

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM THE 1950s GUILLEME ET CHAMBRON FRENCH OAK CHAIRS ARE STILL UNPOLISHED IN THEIR ORIGINAL PASTEL TWEED. THE STAINLESS-STEEL AND FORMICA SIDEBBOARD IS BY THE 1960s MAESTRO WILLY RIZZO. THE BLACK-AND-WHITE CERAMIC VASE IS BY GEORGE KLINT, THE BROTHER OF THE VIENNESE PAINTER

FINDERS KEEPERS

Two of London's most authoritative dealers in 20th-century decorative arts have held on to some prized pieces to perfect their own family home.
By **Lisa Freedman**

Photographs by Lisa Cohen

If you buy a coat and find you don't like it, you can take it back. When you buy a flat, however, and don't immediately warm to it, there's no returns policy - you have to make it work. Fortunately, Julia and Michael Pruskin are experts at that.

The Pruskins are two of London's leading dealers in 20th-century decorative arts, with shops in Kensington and Notting Hill which attract five-star decorators and Oscar winners. But 18 months ago, when they decided to move from a house near one shop to a flat near the other, 'we *knew* we had made a big mistake', Michael says. 'We'd bought the flat from Bernard Ashley, the man who started Laura Ashley, but it had been designed by a young architect, who clearly saw it as a bachelor pad,' Julia says. 'When we moved in we realised what worked for a single man really didn't work for a family.'

Though the flat, which spreads over three light-filled floors, was in theory spacious enough to accommodate the Pruskins and their eight-year-old daughter, Isadora, all the rooms were in the wrong place: 'The kitchen was on the top





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE THE GLASS VASE ON THE SHELF IS BY DINO MARTENS, THE PANEL OF CATS IS BY FUJITA, A JAPANESE ARTIST WORKING IN PARIS IN THE 1920s; THE RED LEATHER SOFA IS 1940s FRENCH, THE CRYSTAL SCONCES ARE BY BAGUES; THREE ATTRACTIVE BUTTERFLY-INSET FOOTSTOOLS ARE BY AN UNKNOWN DESIGNER

'I used to visit markets in Amsterdam where you could pick up pieces of Daum and Gallé glass for under £10'

floor, which would mean lugging shopping up to the very top, and the bedrooms on the bottom, so guests would have had to tiptoe in past Isadora's bedroom. It just seemed odd and untidy. You felt you couldn't entertain.'

After months of nights juggling floor plans and harassed days juggling builders, the flat is now, thanks to their architects, Stiff and Trevillion, logically re-arranged as a family dwelling. In place of the cramped kitchen, the ensuite master bedroom sits at the top, with its own glorious roof garden for enjoying the setting sun over west London. On the floor below, there's a pretty bedroom for Isadora and an equally decorative drawing-room. But the real secret story is the first floor, where two cramped

bedrooms and a small bathroom have been turned into a guest-friendly open-plan kitchen and living-room.

The reinvention has also taken the decoration from tired 1980s to contemporary, and the newly laid unpolished sawn-oak floors and gallery-pale paintwork now provide an ideal backdrop for what the Pruskins do best – finding objects to inject interest and drama.

Michael Pruskin has been a part of metropolitan cool for more than 30 years. He started his working life in the music business, promoting the Moody Blues, Van Morrison and Marc Bolan. This was followed by a brief stint in New

York, where, as well as designing lighting, he wrote the first 130 pages of a pornographic novel.

But pornography was not to be his métier, and after his return to London he set up shop in Antiquarius, the antiques market in the then super-fashionable Kings Road. At the time, the emphasis in the antiques world was on Georgian and Victorian, but Pruskin realised the undiscovered 20th century had much to offer.

'I used to visit the markets in Amsterdam, where you could pick up pieces of Daum and Gallé glass for about £10. One day my uncle, the songwriter Lionel Bart, saw something I'd bought and said, "This is fab." He showed it to



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE THE TILES ON A SIDE TABLE ARE BY THE FRENCH ILLUSTRATOR RAYMOND PEYNET, THE CHUNKY LAMP BASE IS PETRIFFED WOOD; ON THE TERRACE EAST A BEDROOM ARE POTS FROM HODE POTTERY AND FRENCH 1950s FURNITURE; THE CURVY CHAIR IS 1950s DANISH, BY FRITS HENNINGSEN, THE TABLE IS 1940s FRENCH, BY DOLT

'If we love a thing, we take it home and live with it. We work hard, but we have fun doing it'

a rich friend, who paid me £50, which, in those days, was a lot of money.'

Pruskin's sharp eye has always been a perfectly judged step ahead, and after snapping up bargain-basement Bauhaus and De Stijl in Amsterdam, he moved on to Rolex watches and art deco, where his flawless selection quickly attracted the attention of Barbra Streisand and Jack Nicholson. As the appetite for the 20th century has grown, so has Pruskin's range. His enthusiasm now encompasses the best of the past hundred years, from Bugatti bronzes to Picasso vases. 'If we love a thing, we take it home and live with it. We work hard, but we have fun doing it.'



The flat is now filled with key pieces from the period, a carefully judged mix of painters such as John Minton – who brought Elizabeth

David's early recipes to life – and Tristram Hillier, who gave Shell its eco-friendly image, and master furniture designers such as Frits Henningsen, Willy Rizzo and Guillerme et Chambrun.

Though the look is eclectic – dictated by a magpie instinct to collect the rare and the beautiful, rather than by ruthless connoisseurship – it's also harmonious, the product of disciplined, knowledgeable and discerning eyes.

And though it seems effortless, like haute cuisine or couture fashion, it's

impossible to imitate. However hard you scoured a French *brocante* or Italian *bottega*, you'd never spot, as they do, that pendant, or that pair of perfectly scaled mid-century lamps.

No doubt it's this unique vision that has prompted the auction house Sotheby's to ask Michael Pruskin to put together a one-man sale – the rarest of accolades in the world of the decorative arts. Which means, of course, that we'll all now have the opportunity to acquire a piece of the Pruskin 'look' to transform our homes. ●

Pruskin, London W11 (020 7243 1568). The sale Pruskin: Decorative Art 1880-1960, is on 2 April at 2.30pm at Sotheby's, London W1 (www.sothebys.co.uk)