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# An art collector opens the doors of her London home

by Valentina Sonzogni
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Photographs by Francesco Dimitri Tassinari

Welcome to the refined London apartment of Umberto Cianfi Bernfeld, where the Italian roots meet the English style.

**English style, Italian spirit and a rich art collection marry in the luxurious London pied-à-terre by Umberto Cianfi Bernfeld.**

In a building dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, in the heart of the **London District of Chelsea**, the design studio Cianfi Bernfeld, founded by the Italian architect **Umberto Cianfi** and his wife **Victoria Bernfeld**, created for the Italian collector **Barbara Fabroni** a design that combines the Italian and English cultures and their backgrounds both in dress & decor. The project's client, the **Italian art collector and philanthropist Umberto Cianfi Bernfeld**, raised in the Tuscan Lunigiana among the mirror spaces and ceiling a dominant refuge where she could accommodate her family and her extensive collection of art. The Cianfi Bernfeld studio designed a home with **cosmopolitan environments that reflected the traditional English style, but that also have kept to tell the Italian roots of the Bernfeld family**.

Photographs by Francesco Dimitri Tassinari

Cianfi Design team worked on **reconfiguring the spaces** to ensure that the apartment was comfortable and functional. The original entrance, narrow and dimly lit, was enlarged and expanded to achieve better lighting.

As soon as you pass the entrance, you let yourself be conquered by the **calm colours** of the Cianfi Bernfeld's design, which have created a **sense of lightness and of art** that dotes the apartment. On the walls, wallpaper with contemporary patterns alternate with neutral elements to set the backdrop for the rich collection of paintings, sculptures and photographs that Barbara Fabroni has collected over the years. The stunning spaces of the Italian **Fiona Falconcelli's work** envelop the living room, the **ceiling drawings of the artists Lorenzo Bonaguro** for Fiona Fiore dance on the ceiling of the bedroom giving her a touch of feminine.

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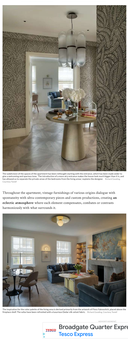

Photographs by Francesco Dimitri Tassinari. Fiona Falconcelli's work envelops the living room. The ceiling drawings of the artists Lorenzo Bonaguro for Fiona Fiore dance on the ceiling of the bedroom giving her a touch of feminine. Fiona Falconcelli's work envelops the living room. The ceiling drawings of the artists Lorenzo Bonaguro for Fiona Fiore dance on the ceiling of the bedroom giving her a touch of feminine. Fiona Falconcelli's work envelops the living room. The ceiling drawings of the artists Lorenzo Bonaguro for Fiona Fiore dance on the ceiling of the bedroom giving her a touch of feminine. Fiona Falconcelli's work envelops the living room. The ceiling drawings of the artists Lorenzo Bonaguro for Fiona Fiore dance on the ceiling of the bedroom giving her a touch of feminine.

Throughout the apartment, vintage furnishings of various origins dialogue with contemporary pieces, in a mix of styles that underline the **eclectic and cosmopolitan ambiance** where each element complements, contrasts or contrasts harmoniously with what surrounds it.

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We were told more about the realization of this refined project directly by their protagonists.

**AD: The starting brief was to find a balance between the rare souls who reside in the house: the fashionista of the owner and the classic English style that permeates this London building of the mid-1800s. What was the design approach to respond to this challenge?**

**Cianfi**: My approach is similar to that of a tailor: I customized it according to the needs of the client and the environment. The **Italian spirit** of the owner, with her motivated and **enhanced some characteristics elements of the English style** that were already present in the apartment, such is the traditional Victorian panelled doors, the ceiling and the wallpaper with contemporary patterns. **Victoria Bernfeld's imagination**, such as the wallpaper with birds and white lilies pattern of the entrance, reminiscence of an English natural landscape. The **Italian spirit**, on the other hand, takes shape both in the furniture choices, such as the iconic pieces of Italian design, but also in the finishes, such as the marble used in the coating of the fireplace and in the details of the bathrooms.

