



Never-ending STORY...

It may look perfectly complete, but Leila and Niels' fabulous family home is always evolving to make way for more exciting artwork and unusual finds

Photography – Paul Craig Production – Mary Weaver Words – Amelia Thorpe



Home profile

THE OWNERS Leila Brink, who runs Moroccan rug company Blue GiGi, her partner Niels van Beusichem, an investment banker, and their children Don, ten, Cassius, eight, and Pippa, six, plus Dante the cat. **THE PROPERTY** A Victorian terrace in south London. There's a kitchen-diner on the lower-ground floor and a double reception/living room on the ground floor. The master suite is on the first floor, while the guest room, Pippa's bedroom, WC and family bathroom are on the second. The boys' bedroom is on the top floor.

← LIVING ROOM →

Leila and Niels made art the focal point in this space. 'We like to visit galleries and fairs when we have time,' says Leila. The double doors, *opposite*, allow the light to flow into the entrance hall. **GET THE LOOK** The Harland Miller Penguin Plays print is from *Other Criteria*. Leila re-covered the vintage chair in Designers Guild fabrics. The Beni Ouarain rug is from Blue GiGi. *Opposite:* the double doors are by D&R Design; the bust is by Jonathan Adler; and the Owl side table is by Graham and Green.

Christmas comes early in

Leila Brink and Niels van Beusichem's London home. Both born and raised in the Netherlands, they like to enjoy the Dutch traditions with their three young children, starting with *Sinterklaas* – Saint Nicholas' Day – on 5 December. 'The children put their shoes in front of the chimney, together with a glass of beer for *Sinterklaas* and some carrots for his horse,' says Leila. 'The next morning, they come down to find *pepernoten* [spicy] biscuits, marzipan sweets and their initials in chocolate in their shoes.'

Because Saint Nicholas traditionally arrives in the Netherlands a couple of weeks before 5 December, Leila says it's the perfect excuse to start dusting the house with fake snow and stringing coloured lights and the children's handmade decorations around the place before November is really over. This year, the family is planning a 'giant sleepover' for Christmas with all their extended family arriving from Holland. 'This is our first proper home,' says Leila, 'so it will be wonderful to have everyone here to share it together.'

Although the couple moved to London 12 years ago, they chose to rent properties (there have been four) before deciding to buy this house. 'People tend to buy later in the Netherlands,' explains Leila. 'Plus, we could never quite get our heads around the prices here – we kept comparing them to what we could get in Holland for the same amount of money, so we just put off making the big jump.'

But, finally, jump they did. 'We love London and want to stay here, so we felt it was time to put down roots and make our own home,' continues Leila. They settled on a family-size, five-storey home in leafy south London, thanks to its proximity to green spaces and the children's schools. 'The house had been renovated by a developer with a taste for pastel shades,' says Leila.

Although it was structurally sound, there was work to be done to remove what Leila describes as his 'unusual creative twists', including the mint-green door frames. While they set about painting the walls white throughout the house, the pair also built an extension to enlarge the rear of the lower-ground floor to make a spacious kitchen-diner with a TV area, opening on to the garden. They also added a floor-to-ceiling window to the ground-floor living room to introduce more light and installed a new kitchen and new bathrooms.

'We did things slowly, starting with a blank canvas of white,' says Leila. 'Often, I put in some colour and then ended up taking it away, because I like the calm that white creates.' She says the house combines her love of the cool hue and vintage furniture, particularly mid-century pieces sourced from 1stdibs, with Niels' taste for contemporary minimalism and their shared passion for art. 'It isn't a fully matching house,' says Leila. 'It's simply a mix of things we like, put together at different times.'

Her taste for quiet beauty, the old and the unusual is evident at every turn. So where does Leila's design eye come from? Not from any formal training – her degree in business economics led to a career in marketing – but possibly from her parents, it seems. 'My father is an artist, my mother worked in a photographic studio and I was brought up in a world in which surroundings are important,' she says. 'Rather than start with a big design plan, my approach is to let things evolve organically. That way, I feel more at ease with things I like around me.'

Her taste for the unusual extends to the antique Moroccan rugs, scattered throughout the house and the focus of her business Blue GiGi. 'Each rug is unique and tells its own story,' says Leila, as she strokes the thick wool of a traditional Beni Ouarain design and shows off colourful *boucharouites*, made from torn clothing, including vintage *djellabas* (Arabic robes). 'The collection is always changing and that's important. I like the idea of individuality in my business, just as I do in my home.' See more of Leila's rugs at bluegigi.com

LIVING ROOM

To add character and more light to the space, the couple replaced the small sash window at the rear with a floor-to-ceiling design. They had wanted a steel frame, but local conservation rules prevented them from installing one, so they cleverly had it made in painted timber instead.

