

Six Ways To Make Your Home Look Reassuringly Eclectic

Sophie Ashby, 29, has carefully carved a niche in the interiors world as a polished practitioner whose secret weapon is a precise eye for art. Operating under the name Studio Ashby, which boasts a team of 12, she describes her interiors approach as a "three-pronged process of commissioning, collecting and curating", all of which results in a rich mix of antiques, mid-century finds, contemporary pieces, and of course, singularly fabulous artwork. As she launches an exclusive furniture capsule with The Invisible Collection, the first British designer to join its roster, she shares her tips on perfecting an eclectic interior with *Vogue*.

Art is everything

I always start with art rather than using it as the final touch. Collecting is a real passion of mine; in particular contemporary African art which has become a main focus for me, in comparison to a few years ago where I used to be on the hunt for exhibition posters and black and white photography.

Hone your eye for antiques

Eclecticism is all about the mix – so seek out antiques to juxtapose with contemporary pieces. A beautiful old Empire chest of drawers, for example, looks so much more striking with a bold Modernist lamp and a colourful contemporary piece of art hanging above it. Get down to your local antiques market (for me, it's always Kempton or Ardingly) and pick up beautiful quality, antique furniture, lighting and trinkets at bargain prices; they will give you so much more pleasure than spending the same at a big retailer.

Play the individualist

It's the individual's quirks and passions that make an interior interesting, whether that's a bunch of old cameras, your Granny's stamp collection, your three-year old's drawings, your Dad's old record player, the ceramics you picked up on a trip to Berlin, the flea market find that made you smile. Don't take your home too seriously; it should be full of things that make you feel something or remind you of a happy memory.

Always choose colour and embrace pattern

Life is better with colour, particularly if you live in an urban environment and a natural source is limited. I always think a metropolitan interior has to work much harder than a countryside or coastal one, because you can't rely on nature's outdoor palette to lend you its framework. The easiest way to change the mood of a room instantly is to paint it a beautiful colour; I love smoky blues, muted greens and earthy ochres and terracotta. Once you dip your toe into the world of wallpapers and fabrics you will quickly be overwhelmed by the amount of choice. I wish I had the restraint to hold back and operate in a world of textured plains (I admire the sophistication of this approach, see Axel Vervoordt) but I am too easily seduced by textile design. Head to Dedar, Pierre Frey, Lewis & Wood, Zak & Fox or William Morris to fall in love with everything from florals to cloudscapes.

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Seek out British craft

Support the maker and buy from craft fairs and small maker-led exhibitions. The Craft Council is the best place to go to see what's on – you'll find there's a real pleasure in having a conversation with the person who made the thing you want to buy, and it's that connection to their process and story which then makes looking at a piece every day in your home that bit more special. I particularly enjoy buying ceramics at craft fairs; we recently picked up some really stunning pieces at a fair at The Barbican Conservatory. The trick is to find ceramicists before they get picked up by a gallery.

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Develop a playful way with texture

Mixing materials is a balancing act that evokes an unexpected playfulness – try statement marble next to warm wood, perfect acrylic next to furry mohair, and cold, strong steel next to sheepskin. Embrace the imperfections in marble, or use solid oak or elm timber proudly full of knots, burrs and cracks. Our bespoke furniture pieces are intentionally refined and quiet so that they can sit next to something else that's louder, older, brighter or shinier.

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