

Katrina Burroughs meets a French couple who have given their London home a Gallic makeover with rustic furniture and fabulous fabrics

Take the historical perspective

S EVEN years ago, French couple Catherine and William Roth each had a whirlwind romance — with the same handsome Georgian town house in London. “First we fell in love with the street,” says Catherine. “Then, one day, we saw the house in the paper. We rushed to the estate agent, arranged a visit and liked it; we went back once more and then we bought it.”

Built in 1730, and still with its original pine panelling, doors and floors, the three-storey terrace house in Kensington was their ideal home. From opening that newspaper to booking the removal van, took a month; the house cost them £1.2 million.

“What was very nice for us was that there was already a studio for me,” says Catherine, 60, an artist who paints delicately coloured, exquisitely detailed portraits in oils under the name Catherine de Moncan. Her husband, William, 57, is a retired newspaper publisher, who spends his mornings in cello practice.

The couple have always adored buildings with history. “In France, we had an apartment at Versailles that was once the home of the chef to Louis XIV,” Catherine says. Their Kensington home also offers royal associations: the row it stands in was built to house workmen engaged at Kensington Palace, when

‘The couple have always adored homes with history. In France they had a flat in Versailles that was once the home of the chef to Louis XIV’

each dwelling was crammed with 25 inhabitants. A series of underground tunnels are believed to have linked the terrace with the palace.

When the Roths moved in, the building was in excellent repair, with good bathrooms and kitchen. But their predecessor had knocked down a wall on the ground floor, making a large living room from two rooms. Catherine says: “It was not the real shape of the room. The ceiling looked low and the proportions were wrong. We visited many houses of the same period in London, and they all had a wall there, so, in the end, we decided to put the wall back.”

At the same time, five years after they moved in, they resolved to redecorate and refurnish. “There was dark varnish on the floor and the walls were dark, too,” says Catherine. “When we came here, we had all our furniture from Versailles. There, 18th century French furniture looked perfect but it just didn’t translate to this house.”

Since coming to London, the Roths had developed a country furniture habit, with the help of antique dealer Robert Young, who specialises in hand-crafted, gorgeously patinated, rustic items in wood. These can range from 18th century carved shop signs to decoy ducks and Gustavian sideboards. Catherine and



Picture perfect: the fact that the 18th century Kensington house already had a studio added to its allure for portrait artist Catherine Roth



French fancies: the Indigo cushion covers are made from fabric produced in Bolbec in 1780; the modern curtains are hand-printed on Irish linen and based on a 1762 toile de jouy

William thought these honest, charming objects captured exactly the spirit of their home, and recruited Young and his wife, Josyane, an interior designer with a special interest in textiles, to advise on the interior.

The whole house was treated to paintwork by DKT, a specialist decorator, which spent six months working on the house, from basement to master bedroom. Catherine had found

remnants of the woodwork’s original colour, a dark rust, on the inside of one of the shutters, but wanted to lighten the smaller spaces. On the ground floor, the layered creams in the dining room are lifted from their Georgian gravity by a subtle pink stripe. In the hallway, the cream-painted woodwork gives way to *trompe l’oeuil* panelling by the stairs. The master bedroom, on the second floor, has the most exotic paintwork in the house — a multilayered verdigris that took a month to get right.

T EXTILES for curtains, upholstery and bedcovers were supplied by Nicole Fabre, from her stock of 18th century French Indiennes fabrics. On the first floor sitting room sofa, indigo-coloured cushion covers are made from fabric produced in Bolbec in 1780; in the basement, the guest bed is covered with a beautiful French ikat fabric of the same date — woven from carefully pre-dyed threads — while the bedcover in the master bedroom is made from fine 1760 hand-embroidered Cambresine linen. The curtains in the sitting room are a Fabre contemporary design, hand-printed on Irish linen and based on a 1762 toile de jouy.

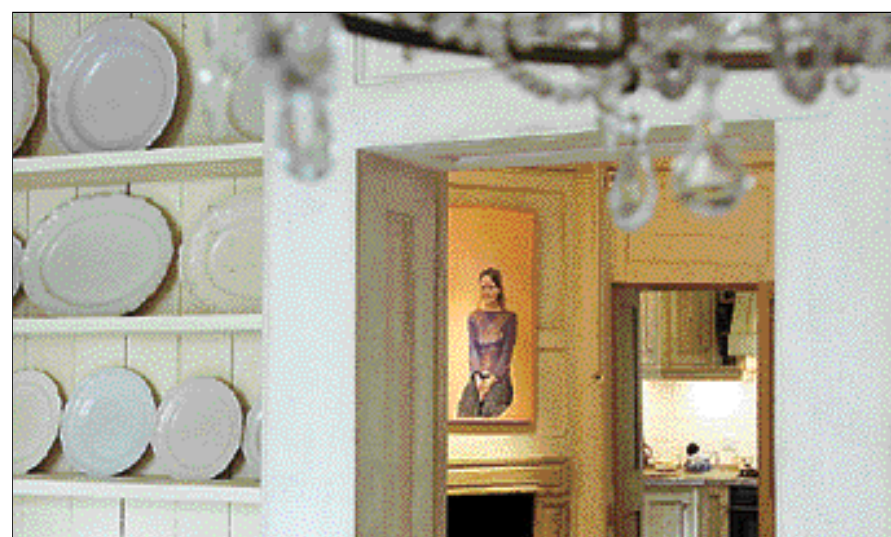
Every surface and object has a glorious texture, from Peggy, a 19th century model yacht for sailing on ponds, in the master

