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GLAMOUR MISSION

TAMSIN JOHNSON'S TIMELESS ELEGANCE



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The owners' penchant for quirky English style dovetails

This page 'Nîmes' chandelier from Mis en Demeure. The wallpaper panels on the right are 'Les Jardins de Mei-Li' from Ananbô. Because of the impending heritage listing, it was not possible to alter either the walls or floors. The panelling was simply washed down. Opposite page Even older than the house, the mirror dates from the 17th century and was bought at the Paris flea market, Marché aux Puces de St-Ouen. Topped with red Flanders marble, the late 18th-century console was also bought at the market. Mediterranean lamps from Eichholtz.



perfectly into a Swiss 18th-century heritage home.

PARTY

Geneva-based interior designer Alexandra de Garidel loves a challenge. “I say ‘yes’ to commissions that others refuse,” she says. “I’m never afraid of anything.” In the past, she has most notably been put to the test with some extremely tight schedules. She recalls one project that involved the complete overhaul of two houses totalling 1800 square metres on a wine property near Cape Town, South Africa. She had just eight months to finish it – from a distance of nearly 9000 kilometres. “I’m extremely pragmatic and whatever the criteria, I find a way to make things work,” she says.

In that case, the redecoration of this house on the outskirts of Geneva must have been right up her street. The owners – a cosmopolitan couple with young children – wanted it finished in just three months so they could spend the summer there. Yet, the constraints were not simply temporal. The house was also in the process of being listed, which meant it was impossible to change the flooring or make any alterations to the wood panelling. The latter could not even be repainted, simply washed down. And no nails or hooks could be hammered into it. The sole painting in the house – an 18th-century French work sourced at the Paris flea market from Hugues Lassaussois – is hung from a picture rail already in place.

Sitting on a three-hectare plot, the house dates back to the 18th century. One of its previous owners obviously had good connections as he managed to get the French-Swiss border moved so that the entire property is located in Switzerland.

When Garidel first saw it, the interior was extremely austere. Her clients’ original intent was simply to install a temporary decor. “They thought they would redo it after three or four years once the heritage commission had decided exactly what they could do to the house,” she explains. Given the swift timeframe, she established a very strict working process with the wife. “To respect the »

These pages The decoration of the sitting room was inspired by a blue-and-white 18th-century wood-burning stove, which was already in place (not shown). Sofas from Pierre Frey. ‘Velleron’ chandeliers, ‘Bourgogne’ coffee table in gilded metal and glass, and side tables in stainless steel and glass, all from Mis en Demeure. The blue-and-white lamps are antiques. The white rug is from Serge Lesage.

« schedule, she had to reply to every proposal I made by 5pm the same day,” recalls Garidel. “That meant she only had three to four hours. Otherwise, I got to choose myself.”

To make things trickier, the clients first presented her with a contradictory brief. “They said they wanted something understated in neutral tones,” she says. “Yet, when I asked for them to send some inspiration images, they were very British and Laura Ashley in spirit.” Garidel persuaded them to go with the English style and to embrace a little quirkiness. “As the decor was meant to be ephemeral, I thought we should be whimsical,” she explains. “Plus, it’s a family house so you want something lively and fresh.”

The sitting room has a more restrained feel, dictated by the blue and white 18th-century wood-burning stove already in situ. But elsewhere, lots of cheerful touches were added. A series of poetic wallpaper panels enliven the entry hall and a set of multicoloured bistro-style chairs were acquired for the kitchen. Bedrooms upstairs were decorated with jaunty wallpaper. The most striking is the hot-air balloon motif in the boys’ room. “They have a passion for all that flies,” says Garidel, “and I loved the design’s rich colours.”

Sourcing items took ingenuity. Nothing with even a modest lead time would have arrived on schedule. Garidel and her clients spent a day at the Paris flea market, where they acquired a number of

pieces, including the late 18th-century console and giltwood 17th-century mirror in the entry hall. Other furnishings were bought at auction, such as the chest of drawers in a guest bedroom and the sconces decorated with glass birds in the first-floor corridor. She also hired a truck to deliver an order from French furniture brand Mis en Demeure and managed to persuade the Ateliers Montespain near Lyon in France to make the kitchen in record time.

