



Brilliant white paint has got itself a bit of a bad rep recently. During the Kelly Hoppen minimalist revolution in the late 1990s, trendy young things not only chucked out their chintz but painted everything white. For years, we lived in a blizzard. And didn't it look awful? And feel cold? The practice of painting your entire house white has now become a byword for those great design crimes: lack of imagination and fear of colour. But when you take a turn round the west-London mews house belonging to the husband-and-wife artist duo Rob and Nicky Carter, you realise, with stunning clarity: we were doing it wrong. "We're big fans of brilliant white," Nicky

tells me, sitting at their large scrubbed wooden scullery table. "It shows our artwork off really well and if the kids get sticky fingers all over it, you can paint over it, so it's practical." She adds that you have to match brilliant white paint with warm colours so it doesn't feel chilly.

As art curator of the Groucho Club and an alumnus of Goldsmiths College, where her contemporaries included Rachel Howard, Jason Martin and Damien Hirst, Nicky is part of the small but close community of artists who swap and buy each other's work. The house is a veritable gallery of friends' pieces, including work by Gavin Turk, Jason Martin and Marc Quinn. In the children's bedroom hang two

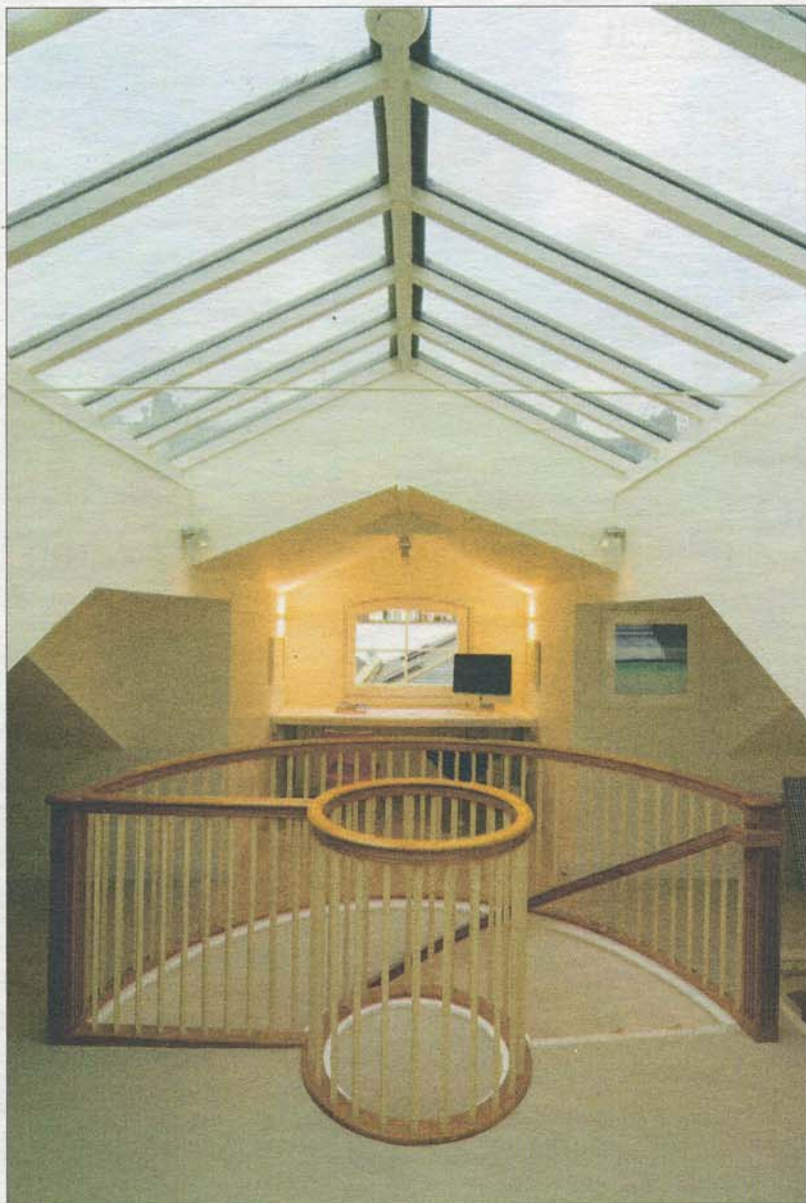
alphabet collages by Peter Blake, a friend and early cheerleader of the pair. They, in turn, are collected by a laundry list of the rich and the famous: Simon Fuller, Elton John, Kevin Spacey, Jude Law and Matthew Williamson, whose dazzlingly colourful ensembles, worn by the likes of Sienna Miller, are reminiscent of the paintings. Rob and Nicky's works adorn such varied walls as those at Land Securities, the Groucho Club, St Mary's Hospital and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

As well as displaying work by other artists, Rob and Nicky show off their own to dazzling effect: a large round coloured piece, *Spectrum*, is lit from the ceiling with spotlights that →

The couple's dining room, with a reclaimed church pew, the Victorian scullery table they secured from an auction house and, to the right, one of their joint works, *Twelve Luminograms*

Light fantastic

Colour and clarity breathe life into the mews house of the husband-and-wife artist duo Rob and Nicky Carter. Esther Walker pays them a visit. Photographs by Michael Franke



Clockwise from above: the glass roof floods the house with light; a bedroom with one of Rob's 'Travelling Still' photographs; view of the outside; the sitting room with a sofa they got in exchange for a work of art



“ Our dining table had to be large enough and strong enough to dance on ”

scroll through colours and change the mood of the picture as you watch it.

The house itself is something of an artwork. Mews houses were built for the drivers of Hansom cabs, the horse-drawn taxi cabs used in London up until 1947. The horse and carriage were kept downstairs in what is now Rob and Nicky's living room and kitchen; the driver lived upstairs, along with the hay. The house is unusually light for a mews building: it has a cylindrical structure at its core, and light floods through the glass roof and filters down to the ground floor. Like those in a lighthouse, the doors leading off from the landings are curved, as are the walls facing the core of the house.

And to avoid that depressing showroom look of white and beige, chrome and stripped pine, Rob and Nicky advise getting yourself down to an auction house or second-hand furniture shop and carrying off big pieces of old furniture. The aforementioned Victorian scullery table, from Phillip's auction house in Queensway (since closed) is surrounded by Georgian leather chairs from an auction in Yorkshire and a reclaimed church pew. "Our brief for the dining table," says Rob, "was that it had to be large enough and strong enough to dance on, should the feeling take us. We dance on it quite a lot, like last Sunday after a big lunch party with all the children."

The combination of white walls and modern art with old, soulful furniture is not a new one, but Rob and Nicky do it well, with areas of uncluttered serenity and more relaxed spaces, like the kitchen and the children's colourful bedroom. They manage to keep most of the house so enviably free of junk, they confess, by keeping most of their bits and bobs in their studio across town. The *pièce de résistance* of the house is the top floor, which in the 1980s had a large frosted-glass structure erected as a roof. As the only other light sources were small windows, the glass roof turns what would be a gloomy loft into a breathtakingly light, cloud-like space under the eaves of the house.

Rob's latest work is a collection of photographs called *Travelling Still*, a series of typically colourful landscapes that look like they have been taken with a slow shutter speed from a moving car. The results are stunning, unusual and drenched in colour. They make up part of an exhibition opening this month, with proceeds going towards the Joanna Parkinson Foundation, the charity set up in memory of Nicky's sister, who recently died of leukaemia. "It's what she wanted before she died; we're just carrying out her wish to help other leukaemia sufferers," says Nicky. *

'Travelling Still', 9-19 April, The Gallery, 28 Cork Street, London W1, robandnick.com