bedroom, to a Swedish corner cabinet in the dining room. Furnishings are largely 18th century, to match the building, and drawn from France, Sweden and Britain. In the dining room, a large French mirror reflects a glittering Swedish chandelier, and a French Bergère chair that was salvaged from the couple’s Versailles apartment and reupholstered in an Eastern European sackcloth, to give it its rustic feel. The rough, homespun material was chosen for its pink stripes, which echo the lines on the panelling.

Floors throughout were hand-stripped and then treated with oil-based liming to achieve a raw, driftwood look. This effect turned out to be so delicious that carpets were banned, with two notable exceptions: a subtle Roger Oates flatweave stair runner, and rush matting in the master bedroom. The matting is wonderfully soft and spongy underfoot, but rather more high maintenance than the usual wall-to-wall carpet: it has to be watered once a month so that it doesn’t dry out. No green plastic watering cans here, though — Catherine has a brace of beautifully patinated vintage cans reserved for the job.

Pictures by John Lawrence

Creamy: specialist decorators banished the ground floor gloom



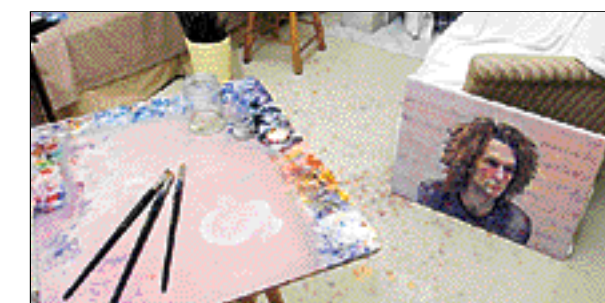
Just right: it took a month to perfect the bedroom’s verdigris colouring; the bedcover is from 1760 hand-embroidered Cambresine linen



Salvaged: the couple have brought many items from their flat in France — including 18th century pieces with delicate upholstery



Texture treats: a tall boy and Peggy the pond yacht, in the bedroom



Clever stroke: Catherine’s portraits add a contemporary touch to rooms



Exception: bare floors give way to a Roger Oates runner on the stairs

How to get the look

■ Portraits by Catherine de Moncan: sold at Delamore House, Ivybridge, Devon (01752 837711; www.delamore-art.co.uk).

■ Country furniture: Robert Young, 68 Battersea Bridge Road, SW11 (020 7228 7847; www.robertyoungantiques.com)

■ Fabrics: Nicole Fabre, 592 King’s Road, SW6 (020 7384 3112; www.nicolefabre.com).

■ Paint effects: DKT specialist decoration, 3 Charterhouse Works, Eltringham Street, SW18 (020 8874 3565; www.dkt.co.uk).

Sold on you: the couple fell in love with the street first, then saw that this house was for sale for £1.2 million

■ Sofas and sofasets: Plinth, Core One, The Gasworks, Gate D, 2 Michael Road, SW6 (020 73717422; www.plinth.net).

■ Rush matting: Waveney Rush Industry, The Old Maltings, Caldecott Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, Suffolk (01502 538 777; www.waveneyrush.co.uk).

■ Rope banisters: WR Outhwaite & Son, Town Foot, Hawes, North Yorkshire (01969 667487; www.ropemakers.com).

■ Flatweave stair runners: Roger Oates, 1 Munro Terrace (off Riley Street), SW10 (0845 612 0072; www.rogeroates.com).

■ Vintage Swedish furniture and accessories: Filippa & Co Swedish Antiques, 51 Kinnerton Street, SW1 (0207 235 1722; www.filippaandco.com).

The Summer Fair, Olympia, two-for-one offer

RUSTIC furniture specialist Robert Young and his interior designer wife Josyane, who advised on the décor at the Roths’ home, feature at The Summer Fair, Olympia (www.summerfairolympia.com), which runs from this Friday to 18 June. Tickets are £10.

Homes & Property readers can get two tickets for the price of one by showing this page at the Olympia box office, or by quoting Homes & Property when buying advance tickets on 0870 126 1727.

Watering the bedroom’s rush matting is a monthly task: Catherine’s vintage cans are from Garden Ornamenta, The Cedars, Main Street, Ewerby, Lincolnshire (01529 469092; www.gardenornamenta.com)

