

MAKING THE HOME FIT THE FAMILY

Interiors specialist Nicolette Le Pelley and her brood are happy to sacrifice space to live in buzzing Notting Hill, writes **Katie Law**

SACRIFICING space for a home in central London is becoming an increasingly popular choice with families who would rather have fewer square feet than spend hours commuting to work. This applies to interiors specialist Nicolette Le Pelley and her husband, Maurice Fraser, an academic in European Politics at the London School of Economics.

They and their three children – 18-year-old Constantine, Celestine, aged 16, and Theodore, 14 – plus labradoodle Romy, love the life in desirable Notting Hill Gate. They live minutes from the hustle and bustle of Portobello Road, in a three-storey terrace house that also contains a substantial collection of artwork and books, amassed when the couple moved into their new home 20 years ago. Minimalist living this isn't.

"When we bought the house, Notting Hill was not particularly fashionable," says Le Pelley, 52, who as co-founder of The House Directory, a website of 3,700 interior and homeware companies, is exhibiting at Decorex International design trade fair later this month.

"Maurice and I used to think the place was huge. Once we started having children though, all that changed. To make

extra space we started adding small extensions. The side return came first, then a room above the kitchen."

Over the years, every room in the mid-Victorian, four-bedroom property has been used for a different purpose, with the exception of the bathroom, of which

there is only one, though there is a separate loo. The original roll top-bath is still in place but there's no shower, which can't be easy, especially with three teenagers at home. Le Pelley insists it's a sacrifice they are happy to make.

"The idea of sitting on the Tube or a bus for an hour to get to school or work is far, far worse than having to wait your turn to use the bathroom.

"Of course the children complain about not having a games room or a huge plasma TV, but on the plus side we're in the heart of Notting Hill. We've got a modest garden and when the children were younger, they played in the communal gardens in Ladbroke Square. Now it's where their friends meet. They just nip round the corner and friends sleep over just because it's so convenient."

She admits: "Keeping the clutter under control is a perennial problem. I'm naturally pretty tidy and I live with a

messy crowd. So I just have to wear blinkers. Within 10 minutes of clearing the kitchen table, it's covered in papers again. We have regular blitzes and Kensington & Chelsea has recycling collections three times a week."

Le Pelley has drawn on her expertise as a former journalist at World of Interiors and now as the editor of The House Directory, to make every inch of the space work to her advantage, although her storage solutions are make-do and sensible rather than cutting edge. "Making neat piles of everything gives an impression of order and the usual ideas



still work of using often-wasted space above wardrobes, and under beds with drawers. We store folding café chairs and get them out for parties and big suppers, and have plenty of wall hooks for hanging guitars and ukeleles.”

Before the children were born, Le Pelley and her husband loved going to Portobello Road and other markets and bought many 18th-century French and Italian engravings, Mesopotamian plates, Roman sculptures, fossils and antiquarian volumes. Fabrics provide colour in a mix of red or blue-and-white tickings, stripes and natural linens. Walls are all painted in Farrow & Ball colours

and doors are smoky green. Piles of books are everywhere.

These days Le Pelley has had to give up on collecting and replaced her buying habit with The House Directory which she runs with her business partner of 10 years, Cheryl Knorr. Since they launched, they have witnessed the massive expansion of online interiors websites.

“There has been a dramatic improvement in the way companies display and sell themselves. Not only can you source anything, but the interactive technology is amazing. Back then, you wouldn’t dream of buying, say, a sofa online, but that’s all changed.”



Left: just a few of the blue-and-white plates Nicolette and Maurice have amassed over 20 years

Far left: the only bathroom in the house, with its original roll-top bath

Photographs:
RACHAEL SMITH





Lending light: the kitchen leads into the modest garden, far left

Treasures: 18th-century French and Italian engravings line the hallway walls, left

Bright and cosy: colour comes from red and white-striped ticking, below

SOME OF NICOLETTE LE PELLEY'S FAVOURITE COMPANIES FROM HER DIRECTORY:

- Tissusdhelene.co.uk: hand-blocked and hand screen-printed fabrics from different European and American companies.
- Deferranti.com: unusual floor and wall surfaces, from glazed lava to cinnamon bark.
- Surfaceview.co.uk: a specialist printing service, always on the lookout for new methods and new materials on which to print striking images including glazing films, Formica, concrete and brick.
- Ize.info: bespoke hardware manufacturers of door and cabinet handles.
- Clayplaster.com: suppliers of ready-to-use pigmented clay plasters in 27 pre-mixed colours.
- The House Directory will be at Stand K320 at Decorex International (Sept 25-28), Royal Hospital Grounds, SW3.
- Visit decorex.com to register. Or visit thehousedirectory.com (020 7221 6600).





Collection:
despite regular
blitzes, there
are books
everywhere,
far left



Creating space:
the side return,
left, was made
into an extension
to provide extra
room for the
family





Boxing clever: the space beneath sofas provides valuable extra storage, right





Content to be close: Nicolette with Romy the family labradoodle

