

# HALLMARKS OF STYLE

For Lavinia Dargie, the switch from advertising to decorating seemed a natural transition. "Having worked in advertising, I understood the importance of presentations and budgets," she explains. Her interior design company, Dargie Lewis

Designs (originally set up with Ewa Lewis, now social editor of the *Tatler*), is in its 18th year. Recent commissions include the refurbishment of Cartier's New Bond Street office and the managing director's office at *The Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers, as well as numerous projects for private clients.

Lavinia is a Fellow of the Interior Designer and Decorators Association and is active in promoting standards of professionalism across the industry. Her own decorating hallmarks are distinctive: a clever use of colour, and a strong, uncluttered style that is international in outlook. "I like details, but nothing frilly," she says. "Simplicity, quality and colour are all very important to me."

Lavinia and her husband Robin, an international wine broker, found their current house after a long and fruitless search around Kensington and Chelsea. Their four key requirements were a cellar, a view, parking and a property with only three floors. Then, one day, the agent rang to say he'd found the perfect house in Fulham. It was love at first sight. "As soon as I crossed the threshold,

**Left:** Lavinia Dargie advocates a strong, uncluttered style. **Right:** In the drawing room, an Aubusson rug and a campaign sofa covered in Percheron's bold Rubelli fabric complement the green felt walls.

**Text**  
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*When decorator  
Lavinia Dargie  
moved into her  
spacious Victorian  
house in Fulham,  
she set about  
establishing a  
strong, simple scheme  
with her trademark  
punchy colours*







This page: tea is served in the garden on a Fortuny tablecloth from Claremont Fabrics. The garden furniture is made by Julian Chichester.

I knew this was the house for me. I liked the atmosphere and the proportions."

A spacious Victorian property on a quiet, tree-lined street, the house required few structural alterations. The major change involved removing the chimney-breast that cut through all three floors of the house. Having opened up the space, the couple were able to create a downstairs basement and boiler-room, enlarge the bathroom and dressing room, and turn the kitchen into a large, flexible family room. The house was rewired and replumbed, a balcony with antique railings was built over the main extension, and new french doors were fitted to link it to the master bedroom.

In the summer, the family room is in constant use. It serves as a sitting room, playroom and dining area, and Lavinia opted for a galley kitchen that can be

screened off during dinner parties. "It was designed in the days before Smallbone," she says, "but the general idea is the same: painted cupboards that blend into the background and make the room less utilitarian." The floor is laid with terracotta tiles, and Lavinia commissioned a teak dining table and chairs from a Wiltshire craftsman. She also designed the folding metal screens, upholstered in gathered fabric, that divide the room in two. "With an array of candles and the screens, the room is instantly transformed into an elegant dining room." The comfortable seating area leads directly on to the garden. "If we have guests, we just hide the children's toys behind a screen and the room becomes an informal sitting room." Decorative touches are provided by Lavinia's impressive collection of green Wedgwood plates on walls and shelves around the room.

The first-floor drawing room comes into its own in the winter. It was originally painted lacquer red, but Lavinia decided to line the walls with green felt to create a restful atmosphere. "The children call it my Christmas room. I often come in here when I need to think or relax." The couple actually moved into the house shortly after getting married, so they had two sets of furniture to accommodate. When they had sold the spare pieces, they spent the proceeds on an Edwardian mahogany roll-top desk. The carved wooden mirror is from Guinevere Antiques on the Kings Road and the campaign sofa was another lucky find. Other changes included window seats for storage space and a bookcase that hides the stereo. Made by a



**Above:** in this restful corner of the drawing room, Lavinia has upholstered Kingcome's Campbell sofa in a cream fabric from Simon Playle. **Right:** the roses on the Edwardian desk were arranged by Jaap Bornkamp.







Main pictures: Shaker-style chairs and a huge yellow pot of contorted willow create a simple but dramatic effect in the hall.

cabinet-maker to Lavinia's design, it has a specialist paint finish to match the green walls.

Recently, Lavinia has turned her attention to the main bedroom. "I wanted something much more punchy than the previous grey and beige design." The resulting red and cream scheme is smart, but low-key. Walls are upholstered in Claremont Fabrics' Semis-Montrichard fabric and she has used Braquerie's stunning Halte de Chasse design for the curtains, tester and bed drapes.

Other corners of the house are equally ingenious. The hall needed a few simple, but dramatic objects – hence the Shaker-style chairs from Baker Knapp & Tubb and the huge yellow pot from Harvey Nichols, filled with contorted willow. The wallpaper with a floral motif is from van Schelle & Gurland. "I really love the ochre-yellow colour and the design is perfect for the scale of the area," she explains.

Flowers are terribly important to Lavinia, and on special occasions she commissions talented florist Jaap Borckamp to work his magic. "His arrangements are dramatic, but very unstructured, and he's incredibly quick. If I could have one major indulgence," she muses, "I'd invite him round once a week to fill my house with beautiful flowers!" ■



Above: in the red and cream master bedroom, the walls are covered with Claremont Fabrics' Semis-Montrichard design, while the tester and bed drapes are made from Braquerie's Halte de Chasse fabric. Below: the family room doubles as a flexible dining room.

