

New York gloss

When work demanded moving their young family to London, a couple chose this central, Thirties flat rather than a leafy suburb, and recreated a glamorous, appropriately art-deco-style interior

It's difficult enough to create a London home that's enviably chic if you've lived in the capital all your life. If you arrive with two toddlers and only the skimpiest knowledge of how things work, it could be overwhelming. Amy Somerville, however, is clearly not someone who is easily overwhelmed.

Amy, a breezy American, moved to London three years ago, when her English husband was attracted home by a tempting job offer. The son of doctors, he had grown up in a flat near Harley Street and, though Amy soon realised that, for many families with children, life in the metropolis is lived out in houses set in outlying, leafy areas, she saw no reason to sacrifice the convenience of central London for a suburban idyll. 'I spent 12 years in New York, so I couldn't believe how difficult it was to find a taxi here,' she says. 'I wanted to live within walking distance of Soho.'

Finding a family flat in fashionable Marylebone – the area they particularly liked, and close to Amy's husband's original home – is even more difficult than finding a cab, and it was two years before the Somervilles discovered a five-bedroom penthouse near Oxford Circus. 'The flat was built in the Thirties, but interior designed – with no expense spared – in the Seventies,' says Amy. 'The ceilings had been lowered by about 75 centimetres and all the floors were covered with shag-pile carpet. What really mattered was that it had the nicest light.'

Amy's professional background had always been visual. A degree in art history was followed by work in a



In the office (above), business partners Amy Somerville and Stuart Scott sit below a painting by Isabelle de la Touche. Amy spotted the writing table in the drawing room (opposite) as it was being unloaded off a lorry in Bern; it dates from c. 1905, and is attributed to Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann. The chair is 'BA23', by Ernest Race

New York gallery, a period making documentaries, and web design for major corporations in Switzerland. Though interior design had never featured on this eclectic CV, she had no difficulty deciding how she wanted the flat to be reinvented. 'Design is design,' she states, 'and each property has its own feeling. This flat couldn't have been rustic or French. It just made sense to make it deco – I really love that mix of masculine and feminine.'

The Somerville eyrie overlooks the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), itself a classic of Thirties architecture, and Amy found her near neighbour a useful source of inspiration. Here, in the library, she discovered original photographs of her flat, and the RIBA's dramatic stone staircase, monumental bronze doors and ornamented glass set the mood of angular luxury that now pervades the Somerville home.

Two months of planning – with the help of interior designer Lisa Weeks – preceded eight months of reconstruction, but the fun part was the furnishing, and Amy had little trouble getting up to speed on the antiques shops of Kensington Church Street and Notting Hill. 'I grew up in Pennsylvania, where there is a history of furniture making, and I was taught to appreciate fine furniture when I was very young,' she explains. 'I've always collected it. I love antiques – it's something about the patina.'

The Thirties look she had envisaged demanded lacquer and bevelled glass, stately marble and precisely finished woods, and one of Amy's earliest challenges

was to find craftsmen skilled enough to meet her exacting standards. 'The main bedroom is quite small and I knew I'd have to lie in bed and face the wardrobes,' she says. 'I didn't want ugly hinges. The cupboards had to be beautiful on the outside.'

Amy eventually came across a tiny piece of editorial in a magazine, which led her to Stuart Scott, a furniture designer and maker working in the classic tradition. 'That's the man for me,' she recalls thinking. As indeed, it turns out, he was. Stuart created the bedroom's elaborate marquetry cupboards – a retro tone poem in shimmering walnut and satinwood – to regal standards, and designed and made the sharp-lined Macassar-ebony and sycamore bookshelves that face an entire wall of the drawing room.

Amy and Stuart found themselves so much in sympathy – 'Amy has some great ideas and we push off each other' – that they decided to set up in business together, and in November 2006 they launched Somerville Scott, a made-to-order furniture company. 'The look is a modern, masculine style which borrows classic elements,' says Stuart. 'I like to make furniture in the way it's always been made – I want to build things that will be around in 100 years.'

Prototypes of their work can now be found throughout the flat. The main bedroom's bedside tables – witty furniture puzzles with hidden drawers – are a notable



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE In the main bedroom, the french-polished dressing table was made by Stuart Scott, using walnut and satinwood. The bedroom walls are covered in silk from Gotham in Notting Hill. The tiles in the main bathroom were imported from New York specialist Waterworks. Finnean's bedroom,

been concealed in a deco-inspired cabinet of many colours. 'We're still working on the dining table,' says Amy. 'We're adding patina to the leather panels by having lots of parties.'

The rest of the flat has been reworked as closely as the furniture, with an intelligent, modern take on the design language of the cruise liner and the Agatha Christie mystery. Instead of shag pile, the floors are now covered in period-perfect wood and stone. The kitchen has a terrazzo floor – a hard-wearing material popular in the Thirties but equally suitable for today's family life – while, elsewhere, reclaimed French parquet gleams in neat chevron bands beneath patterned rugs.

The bedrooms and the bathrooms have also been glossed with Thirties glamour. Amy's children – Ella (7) and Finnean (4) – get tucked up in bunk beds reminiscent of railway sleeper berths, with their own personal magazine racks and adjustable lighting. And Amy's en-suite bathroom has a *Queen Mary* flammur, lined in intricate geometric mosaic specially freighted over from the US.

The result is a triumph of polished urban sophistication – but of a very un-English sort. 'People say the flat reminds them of New York,' says Amy. And you can imagine them calculating how they, too, might sacrifice five floors and a garden for one perfect plane of lateral luxury □