GET THE LOOK The sofa is from Designers Guild. This is the Jolly Supplement side table by Paolo Rizzatto for Kartell at Made in Design. The wicker chair is a vintage find. The Tulip coffee tables are by Eero Saarinen for Knoll and the tall white Legume vase is from Jonathan Adler. This is the Sellarsbrook Yellow rug by Suzanne Sharp for The Rug Company.

LIVING ROOM ↑

Unglazed tiles clad the wall – their warm, handmade finish contrasts with the industrial feel of the galvanised steel fireplace surround and concrete bench.

GET THE LOOK

These are the Zelliges wall tiles by Emery & Cie. The floor lamp is from Mint and the Water Flora vase is from Anthropologie. The polished concrete bench was crafted by Lazenby.



'We like the clarity and simplicity of mid-century design'



KITCHEN

The breakfast table catches the morning sun, making it Leila's favourite place to work on her laptop. The bench doubles as storage; the polished concrete floor was chosen for its utilitarian beauty. **GET THE LOOK** The Bulthaup Burnt Oak island with Carrara marble top is from Kitchen Architecture. The bench was made by a local joiner with cushions covered in fabric by Designers Guild. This is the Trisse table by Nanna Ditzel at Sigmar London.



HALLWAY ←

In a house of five, life is busy. 'I wanted the hall to create an immediate sense of calm when we come home,' says Leila. 'I like the contrast of the black lines on the white walls and the way some of the lines lead you through to the garden.' **GET THE LOOK** The walls are painted in Strong White emulsion with the dado and picture rails picked out in Railings eggshell, both by Farrow & Ball.

MASTER BEDROOM ↓

Wardrobes from Ikea are given a stylish makeover with designer wallpaper and vintage leather car-door pulls, found by Leila on eBay. **GET THE LOOK** For details of the Brooklyn Tin Tiles wallpaper, see Ideas to Steal. The day bed is by Rune Bruun Johansen at The Apartment.



Home truths

WHAT'S ON THE FESTIVE MENU THIS YEAR, LEILA?

We tend to eat game on Christmas Day in the Netherlands, but this year, I'm going to cook a big turkey. I'm worried that it will be dry, so I'll do lots of sausages on the side.

WHAT MAKES CHRISTMAS SPECIAL FOR YOU?

The whole experience, including going to the traditional panto with the children and seeing all the pretty lights in London. And the days around Christmas are so lovely and free – everyone seems to slow down, so we actually spend time with each other without all the distractions of a normal day.

ON YOUR BUYING TRIPS TO MARRAKECH, WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?

I love the Majorelle Garden, which used to belong to Yves Saint-Laurent. It's

filled with plants and is so colourful and bright that the experience is always uplifting

DUTCH VS ENGLISH? I like to read in Dutch, because it helps me stay in touch with my first language.

YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE? Ile de Ré in France – I've been going there for holidays since I was a child. Petit Bec is my favourite beach.

ANY INDULGENCES? Chocolate, definitely. It has to be dark.

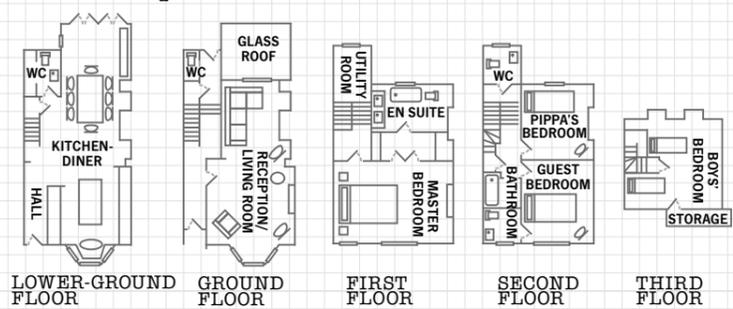
MASTER EN SUITE

Leila and Niels converted the former en-suite bathroom and separate dressing room into one space. A large walk-in shower is located behind the dividing wall.

GET THE LOOK The taps are by Lefroy Brooks. The Zelliges wall tiles are from Emery & Cie and In Situ. The wall is painted in Squid Ink emulsion by Paint Library.



The blueprint



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MASTER BEDROOM

The couple stripped back the wall and painted it white to create a tranquil mood. They designed the oversized headboard and had it made by a local upholsterer.

GET THE LOOK The artwork is by German artist Christiane Richter at Priveekollektie. This is the Componibili Storage 3 unit by Anna Castelli Ferrieri for Kartell at Made in Design. The pendant is from Retrouvius and the pillowcases are from The Linen Works. The cushion is by Jonathan Adler.