



Shades of grey: the look is eclectic, romantic, yet with an industrial edge, both in the huge, knocked-through drawing-living area, above, and in a bathroom, below



The most fabulous house in Hackney, by the boy from Brazil

The dream ticket came when the flat below became available. Then the real work began. Designer João Botelho went for glam grey, he tells **Philippa Stockley**

BRAZILIAN interior designer João Botelho, 45, was working in fashion in his early twenties and wanted to move to the US, but after two applications failed, he said to himself: "Well, if you don't want me, I'll go to Europe." Aged 23, he arrived in London.

After an immersive English course he started out as a waiter in Harvey Nichols's swanky Fifth Floor restaurant, but soon got a job with Nicole Farhi, then in 2001 with Donna Karan, where he stayed 15 years and ended up as MD, running both fashion and homewares. This year he launched his own interior design company, Casa Botelho, which brings out its second collection this month.

Back in 2001, renting in Hampstead, Botelho met Laurent Colinmaire, now

38, who works in finance. Since married, they started out together in a flat in Shoreditch and saved for three years – then the search to buy a home together was on. They concentrated their efforts around Dalston, which not only had many big houses in bad repair, but also lots of creative people.

In 2004 they were shown a flat on the top two floors of a huge Victorian mansion in Hackney. "It was yellow, blue and green, pretty disgusting bathroom, but the ceilings were high and the rooms big," says Botelho. "The minute I saw it, I knew I could make something of it."

They bought the 900sqft flat and did it up, but their real hope was to buy the bottom half of the house. In 2008 the couple downstairs marketed their flat on the basement and ground floor. It

was in a bad state but it had a big garden. Botelho and his husband bought it. They decided to make the basement floor a self-contained, rentable flat.

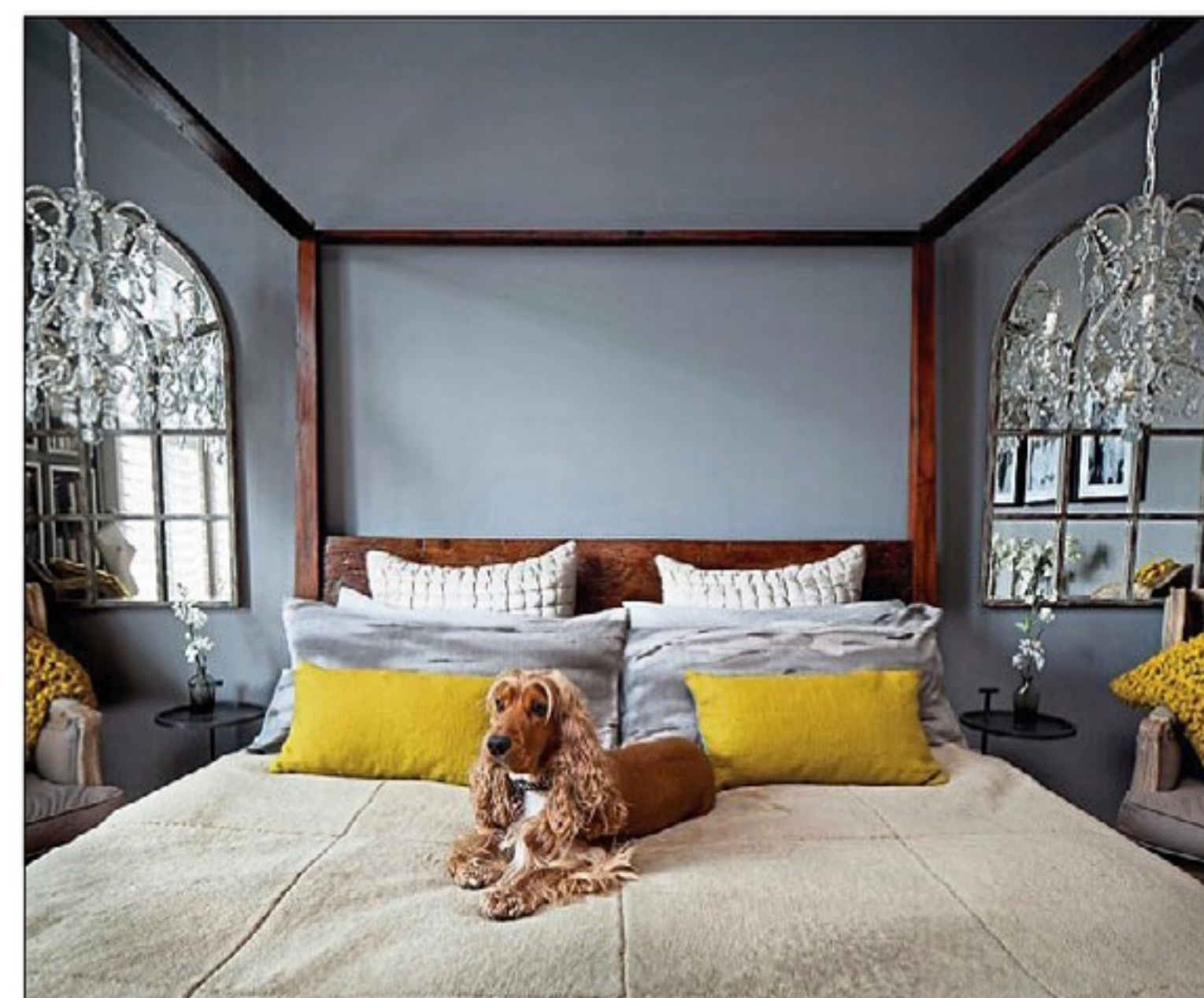
The top three floors, they decided, would become "the most fabulous house in Hackney". They wanted to open up everything and extend out at the back, with a landscaped garden, and a garden room for utilities.

