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PRESERVATION ORDERS

The owner of this 1830s London house wanted it to be restored to its original style, which interior designer Max Rollitt achieved by retaining its idiosyncrasies, adding Soanean elements and carefully creating a 'patina of age'

TEXT ANTHONY GARDNER | PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON UPTON | LOCATIONS EDITOR LIZ ELLIOT

Bomb damage, though hardly desirable, can sometimes have its advantages. If this four-storey house in a west London square hadn't been rocked by a World War II doodlebug, it would have been listed like its neighbours, restricting what the current owner could do to its interior. Not that she wanted to take liberties. 'She was keen that it should be restored to its period,' says the designer, Max Rollitt, 'though it didn't have to be an exact restoration. The

staircase had sunk quite a bit and the architect decided all the floors had to be taken out, top to bottom—so the challenge was to put everything back in a way that didn't look over-restored.'

The house's presiding spirit is Sir John Soane, for whom the owner has a passion. His influence can be seen in everything from the arrangement of the rooms to the mouldings (copied from designs in the Soane Museum) and the principal doors – 'made flush in the

Soanean manner,' Max explains, 'using mahogany from antique table leaves to get that thick veneer, with ebony-line details'. Similar ingenuity was essential to provide enough storage for a family of four in a comparatively narrow house. As the owner says, 'Max is clever at creating a lot of space out of nothing, and giving you something which is both beautiful and functional.'

As you enter through the front door, the

THIS PAGE The entrance hall has its original dentilled corning (left), while additional period details were added, including the eighteenth-century pedestal and lead urn (right); the latter is from Jamb. **OPPOSITE** Another urn stands in the second hall, part of the Soanean enfilade which is a feature of the ground floor





OPPOSITE A galleon-shaped, Thirties chandelier adds humour to the dining room. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A painting by William Scott is flanked by a pair of marble obelisks from Max Rollitt. In one of the studies, mirrored shutters continue the Soanean theme. Oak and ebony bookshelves give a masculine feel to the other



ABOVE Many of the objects in the drawing room are from Max Rollitt, including the collection of porcelain vases (top) and the eighteenth-century table (above)



The drawing room is dominated by a battle scene by seventeenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Snayers. The curtains are 'Bleu en Changeant' from Claremont, and the Chippendale Junior-style sofa is also upholstered in a Claremont brocade



owner's love of art is immediately apparent: the hall acts as a gallery for her collection of Dürer prints. Turning right at the stairwell, you find yourself in a second, smaller hall, this time dominated by John Rocque's enormous eighteenth-century map of London, hung above a mahogany bench. It's not the kind of room you would expect to find in the city, and looking right and left you realise that it's part of an enfilade – a common feature of Soane's country houses. This was created by knocking through to the dining room – which overlooks the garden square – on one side and a kitchen extension into the back garden on the other. A Thirties French chandelier in the shape of a galleon lends humour to the dining room; an array of sconces on one wall, displaying small china pieces by Wedgwood, is another unusual touch.

The kitchen extension involved removing the Georgian rear window, but rather than discarding this, the owner used it to replace a smaller one in the upstairs drawing room. 'So much of what we've done has been about preserving what is beautiful about the house,' she says; 'for example, the slightly wonky staircase and the windows with their original shutters.'

In the drawing room, which occupies the whole of the first floor, only the chimneypiece

and the windows have survived the refurbishment – though you would think that most of the contents had been there for decades. 'We've tried to make it look like a home that has evolved over time,' says Max, who either sourced or made all of the furniture. 'I like things that have a patina of age – the refined beauty that comes from use and sunlight and being loved.' Among the most notable pieces are a Chippendale Junior sofa, upholstered in Claremont brocade, and a mahogany card table that rotates and folds into a side table. A battle scene by the seventeenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Snayers takes up most of one wall, while the work of two Irish artists, Jack Yeats and Paul Henry, is displayed around the corner of the L-shape room.

The walls have been painted grey, using a lime-based paint custom-mixed by Naismith Robertson that enhances the lived-in look. 'It's got a wonderful textural feel, so you don't mind the odd scuffed-up bit,' says the owner. 'It looks different according to the light, and works particularly well in the stairwell, pulling together a lot of different spaces and weird angles.'

The second floor holds the main bedroom, with its curtainless four-poster bed – another Max Rollitt design – and the main bathroom,

while the top floor is given over to the children. Two half landings accommodate their parents' studies, each very different in style: 'My husband's study is inspired by the work of George Bullock, a Regency designer,' explains the owner, indicating a wall of exquisite oak and ebony bookshelves, 'while I've stayed with the Soane theme.' The Soane touches include mirror panels on the backs of the shutters and a coffered ceiling decorated with a painting of the sky; an asymmetrical lunette adds to the feeling of elegant eccentricity.

The basement contains a large, minimal family room and, in what used to be the butler's pantry, a New England-inspired spare room with tongue-and-groove walls. Since the adjoining bathroom has no windows, Max used tiny, highly reflective Moroccan wall tiles to maximise the light. A splendid Georgian-revival washbasin was rescued from a dingy passage and stripped to give it a new lease of life.

'What's been so much fun about working with Max has been going with the grain of the house,' says the owner. 'We love it, and we live in every bit of it – there's not a single redundant space' □

Max Rollitt: 01962-738800; www.maxrollitt.com

OPPOSITE The curtainless four-poster in the main bedroom was designed by Max Rollitt. ABOVE FROM LEFT Moroccan tiles, from Habibi, maximise light in the windowless basement bathroom. Tongue-and-groove panelling adds New England-style charm to the spare room