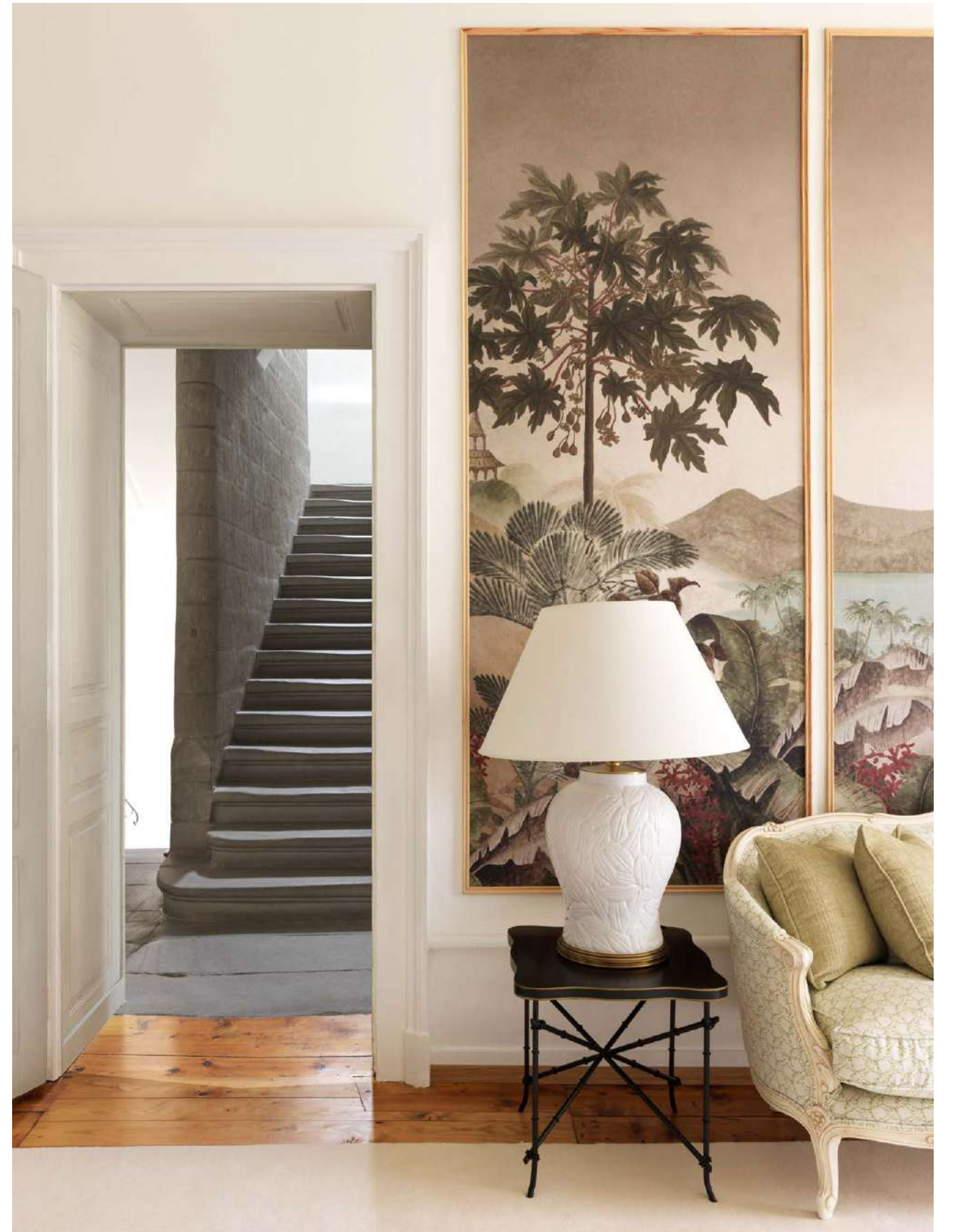
The most complicated pieces to track down were the bathroom fixtures, as well as the 3.6 metre-long dining table. “It was not easy finding one the right size,” she says. Given the decor’s ‘temporary’ nature, she also had to work around a relatively tight budget. The only things that cost a significant amount of money are the bedside lamps in the main bedroom. “There’s great finesse to their design,” notes Garidel. “Their glass bases remind me of perfume bottles.”

