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6 APRIL 2008

THE
INDEPENDENT
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Not too shabby

Interior designer Russell Sage's home is a mishmash of grandiose English style

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY DRAYTON

Interior design is about atmosphere, not what colour the curtains are. In the end, it doesn't matter which shade you paint your walls; you probably won't even notice after the first time you see it. It's about how you play objects and colours against each other rather than the things themselves.

This house near Marble Arch doesn't actually belong to me - a friend inherited it and didn't want to live in it, so I've been here ever since. People find it odd that an interior designer wouldn't want to buy his own place, but I like it this way. I never want to settle down in a house that looks the same as the one next door. I'm obsessed with finding a disused, corrugated-tin church to convert, but there aren't many of them on the market, funnily enough.

My style is very English, in the sense that it can incorporate almost anything. The contents of the quintessential stately home are basically the spoils of a Grand Tour, with lots of different periods and cultures

thrown together. Things shouldn't be too polished. I'm suspicious of that generic, "international luxury" look you see a lot these days - history and emotion are important to me. I like the mythology that surrounds a building and I try to add to it by hiding little stories in the design. The painting behind me [partially obscured] is one of a series we did for Stapleford Park hotel; we got the staff to bring in photos of their dogs and painted their faces on top of antique portraits to hang in the main hall.

I work on a few private houses but I don't always enjoy it. I don't think you should be providing someone with a lifestyle; it should be a home that they love and the adventure of creating it should always involve them. I love this Mick Casson bowl [on the table], for instance, because I remember going to his farm and buying it. You need to make that journey yourself. ■

www.russellsagestudio.co.uk
Interview by Rhiannon Harries

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