

A homecoming

Sarah and Frank Alem's maisonette has had a big remodel – and when that was done they filled it with pieces that celebrate their heritage

HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY
Maisonette over the top two floors of a Victorian terrace

ROOMS Sitting room, kitchen-diner, office, three bedrooms, two bathrooms

LOCATION West London

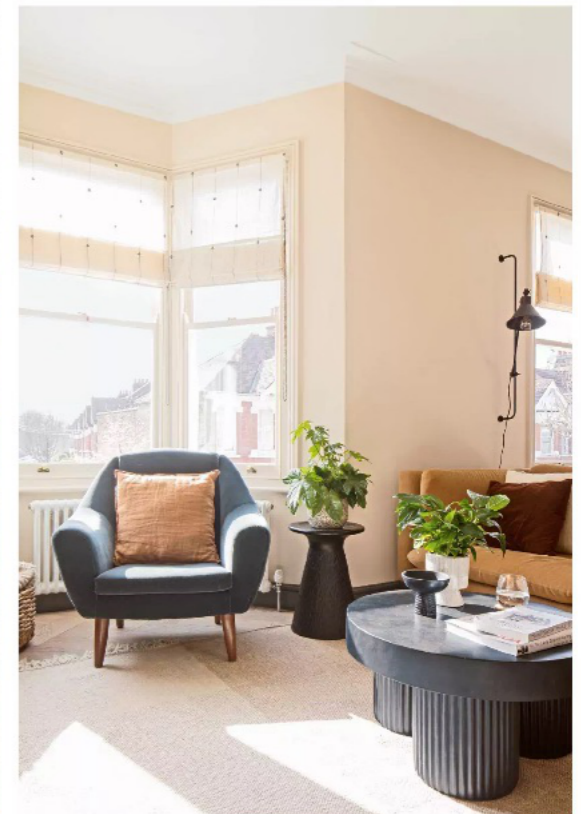
FEATURE JANE CRITTENDEN | PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES FRENCH | STYLING MARISHA TAYLOR



SITTING ROOM

'The Malawi mirror is made of rattan strips, which reminds me of Ethiopian weaving, an important tradition,' says Sarah. Walnut shelves and charcoal blue cupboards to the ceiling (right) create a visual backdrop that streamlines the space.

Cupboards in Down Pipe, Farrow & Ball. Douglas three-seater sofa, British Design Shop. Gear coffee table by Norrtj, Nunido. Try Malawi round mirror, People of the Sun. African print lampshade is similar, By Kala X on Etsy. Mátmat ceramic side table, La Redoute





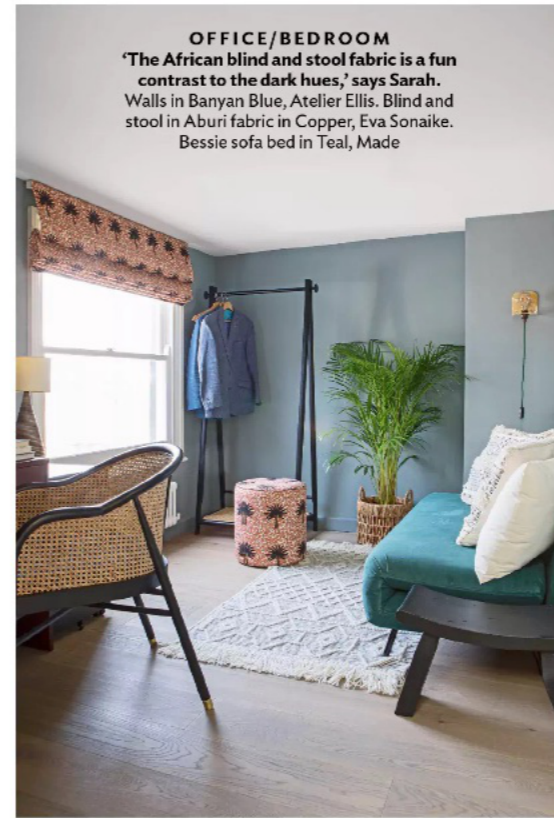
KITCHEN-DINER
 'The table is my favourite place to sit with a coffee and look out at the trees,' says Sarah. Verge table in black walnut, Camerich. Ivy chairs have this look, La Redoute. L. Ercolani stacking chairs, Cimmernann, are similar

Sixteen years after moving here, Sarah Alem, a doctor, and her husband, Frank, gutted their tired, cramped maisonette with a focus on making better use of the space. Sarah wanted to revive her passion for African art and furnishings with a stylish interiors scheme, too.

'Frank's Kenyan-English and my parents are from Ethiopia so colours have a warm, earthy African feel to reflect our heritage,' she says. 'I took inspiration from a Kenyan safari and the tones we admired in the landscapes.'

Bought as a two-bedroom flat, some years ago the pair added another floor with a loft conversion – but the layout wasn't working. 'We'd only been allowed to build a small dormer so when we discovered a neighbour had received planning permission to extend their loft over the roof of their kitchen below, everything fell into place,' says Sarah.

The new space became their daughter Ann's bedroom, and the replacement dormer allowed for an office and larger bedroom for their son, Abou. 'Below, we craved a bigger sitting room with space to entertain,' adds Sarah. 'We did this by knocking through the adjoining box room.' The family moved into an Airbnb while the building work got underway. When it came to the interiors, Sarah sought advice from her friend and neighbour. 'Kay has a fantastic eye for interiors and helped me put my thoughts into a coherent vision,' she says. One struggle was how to resolve the kitchen, previously crammed with too many cupboards and messy open shelves. 'I had this idea of a beautifully styled kitchen, clean and tidy with everything



OFFICE/BEDROOM
 'The African blind and stool fabric is a fun contrast to the dark hues,' says Sarah. Walls in Banyan Blue, Atelier Ellis. Blind and stool in Aburi fabric in Copper, Eva Sonaïke. Bessie sofa bed in Teal, Made



LANDING
 'The artwork is the first thing we see as we come up the stairs into our home,' says Sarah. Lawdy Mama print by Barkley L Hendricks, FrameorWall at Etsy

'WE ADDED ANOTHER FLOOR TO THE MAISONETTE WITH A LOFT CONVERSION – WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE IT BIG WITH A DORMER'

hidden away,' says Sarah. 'Kay has a large dining table in front of huge windows looking over the garden, which I absolutely love – and copied. Adding more glass has flooded our kitchen with light and feels so welcoming.'

Bespoke storage was high on Sarah's agenda. She designed everything with her builder who arranged to have the pieces made in Bulgaria like the kitchen. An existing sofa was covered in a blue velvet to echo the kitchen and Sarah chose a new amber sofa. 'I like natural fabrics and these inviting colours set the African tone I wanted,' she says. 'I'm particularly drawn to African handicrafts, they're beautiful and personal. I also love looking for artists who represent who we are and where we come from.'

Sarah sourced cushions from a fair trade co-operative in Ethiopia where they farm silkworms, weave their own textiles and use natural dyes. She discovered African art from The Studio Museum in Harlem's Studio Store, the Lori Austin Gallery and Etsy. She's delighted there's a coherence to their collection now. 'Before, our African art looked lost and unappreciated but now each room is a highly designed space that's just for us – I love it all.' 25



MAIN BEDROOM
 'Pairing rust cushions with pale pink walls resonates with earthy colours in African landscapes,' says Sarah. Walls in Desert Rose, Paint & Paper Library. For similar headboard fabric, try Vintage velvet in Umber, Just Fabrics