

## People

It all started with a specific yellow chair: we talk to Sandrine Zhang Ferron, founder of Vinterior

## Pulse

The latest industry news, plus a look at what to expect at this year's digital version of Decorex

## Products

An overview of the key wallpaper and fabric launches we would have seen at this autumn's shows

## Projects

The Vicarage Gate apartments were a labour of love for interior designer Laura Hammett

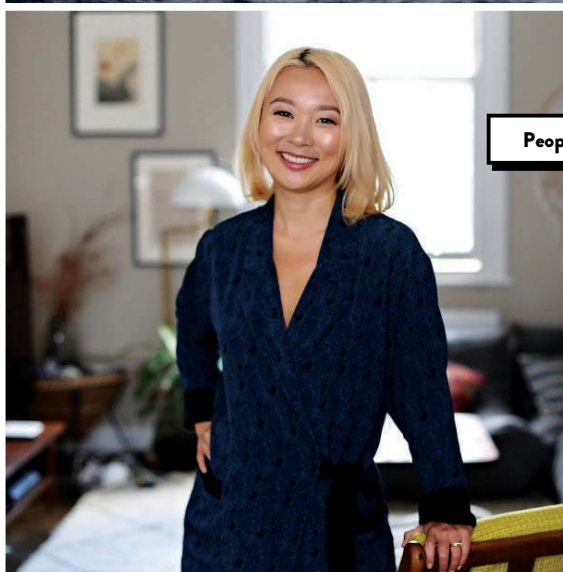
## Professional

Emily Brooks explores the challenges facing designers when creating interiors for luxury yachts

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## Parisian inspiration

by Elspeth Pridham



### Laura Hammett discusses the challenges and rewards of converting a historic town house into four luxury flats in a three-year project

**Who was the property designed for and who will live there?**

Vicarage Gate was a project for a London property developer to convert it into luxury flats for resale. We always design with an imagined buyer in mind, as it is more natural for us with a personal approach. From past experience in this particular Kensington location, we assumed the buyers were likely to be young European professionals, but it's important to ensure the design never alienates another demographic.

**What was on the site previously?**

It's a historic townhouse dating back to circa 1877-1880, originally separated into six apartments. We worked with the architect to completely strip it out, so it was just the shell, virtually removing all walls and floors but retaining the original grand staircase and stained-glass windows. We then designed every interior architectural element to bring it back to life.

**Please describe the building to me**  
The 6,400 sq ft townhouse has been

converted into four luxury apartments - a three-bedroom split-level penthouse with direct private lift and access to the roof, a three-bedroom split level apartment with lovely exterior space outside the master suite, a two-bed duplex apartment, and a stylish studio at lower-ground level. The floors throughout are oak chevron and the walls are adorned with elaborate plaster moulding. We used a monochromatic palette with light panelled walls and dark chevron floors and the dramatic contrast of dark-framed glazed double doors, Noir St Laurent marble fireplaces and bronze effect on the kitchen units. The furnishing is classic contemporary with sculptural lighting and artwork and a jewel tone pop of colour unique to each apartment, to keep them harmonious but have their own identity.

**What was your starting point for the design?**

Working with a potential European buyer in mind we took influence from Paris for the interior architecture, introducing beautiful curved doors and arches, bold veined marble and elaborate plaster moulding.

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We then combined this classic backdrop with contemporary joinery, bathrooms, kitchens and bespoke furniture and styling.

**Were there any particular challenges you had to overcome?**

The nature of a historic building like this always brings challenges, including obtaining the relevant permissions needed to make such dramatic structural alterations, including the installation of a lift. The space planning of each apartment was crucial to make this a success for our developer client, as they were selling for a high price so needed to be completely uncompromised. We had to make clever design features within the compact studio apartment for example, with a floating partition wall that housed a rotating TV – so it can be viewed from both the bed and the seating area – as well as a slim breakfast bar to create a separate zone for the kitchen within the open-plan space. It worked beautifully

**What is your favourite design feature?**

Without question the curved glass double doors are my favourite feature. They are breathtaking and add such a refined contemporary twist on the classical architecture. I also love the ornate plasterwork combined with the contemporary elements like the glass internal atrium and the kitchens. The kitchens were also designed by our team as integrated elements within the architecture, so the contemporary bronze effect units are concealed behind classical panelled pocket doors.

**What did you enjoy most about this project?**

It was a real labour of love for our team, stretching over a three-year period, so the last few weeks as the final elements were installed and revealed were extremely rewarding. In addition to the full interior architecture, we fully furnished and styled each apartment to perfection using a number of bespoke items. The spaces feel so elegant and timeless but with a depth and warmth that is so essential to us as designers.

**Projects**



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**Projects**



**Looking at the finished project, is there anything you would have done differently?**

At the level we design at now, we are conditioned to be perfectionists and hypercritical of our work to ensure we continue to make each project better than the last. Although we were elated with the result, it's impossible to complete a project without seeing minor things to improve. We are forever learning. As a studio, we pride ourselves on pushing each project further and designing out of our comfort zone which means we very rarely repeat a design, therefore each design is a first for us. However, our extensive design process and drawing packages are so detailed so there is very little room for error or surprising results when implemented. You can never stop growing and improving as a designer and our hunger to create perfection keeps us on our toes.

**How do you want the house to be enjoyed?**

We always design with function and comfort in minds as it's crucial that our spaces are to be enjoyed fully, rather than feel like show homes. The bespoke upholstery has been tried and tested by our team in the factory during production and all materials found

throughout are practical and usable. For example, the kitchen worktop is a sintered stone rather than real marble so it can be used freely in a busy working kitchen. The apartments have beautiful open voluminous rooms, ideal for entertaining in. We always envisaged young professionals inhabiting the apartments but the design would also work really well for a family.

**What is your company ethos?**

We are a family-run studio, run by myself and my husband Aaron, with a design team of 15, many of which have been with us for a number of years. We have a relaxed and informal company culture but run a tight ship when it comes to processes and the quality of the work. Both Aaron and I are very hands-on with design and working closely with our clients, who are our biggest inspiration. Particularly with private clients, we develop very close relationships with them and the briefing process for us is absolutely key to the success of a project. I also place huge importance on how an interior "feels" just as much as how it looks. It's impossible to capture on camera, but we pride ourselves on designing liveable homes, whether for resale or for a private client. 🏡

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