Working within such a strict timeframe didn’t stop her from enjoying the process. “I prefer projects that are fast and very intense, rather than those that last for years,” she says. “They’re more inspiring and dynamic.” Her clients seem happy too. So much so that what was supposed to be temporary will now become permanent. “They’ve abandoned the idea of redoing the interior,” recounts Garidel. “They love it just the way it is.”

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This page On the veranda, the rattan sofa and armchairs are from the Barbados collection from Eichholtz. The coffee table is from the Kross collection from Sifas. The antique lanterns are original to the house. **Opposite page, from top** The dining chairs are from Philippe Model Maison. ‘Bistroquette’ chandeliers from Eichholtz. The blind and curtains are made in ‘Kingswood Embroidery’ fabric by Jane Churchill from Colefax and Fowler. The kitchen units are from Ateliers Montespain in Lyon. The splashback has been decorated with hand-painted tiles from Terres Cuites de Raujolles.



This page View from the first-floor landing towards the main staircase. **Opposite page** Wallpaper panels in 'Les Rives de l'Irrawaddy' from Ananbô make an exotic backdrop to the 'Lourmarin' sofa and the 'Bordeaux doré' chandelier, which are both from Mis en Demeure. The coffee tables and side tables are from the Bambou collection, also from Mis en Demeure. 'Cyprus' lamps from Eichholtz. The rug is from Serge Lesage.



This page The main bedroom features the 'Leonie' bed from Elite with bedspread bought from Le Bon Marché department store in Paris. 'Les Aeronefs' wallpaper from Pierre Frey. The Murano glass lamp is from Galerie Glustin in Paris. 'Nightstand Napa Valley' bedside table from Eichholtz. Opposite page, clockwise from top The boys' room features Pierre Frey 'Les Aeronefs' wallpaper with curtains in 'Pamina' silk from Colefax and Fowler. 'Montmartre' pendant light from Maisons du Monde. The 'Beaux Arts' chest and 'Coosa' table lamps with metal base are all from Eichholtz. In the main ensuite, the 'Anton' polished chrome wall lights are from Astro. 'Cléo 1889' taps from Jacob Delafon. Mirrors sourced by the clients in Paris. Tiles on the floor and in the shower are from Carodeco. In the corridor on the first floor, 'Stripe' wallpaper from the Flamant Les Rayures collection from Arte. The wall lights are antique. The rug is from Nash Andréa.



These pages The children's playroom is located on the second floor at the top of the house. The sofa is from Maisons du Monde. The chest of drawers is from Ikea. The two rugs are from My Little Room in Geneva. The table and bench on the rug in the foreground are from Ikea.



SPEED READ

» Geneva-based interior designer Alexandra de Garidel, who says she relishes a fast-paced project, was asked to refresh an austere 18th-century property for a young family who wanted it completed in three months so they could spend the summer there. » Along with the time constraints came restrictions as the house was in the process of being heritage-listed and alterations were extremely limited so the owners requested a 'temporary' decor until it was clear what changes were allowed. » They agreed that a whimsical English style would suit them and the ephemeral decor, and a visit with Alexandra to the Paris flea market and auction finds yielded a number of suitable pieces. The rest were sourced via French brand Mis en Demeure and the well-equipped kitchen was made in Lyon in double-quick time by Ateliers Montespain. » The result? The family loves the house the way it is and there is no more talk of redoing the interior.

5 SIGNATURE STYLE KEY PIECES



- 1 Studio Ashby 'Chess' side chair, \$7627, from 1stDibs. 2 'Sea Coral' mirror, \$1295, from Highgate House. 3 Ralph Lauren 'Sydney' large table lamp, \$2190, from The Montauk Lighting Co. 4 'Herbarium' porcelain teapot in Yellow, \$1200, from Gucci. 5 Antique Louis XV-style painted side table, \$2250, from The Vault Sydney.