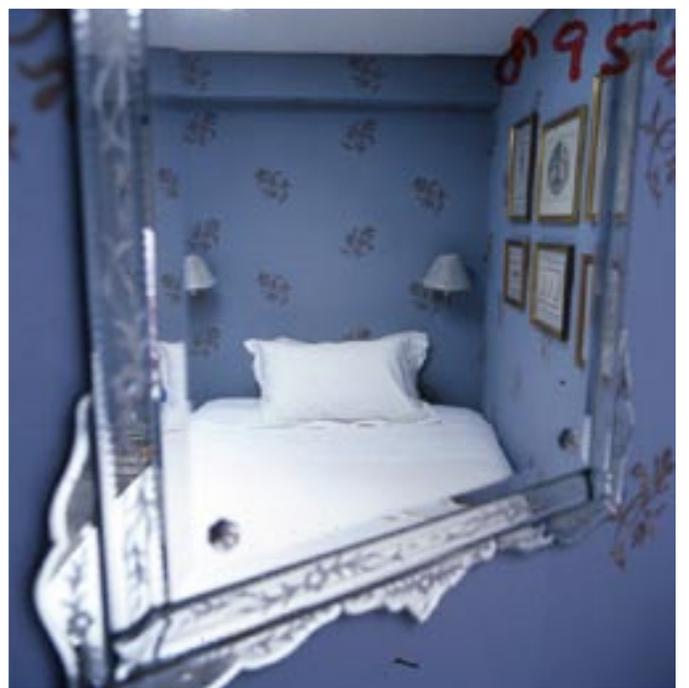


MARRIAGE VALUE

The acquisition of the basement below her studio flat doubled the designer/owner's living space; a combination of former possessions with new decoration and clever lighting makes the whole much more than the sum of its parts

The sitting room of this flat in London is decorated in a warm palette of taupe and cream (main picture and opposite top), with walls painted 'Matchstick' by Farrow & Ball, and an oatmeal-coloured rug from ?Where. Armchairs covered in 'Name' by Name contrast with a pale pink button-back chair from Name (opposite below left). The chinoiserie bureau is from ?Where. The spare bedroom (opposite below right) is lined with 'Name' wallpaper from/by ?Where



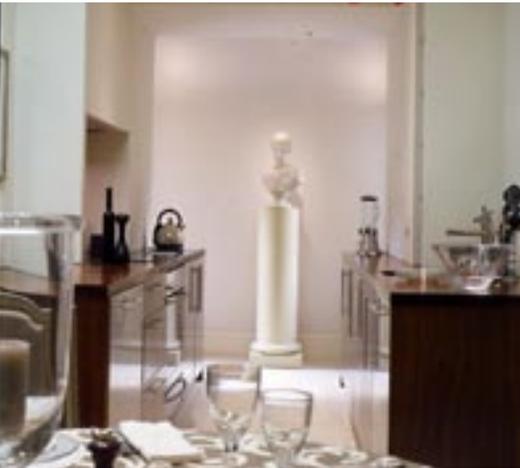


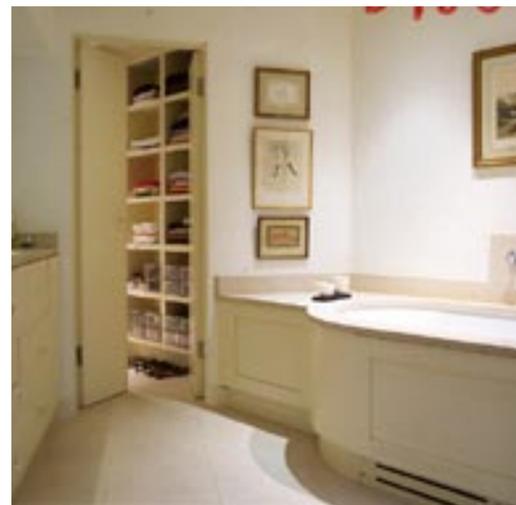
Ginnie Howard is a brisk woman, who speaks in short, clipped nuggets. Everything about her is trim and neat, from her figure to her flat in Knightsbridge.

