

# THE LAST WORD

Nina Campbell talks to Rebecca Winward about decorating period homes and the inspiration behind her designs – including why one of them owes its name to Cockney rhyming slang



**I** sometimes think that my favourite era – when it comes to architecture – is the 18th century, since it represents the epitome of elegance. But then again, when I look around London, I find myself being fascinated by all sorts of properties from many different ages. I am intrigued by Victorian buildings, most particularly former schools and warehouses, as there's something about the well-built brickwork that I admire. I love seeing them stripped down to their bare bones, so you can see how they have been constructed. There are some fantastic conversions happening in our towns and cities, and it's wonderful to see these buildings back in commission. I'm also starting to see the value in 1930s architecture, especially those curved windows reminiscent of sea-going liners.

When it comes to authenticity, I'm a great believer in retaining the structure of a period house, inside and out. Proportion is so important, and often it's just not possible to better the original design elements. One of my pet hates is ugly replacement windows, they can

really ruin the facade of a beautiful building. But decorating is an entirely different matter – one of taste. For example, I have a pair of Hepplewhite chairs which I have chosen to cover in a modern fabric by Philadelphia-based designers Galbraith & Paul. Why not be innovative? John Fowler (of eminent design firm Colefax & Fowler) once said to me 'buy what pleases your eye, and when it ceases to do so, get rid of it'. Décor isn't permanent, and if you find you don't like something, it can always be changed. You should keep your eyes open and be inspired by what you find – for centuries homes' interiors have evolved as their owners have travelled and bought new items, so you shouldn't feel pressure to be totally 'authentic' – it is in fact the way things have always been.

When I am designing my fabrics and wallpapers, I use a huge amount of archive material – I might copy an historic pattern, but alter the colours or tonal quality. However, inspiration can come from anywhere. One of my most recent creations originated from a visit to

Odorantes, a shop in Paris that only sells the freshest scented flowers. Alongside the blooms, the owners display their collection of 19th century taxidermy, including some vibrant green parrots. This juxtaposition was so amazing I had to do something with it, and Perroquet was born.

My furniture is a slightly different matter. I seem to lean towards the style of the 1930s. I've been buying originals from this era myself, as I adore their sleek elegance. They do tend to be French examples though. At this time in Britain much of the furniture was being made in oak, and I prefer the finer grained woods such as walnut or ebony. All of my designs are named after people – either christian or surnames. I inherited some books that belonged to my mother, and one, written by my great-great grandfather, contained his etchings of famous people he knew as friends, so this is where I got my first inspirations for names. But they were not all decided in that way. The name for the Liszt bar stool, for example, came from the Cockney rhyming slang 'Brahms and Liszt'. That always makes me smile.

## INSTANT CHIC

Rather than redecorating a whole room completely, follow Nina's tips for freshening things up for spring:

- Repaint the woodwork. Door frames, skirting and dado rails always show wear before the walls will.
- Upgrade your lampshades. Whether you opt for sleek sophistication or a quirky attention-grabbing design, it will add a new flourish to your decor.
- Cushions can get awfully tired-looking. Try picking a few shades of fabric, and trim each cushion with one of the other colours. Mix it up a bit though – you don't want it to be too predictable.
- Make a loose cover for your sofa and armchairs in an entirely different fabric – you could even change its character periodically to fit with the seasons.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

Nina Campbell has recently had two titles published by CICO Books. *Elements of Design* is priced at £25 in hardback. It is available from all good bookshops



or *Period Ideas* readers can call 01256 302 699 quoting ref. V32 to purchase a copy at the special price of £23 including free p&p (UK only). *Nina Campbell Decorating Journal* is also available, priced at £14.99. To purchase at copy at the special price of £12.99 including free p&p (UK only) please call the same telephone number and quote ref V33.