chips and slurping a fizzy drink. He strikes a wry, contrasting note in this room devoted to good food and the pleasure of growing your own herbs and autumn squashes.

Hopton's designs are joined upstairs by wallpapers from William Morris and Robert Kime in the attic guest bedrooms. The ground-floor music room and library are hung with papers by Mauny. 'Very Bloomsbury,' says Hopton. It's true. You expect Duncan Grant or Roger Fry and his Omega crowd to ring the bell at any moment. The centrepiece of the library, with its shelves of illustrated books on the history of British art from William Blake to Mark Wallinger, is the 'Stromboli' rug that Hopton has designed with Christopher Farr. 'I always give my works titles of places I dream of going,' she says. The oval rug, with its collaged pattern of shrewd-faced foxes and plaited ropes, can be commissioned at any size. 'I'd like to see it in a ballroom,' says Hopton.

Leaving the house by the front door, you draw aside a curtain printed in Hopton's 'Deco Primitivo' print. It is so bright, so cheering, your thoughts turn to early mornings in the garden, dew on the leaves, and first radishes as round and tooth-cracking as gobstoppers. You can hardly believe that London is on the other side. Even on a winter's day of the densest, most shivering fog, there is one house in the city that will be forever in high, summer-harvest spirits.