



A STUDY IN

Art lovers Philip and Maria Arden have created a pared-down interior



LIVING ROOM

Touches of graphic design in the contemporary rugs and pastiche of the London Underground map add pleasingly busy notes to the streamlined scheme. The cabinetry on the far side incorporates a drop-down desk for Maria.

Bespoke black walnut cabinet (right), Davidson London, 020 7751 5537, davidsonlondon.com. **H Cocktail coffee table**, around £4,540, Holly Hunt, 001 212 755 6555, hollyhunt.com. **Bespoke rugs**, from £250sq m, PWC International, 020 7349 7440, pwcinternational.co.uk.



PERFECTION

that provides the perfect backdrop for their collection of contemporary art



DINING ROOM

With its letterbox-shaped window, dark woods and cool tones, this scheme evokes images of the Captain's dining room of an 18th-century ship-of-the-line.

Domo Nevada chandelier. £8,379, Barovier & Toso at Cameron Peters, 01235 833833, cameronpeters.co.uk. **Asti dining table.** from £6,430, William Yeoward, 020 7349 7828, williamyeoward.com. **Sacha high back chairs.** £394 plus 1.5m of fabric each, The Dining Chair Company, 020 7259 0422, diningchair.co.uk.





Finding the perfect interior designer, that elusive professional blessed with flawless taste, common sense and the ability to translate even the vaguest idea into reality, can be quite a struggle. But Philip and Maria Arden, owners of this chic London townhouse, believe that they made the perfect choice. "Interior designers are natural chameleons," says Philip, who works in finance. "It's their job to adapt their style to their client. But underlying that flexibility, every designer has his or her own aesthetic. The trick is to make sure that aesthetic coalesces with yours."

When Philip and Maria approached Caroline Shasha to help them design their new home, they knew there would be no question of a creative falling-out, for Caroline is a long-time friend and shares their predilection for what they define as "modern elegance - high-quality finishes and a neutral palette". So, although this was Caroline's first full-scale project, she knew exactly what her friends, urbane thirty-somethings, wanted from their five-storey house: "Somewhere that reflects their tastes; a place to entertain and relax," she says.

Maria adds, "Philip works from home and we travel a lot, so we wanted a practical but comfortable home, where we can do everything with minimal fuss." The couple were also adamant that the interior should be a blank canvas for their expanding collection of art. "While the decoration is demure, it's the art that really pops," says Maria.

From the outset, the couple worked closely with Caroline. "We'd float ideas and she'd come up with practical solutions," Maria explains. "We know exactly what we like, so we made quick decisions." For example, while Philip has a study upstairs, Maria needed her

KITCHEN BASEMENT LIVING ROOM

The couple decided to keep their existing kitchen, but created the cosy banquette eating area (opposite, below left) for relaxed meals.

Large Longlight pendant in Satin, £1160 plus custom-made shade, CTO Lighting, 020 7686 8700, ctolighting.co.uk. **Chairs covered in Peasant Cloth** in Clay, linen, £144 60m, de Le Cuona, 020 7584 7677, delecuona.co.uk.

Ample storage for DVDs and an extra-deep sofa (below, left) make this the perfect retreat for relaxing and watching films.

Flexform Groundpiece sofa, around £2,866 for L100xD122cm unit, Interdesign, 020 7376 5272, interdesignuk.com. **Bespoke coffee table** designed by Caroline Shasha, 020 7584 2828, carolineshashainteriors.com.



STAIRCASE

Discreet low-level lighting gently illuminates the stairs at night.



BATHROOM

Even this room is a neutral gallery for the couple's artwork.



own desk, too, so Caroline decided to combine work and leisure seamlessly in the living room. One half of the room functions as a spacious entertaining area complete with pale, understated sofas and a graphic-patterned rug; the other half features a wall of customised cabinetry incorporating a bar plus a drop-down desk and filing drawers. "When guests arrive, I can whisk everything into the cabinet and close it up," says Maria.

Philip's so-called "man cave" upstairs is equally streamlined, with a desk and storage designed by Caroline to suit his needs precisely. "We didn't want design for design's sake, but beautiful things that happen to be useful," says Maria.

To ensure the decoration did not eclipse the artwork, Caroline followed a prescribed palette of "dark woods, minimal colour and no frills". Cabinets are made of dark-stained oak and walnut contrasting smartly with pale walls. There are dashes of colour in the rugs, upholstered furniture and a petrol-blue seagrass-clad wall, but nothing detracts from the paintings. "My husband's family are great champions of Pop Art," says Maria, who has sat for Julian Opie, in 18th-century style.

For all of this, the Ardens have taken a long-term approach. With their first child on the way, they have carefully planned the interior as a family home. There is a neat kitchenette and nursery on the top floor, while the basement houses a laid-back TV room with an extra-deep Flexform sofa ("probably the most comfortable seating ever created", says Caroline) and ample storage for games and DVDs. The kitchen has a convivial banquette for family suppers and Caroline has left space for toys and a playpen.

Of course, there is also space for more paintings. "We're always on the prowl for art – in auction rooms or at fairs," says Maria. But, while the art will change, the interior will not. Now that this admirably decisive couple have realised their ideal – grown-up, elegant but eminently practical – there seems little point in altering things. At least for now. ■

MAIN BEDROOM

"We wanted the bedroom (above) to have a chic hotel feel: no dressing table, no superfluous decoration – just super simple," says Maria.

Bespoke ottoman designed by Caroline Shasha and custom made by Ben Whistler, 020 8576 6600, benwhistler.com. **Vetro Large lamps** in Clear, £729.60 each (excluding shade), Best & Lloyd, 020 7610 9191, bestandlloyd.co.uk.

GUEST BEDROOM

The low-key backdrop of textured neutrals (left) offsets works by AJ Crane and Duncan Hannah: "The real talking point," says Philip.

On walls, Grasscloth II in Birch, jute, £138 for 7.3m roll, Donghia, 020 7349 1590, donghia.com. **Siena lamp**, £729.60 (excluding shade), Best & Lloyd, 020 7610 9191, bestandlloyd.co.uk. **Cashmere throw** in Camel, £450, Ralph Lauren Home, 020 7535 4600, ralphlauren.co.uk.