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**AD: What is the methodological approach to incorporating the client's personal tastes within the project?**

**Cianfi**: Every interior has a personal taste that must be reflected in every property they come to live. **We create a holistic concept for the space, a voice of mind, a common thread for the project** that is then developed together with our customers, down to the realization. Indeed, Victoria gave us the full creative freedom to the management of the project, and we **thank her** for her trust and great concept and vision.

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**AD: How was the way to display important art collections in the apartment defined?**

**Umberta Cianfi Bernfeld** I believe that art should not be considered a decorative element, but a meaning in its own right. For this reason, Fiona and I decided to create a **neutral backdrop that would not overshadow the pieces of art, but would give maximum flexibility to all the other walls of the apartment**, keeping them as simple and neutral as possible. This allowed us to place the works of art on the walls without any restrictions or constraints.

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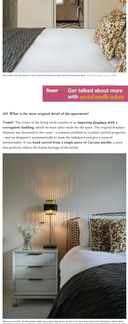

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**AD: Are there any works of art that have a particular meaning and that have influenced the design process the most?**

**Umberta Cianfi Bernfeld**: Being a passionate collector of contemporary art, I like to establish contacts with various artists that life makes me meet. In my London home, I have a wide collection of photographs by the Italian artist **Fiona Falconcelli** depicting my family. My decided place is in the dining of the living room that constantly emphasise their presence and their surveillance on the house.

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**AD: What is the main principal detail of the apartment?**

**Cianfi**: The center of the living room consists of an **imposing fireplace with a contemporary design**, in which we have placed a work of art. The fireplace in contemporary elements was decorated in the room – a common problem in Italian palazzi and palaces – and we designed it aesthetically to mask the unfamiliar and give a sense of **lightness and of contrast with the rest of the room and Victoria's taste**, a piece that perfectly reflects the Italian heritage of the family.

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**AD: What is the link with the community of San Pietroquare, and how does it fit into the project?**

**Umberta Cianfi Bernfeld** I have always admired the incredible work of the Community and is proud I am amazed by the incessant work of non-profit organizations, which make a huge contribution to society by taking care of the less fortunate. I have tried to bring my contribution to the community in many ways, including it in the project. They **craftsmanship is exceptional**, so it's important to be able to support companies that are committed to giving back to communities without compromising the quality of the final product.

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Richard Gooding, Courtesy Tomé

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The coating was hand-carved from a single piece of Carrara marble, an element that reflects the Italian roots of the Beretta family.

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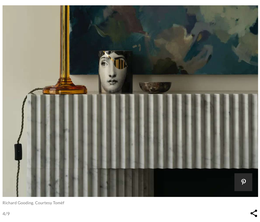
Tomé also custom designed the container cabinet with bookcase. The mirrored side adds depth and highlights the collection of items on the shelves.



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The decorative brass details in the living area warm the atmosphere and give an additional sense of sophistication to the environment.

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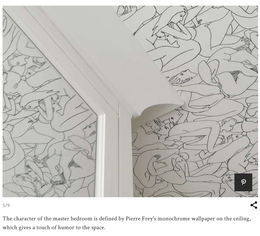

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The character of the master bedroom is defined by Pierre Frey's monochrome wallpaper on the ceiling, which gives a touch of humor to the space.

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Richard Gooding, Courtesy Tomé

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The luxurious Art Deco-inspired bathroom combines three different marbles, monochrome, black, pink and beige with brass inlays, all custom-designed by Tomé.

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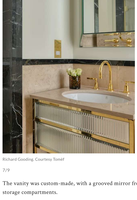

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The vanity was custom-made, with a grooved mirror front and beveled shelves. Two jewel mirrors hide storage compartments.

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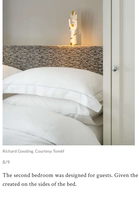

Richard Gooding, Courtesy Tomé

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The second bedroom was designed for guests. Given the small space of the room, containers have been created on the sides of the bed.

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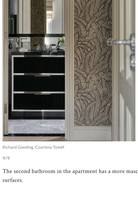

Richard Gooding, Courtesy Tomé

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The second bathroom in the apartment has a more masculine aesthetic, with dark tones and shiny surfaces.

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