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AT HOME WITH: TOMMASO FRANCHI

The founder of creative architecture and interior design studio Tomèf's love of art and travel features heavily in every room of his Chelsea flat

Photography by **Rachael Smith**

The moment you enter this light, bright west London abode, you know you're in for a sensorial treat. What hits you first is the richness of it all. "With my work in interior design, and my husband Marco Pasi's in real estate, we are both immersed in the world of art and design and have built our collection together," Tommaso tells me. "We like to collect pieces that inspire us and have a meaning to us. For instance, the Mario Ceroli sculptural La Casa dell'Architetto (The architect's home) in the living room was the first important collectible object I purchased from Bonhams. I immediately fell in love with it. Being an architect, it just had to be mine." The pair have lived here for five years, but in the immediate vicinity

of the apartment's square since 2011. When this property came up for grabs, they couldn't resist the opportunity the impressive ceiling height would give them, not only for its abundance of natural light, but for those vital extra inches of wall hanging space – a precious commodity for keen collectors. “Although we are both Italian, we love London and have lived here for a long time. I particularly admire the architecture and feel fortunate to live in a flat with such beautiful proportions and light,” he says.



TOMMASO FRANCHI

You wouldn't know it, but this is a rental property. Filled with layers of rich textiles, antique finds, family heirlooms, and, of course, a gallery-worth of contemporary art, it feels uniquely theirs. Tommaso says renters shouldn't be afraid to go bold with colour in order to inject a bit of personality. “Don't be scared to paint walls or change curtains,” he advises. “A renovated wall colour can change a room's atmosphere into a more positive vibe at a reasonable cost and can ultimately be repainted and brought back to its original colour.” This luxury rental has personality by the (Champagne) bucket-load. But being the creative he is, Tommaso has gone much further than a quick-fix lick of paint to change things up: in the cosy spare room, which acts as both a dressing room and relaxation area for the couple, are floor-to-ceiling bespoke fitted wardrobes, designed by Tomèf, complete with green Fortuny fabric behind latticed glass, and a quirky library ladder, helping the pair make use of every available inch of ceiling height. Only with thoughtfully designed storage can you work on the considered placement of your treasures. And here, there's a place for everything, and everything in its place.



Tommaso tells me that travel features “massively” in the couple’s life, and naturally that’s reflected in the apartment. Just like the various artworks and objects on display, each telling a different story, curiosities from around the world speak volumes of their many global adventures. “In the entrance, we have objects from flea markets in China, a painting of Venice, and a Moroccan chess table, to name only a few pieces in the flat,” says Tommaso. “Travel is part of our lives, and we adore being constantly reminded at home of our experiences through the vision of some discovered objects.”



The heart of the home is undoubtedly the large open plan living/dining area. With furniture pieces and decorative objects so eclectic in style yet beautifully blended, I'm curious to know where Tommaso and Marco sourced them all. I'm told the mid-century dining table was bought at auction in Genoa, while the dining chairs are originally from Prague by the designer Jindrich Halabala and have been reupholstered by Tommaso in a contemporary tiger print fabric from Clarence House. It is a bold addition. The day glo Mario Schifano palm tree painting was bought at auction from Bonhams, while other eye-catching objects in the room include candlesticks from Fabio Salini, antique French urns from the 1810s – these belonged to Tommaso's family – and a Mirko Basaldella sculpture, which takes centre stage on the ornate mantelpiece. Bringing the look together in the most theatrical fashion is a magnificent three tiered silk Scheherazade chandelier from Fortuny in Venice.



Tommaso describes his interiors style as “eclectic, sophisticated and daring”, and that’s exactly how you might define this vibrant and layered home. “I love mixing colours, patterns, fabrics and colourful art,” he says. “Every object in our home has a meaning and reminds us of a cherished experience we have had together throughout the years.” The look has clearly come about organically with pieces plucked from all over, but I wonder if Tommaso has any sourcing tips for us mere mortals looking to decorate a space that’s half as glamorous. “There are many places, not only in London. But I find that, among many others, the Lots Road auctions are often the perfect place to find that special object you are looking for,” he offers.



Despite the design triumph of the grand open plan living room, Tommaso's very favourite spot in the flat is the bedroom. "Because it is small and cosy," he says. "The Farrow & Ball Studio Green walls make me feel protected and the beautiful ancient Indian embroidered bed quilt just provides that level of sophistication I like to see in every space within the flat." It is indeed a sanctuary, and a fittingly luxurious one, at that.

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