

Return to splendour

How one interior designer turned her Berlin apartment into a home that feels classic, contemporary and international

Words **RACHEL WARD** Photography **MARC WALDOW**

Living room 'The space is asymmetrical, with five walls. It was necessary to create a neutral scheme to make the room feel more peaceful,' says the homeowner

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rom the moment I stepped inside, I felt this enormous sense of wellbeing,' says interior designer Vanessa Kress of the Berlin home that she shares with her businessman husband Roman Matthesius and their one-year-old son Aurelius. That's an understandable emotion when you consider the attractive apartment today, but when Vanessa first viewed the place in 2011 it was far from the stylish space it is now.

The property's 171 square metres had been broken up into two dwellings: 'A student was living in one half, a punk in the other,' she says. 'It was painted pink, orange and blue – some rooms even had carpet on the ceiling.' Despite this, it was clear to Vanessa that the apartment, which is located in a 19th-century building in the city's creative Kreuzberg quarter, was something she could work with. The proportions were good, natural light was abundant and the period details had not been destroyed by an unsympathetic renovation.

'I wanted to return some glamour to the apartment and instinctively knew what changes I should make,' says Vanessa, who promptly set about reworking the floorplan, constructing wider passages and adding doorways to create flowing lines of sight. The largest room was divided to create the main bedroom and an elegant dressing room. The wooden floor and intricate ceiling stucco were also repaired and traditional-looking skirting boards added throughout.

The restoration is faultless, but this home was never intended to be an ode to a bygone era. 'I was determined to preserve the historical details, but I also wanted the interior to feel timeless and international,' Vanessa says. Cue a chic neutral palette and the addition of a few modern indulgences, including streamlined black Modulnova kitchen units with granite worktops and a spa-like bathroom. Adding further wow-factor are two walls of beautiful antique Egyptian tiles, one in the kitchen and one in the guest bathroom. 'Details like these make a room feel decorated – you only need to add a few signature pieces to complete the look,' she says.

Much of the furniture was designed by Vanessa and custom-made. These bespoke creations are combined with much-loved items collected over a lifetime, from the antique silk rug in the living room to the Chinese bench in the hallway. 'Very old elements have such a nice patina,' says Vanessa. 'But when placed next to something modern they take on a different feeling – I like to play with this tension.'

The lighting in the house mixes up styles and eras to great effect, too. Vanessa has teamed sleek spotlights with industrial-style designs and opulent vintage pendants. 'These rooms need the charm of a chandelier, but downlights create the ambience,' she says. 'In the evening, the wooden surfaces, the structured wallpaper and the antique tiles are brought to life, like museum pieces.' vanessakress.com

Living room The furniture includes a custom-made linen sofa and coffee table. The antique Chinese silk carpet was the first piece that the homeowner bought after completing her first interior design job (try Little Persia for similar in the UK) **Stockist details on p198 ►**



'I was determined to preserve the historical details of the apartment, but I also wanted the interior to feel timeless and international'



Kitchen One wall is covered with 532 antique Egyptian tiles (Alhambra Home has similar patterns); an old pharmacy cabinet has been painted a soft grey to match. The table and chairs were designed by the homeowner, while the lights are vintage Czech pieces dating from the 1930s (try Trainspotter for similar in the UK). The Modulnova kitchen units have bespoke granite worktops **Stockist details on p198 >**



Hallway The generous space offers a direct view of the tiled wall in the guest bathroom. An antique bench (try Myakka for similar) is topped with urns from Vietnam that are filled with hydrangeas. The walls are covered in a vinyl and linen wallpaper that also features in the kitchen and guest bedroom. The original red stucco ceiling has been carefully restored [Stockist details on p198](#) ▶



Guest bathroom

‘This is one of my favourite rooms. I have been collecting these tiles for many years – here the arrangement has the look of a kilim carpet hung on the wall’ says the homeowner ▶

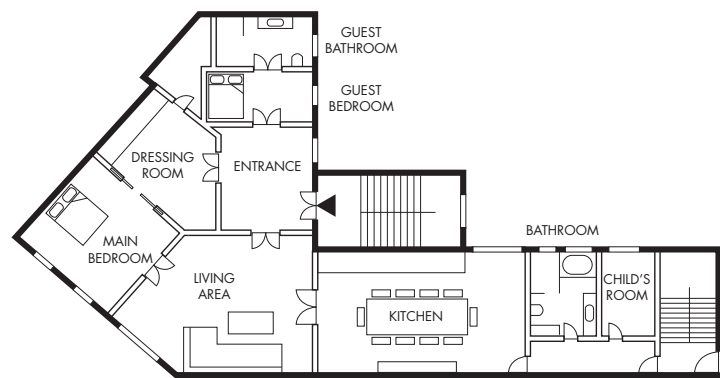


MY CITY

I love living in Berlin because it's relaxed and not as anonymous as you might imagine. It's also a great source of music, architecture, fashion and gastronomy. I am thankful that this is a city that is unprejudiced, open-minded and encourages new talent. **Our apartment** is on the fourth floor, so when you look outside, all you can see is sky.

My favourite memory here is when I showed my husband the apartment for the first time. I'll never forget the terrified look on his face when I told him that this ruin would be our new oasis.

I recommend that visitors walk along the romantic promenades and through Berlin's idyllic parks, soaking up the atmosphere rather than just viewing the historical buildings.



Main bedroom The homeowner spent a lot of time perfecting the lighting scheme, which mixes styles and eras. Here, an antique brass and crystal pendant hangs over the bed, which is flanked by two vintage scissor-arm wall lamps. The opulent light in the dressing area (above) is a flea-market find **ED**