This is not the first time that her flat has appeared in *House & Garden*. It made its debut in 1995 – not that you would recognize it today. Since she linked the ground floor with the caretaker's basement flat, it has more than doubled in size. And then there is the way it looks. Back in the mid Nineties, it was a *grande-luxe* broom cupboard, cocooned in yellow damask and tinted with Sloane apricot. A decade ago, its clever compact design was proof of Ginnie's premise that living in a studio need not mean living with a sofa bed in the sitting room. Now, it is an exercise in modern living.

'Move on 10 years and the colours of today are a mixture of beige and those favoured by John Soane,' she says, adding, in her characteristically telegraphic fashion, 'I wanted to achieve something of today without its being soulless or austere.'

Ginnie's solution to link the lower-ground and ground floors is a sweeping staircase.





OPPOSITE The staircase (top) was designed by Liam O'Connor (tel: 000-0000 0000). The kitchen (remaining pictures) has stainless-steel cupboard doors; beyond is the dining area, the walls of which display engravings framed in bespoke frames. **THIS PAGE** The main bedroom (left) is hung with 'Pompadour' hand-printed flax from Christopher Moore. The adjoining bathroom (right) is partly lined with limestone

The pleasingly curved and Soanean stairwell was hewn from the skeleton of the building [explain], and the result is a sense of volume and airiness that is at odds with the steep angles and what on paper are cramped dimensions. Lighting the staircase, which was designed by Liam O'Connor, was a problem. 'I had to go one step further to create lights other than the currently voguish ankle-level spotlights, which would have been too obvious. I wanted to do something different,' she says, adding with a chuckle, 'I also think that kind of lighting looks dead naff.' Instead, each tread is illuminated by its own downlighter, below skirting level, with individual shades cut to fit, a labour-intensive and costly process.

Other well thought-out solutions include the fire door, which is actually a screen set into the ceiling that descends automatically [when it detects smoke]. 'It is unbelievably extravagant and state of the art,' she enthuses. 'It drops like a portcullis. The first time I had a dinner party, we had duck, and while it was

cooking the screen suddenly came down.'

The kitchen is at the bottom of the new staircase. The illusion of light and space here would have been spoilt by a door, so what is there instead? Beyond the streamlined, galley kitchen is a dining area, the walls of which are hung with engravings in bespoke frames, which are set with mirror-glass slips. 'Although this is a basement area, I didn't want to feel as though I was in a basement,' she says, peering out at a gravelled garden that is softened by plants climbing up trellis.

Ginnie's disciplined approach to space management – what she calls 'getting the most out of the littlest' and 'my obsession with using every single inch' – is shown to best advantage in the bathrooms, which are fitted into the sort of space that in another house might be used for storing vacuum cleaners. The bathrooms are almost yacht-like in the way in which they accommodate such items as a heated bath and 'wet' areas with dinner-plate-size deluge shower heads.

Despite her enthusiasm for popular col-

ours (such as Farrow & Ball's 'Matchstick', which covers walls and blinds in her sitting room), and space-saving technology, traditional elements are apparent throughout the flat. The walls of Ginnie's bedroom are lined in 'Pompadour', an opulent, hand-printed flax from Christopher Moore, and there are tartan lampshades in the spare room, as well as Regency armchairs (albeit covered with beige corduroy), and the Forties-style mirror copied from a Gilbert Poillerat design, which hangs over the John Soane-inspired marble chimneypiece.

'Old things keep reappearing,' she says, as if they have a life of their own, while patting the faithful ottoman that survives, re-covered, from the flat's Nineties incarnation. But as Ginnie sees it, the old and the new can coexist happily. 'This project was an exercise in proving that a whole flat does not need to be all new.' And any style jury would agree that her case has been proved beyond doubt □

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