

In the master bathroom, a marble bath from London's Limestone Gallery sits before the Holbeinesque leaded windows and beneath a Murano glass chandelier by Venini. **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT:** the façade of the house, designed in the early 1880s by Ernest George and Harold Peto, represents the high point of late-Victorian architectural individualism, with its mix of motifs from northern European merchant mansions and more common features of Victorian residential architecture; in the library, a "Senior" armchair by Marco Zanuso sits beneath a Nahoor "Mahari" floor lamp. The painting is by Roger Hillon. **Details, last pages.**



## INTERIORS



< It was part of a residential development by esteemed London architects Ernest George and Harold Peto. Exponents of a flamboyant and novel architectural style, their distinctive look came from transplanting motifs from northern European merchant mansions upon the stock of the rather reserved, indigenous Queen Anne style.

At first glance, the house displays the usual trappings of Victorian residential architecture — red brick, blocked stone dressings, leaded lights and high, tiled roofs. However, on closer inspection, the façade is decorated with vernacular motifs from the merchant mansions of Holland and Flanders. As one of the central houses in a row, it has a shaped gable broken into by a chimney, while a triple-storey porch and arched stone balustrade add elegance to the exterior.

When Galvin and Bracken — who have two young children together and five older children from their first marriages — first saw the house, many previous prospective buyers had been put off by its dark appearance and oppressive interior. "We could see beyond its current state and visualise the way it could look," says Galvin. "The proportions of the rooms were beautiful, as were the decorative moulded ceilings, panelling, staircase and fireplaces. We knew the bones of the house were right."

From the beginning, her vision was to create light, natural spaces with an organic flow from room to room — an approach that mirrors her beliefs in life and strongly held views on the environment.

Soon after the sale was agreed in 2012, London architect David Quigley was engaged to handle the structural work. Galvin had been introduced to Axel Vervoordt through her friend, designer Ilse Crawford, and after visiting Antwerp and seeing Vervoordt's work for other clients, she commissioned his company to undertake

the interior design. The brief was to keep the core integrity of the original building by creating a fresh, uncluttered look that would place the emphasis on the furniture, art and architectural features.

Barbara de Belder-Maselis, lead designer at Axel Vervoordt, explains the practice's thinking. "We take a very different approach to other interior designers," she says. "Right at the beginning, it's important to understand the family, their personality, lifestyle and how they want to live. The house evolves together with the client, and along this journey we try to translate their needs in the most natural way and to make connections with the past, present and future."

Galvin and the team chose a white-based palette for the interiors to integrate the family's existing art and furniture collection, while respecting the house's history. "We took into account the family's desire for simplicity and natural spaces," says de Belder-Maselis. "A pared-back approach was central to contrast with the busy moulded ceilings, panelled walls and fireplaces."

The house is largely furnished in classics pieces from the early-to-mid-20th-century. Their bold, graphic shapes combine with the white walls and refined colour palette to evoke a contemporary feel, an elegant simplicity. The precise, symmetrical style of Belgian furniture and interiors designer Jules Wabbes makes him a particular favourite of the couple. "For us it was love at first sight," says Galvin.

The interior she and the Axel Vervoordt team have created will continue to evolve; it's a house that will grow with the family while holding onto its heritage. A functional home that meets the needs of busy people, every room has a purpose. Yet, despite these practical needs, the interior features sublime touches of glamour and elegance, thanks to Galvin's passion for history and eye for beauty. **VL**

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