They found their architect, Phil Waind, through personal recommendation. Botelho wanted glamour and a look he terms "masculine-luxe", with elements of a French chateau. So instead of sliding glass doors, the extension has three dramatic floor-to-ceiling French windows with exposed brick pillars between, leading to the elegant York stone-paved garden set with trim olive trees. "Crittall only does doors 2.8 metres high," Botelho explains, "and we wanted three metres, so I had them made."

Despite needing complete renovation, rewiring, re-piping and re-roofing, the house still had some Victorian detail and original plasterwork, which they kept, and matched.

WHILE wide-ranging, the plans were not structurally radical – basically, the intention was to open up the house and modernise the staircase. So since the property is not listed, the plans passed without problem. Work started in March 2013 and took 14 months, while the couple lived round the corner.

"I'm obsessed with detail," says Botelho – and it shows. From the elegant front door he designed to the drama of the massive knocked-through drawing-living area, this once much-divided house is now stunning. Modulations of grey are used throughout – using one tone on skirting, walls and ceiling. The ground floor features luminous pale



A chap needs his rest: Oscar makes himself perfectly at home on a four-poster bed



grey, perfect with the wide reclaimed floorboards, the modern sofas offset by enormous chandeliers and the svelte black kitchen that Botelho designed with a black cast-concrete top. This contrasts with exposed brick spine walls, and more chandeliers.

The middle floor is magnificent. Opened up front to back, the quieter back half holds a dramatic master bedroom with new decorative plasterwork above a modern four-poster, while the front half is a bathroom with walk-in black polished-plaster shower, an egg-shaped free standing bath, and double sinks. Two spectacular chandeliers, like gyroscopes, add even more drama. Dividing bedroom and bathroom is a vast, glazed sliding door. This bedroom was once the tatty kitchen.

Tucked neatly behind the shower is a walk-in dressing room. Jackets hang in rows. Divided drawers swish out holding every imaginable accessory. Shoes line up on parade. The top floor holds two glam guest bedrooms with four-posters, and a black-and-white bathroom.

Botelho's attention to detail extends to bronze fittings everywhere and neatly traced shadow gaps, while unseen detail such as underfloor heating and a sophisticated Loxone integrated home entertainment system that is movement sensitive, add a further dimension of luxury to daily life. "Who knew I'd end up doing this for a living?" Botelho says. "If you have a dream and your heart is in it, follow it."

WHAT IT COST
 Top flat in 2004: £240,000
 Lower flat in 2008: £380,000
 Money spent: £800,000
 Value of top three floors now: £2.05 million

Photographs:
Juliet Murphy



Masculine-luxe: above left, João Botelho with pet Cocker Spaniels Prince and Oscar in the svelte black kitchen; above, this home is super-smart and spectacular – yet comfortable

Drama: left, floor-to-ceiling French windows, exposed brick and the York stone-paved garden with trim olive trees



The middle-floor master bedroom: new plasterwork, modern four-poster and "gyroscope" chandelier

JOÃO BOTELHO'S TIPS

MY TOP tip? Do your budget for lighting, then double it because lighting is vital. From uplighters (in the drawing room), to chandeliers, to beautiful LED light bulbs.

You must use dimmers, too, to create mood, to seduce the eye. And use LED bulbs, they last much longer and cost less. You can get elegant ones now. Make the floors and walls beautiful. Furniture doesn't have to be expensive, and it's a layer you can change. If you can afford a home entertainment system, it's worth it.

Top places for inspiration: Chelsea Harbour Design Centre; Clerkenwell Design Week; Pinterest.

GET THE LOOK

- See João's Martini collection of tables, and his interior design, at casabotelho.com
- **Architect Phil Waind:** Waind, Gohill + Potter Architects (wgpa.co.uk)
- **Flooring:** from reclaimed flooringco.com
- **Decorative plaster specialist:** London Plastercraft (londonplastercraft.com)
- **York stone paving:** from London Stone (londonstone.co.uk)
- **Chandeliers on ground floor and giant convex**



Lighting's vital: do your budget – then double it

mirrors: from Abigail Ahern (abigailahern.com)

■ **Kitchen table:** bespoke from Lombok (lombok.co.uk)

■ **Loxone home entertainment system:** (loxone.com)

■ **Handles and hinges:** from Fulham Brass (fulhambrassonline.com)

■ **Sofas:** by Natuzzi (natuzzi.co.uk)

■ **French Grey paint in drawing room:** from Papers and Paints (papersandpaints.co.uk)

■ **Downpipe paint in hall:** from Farrow and Ball (farrow-ball.com)

■ **LED lamp bulbs:** from Buster + Punch (busterandpunch.com)

■ **Electric blinds:** by Silent Gliss (silentgliss.co.uk)