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# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS





There were hardly any windows in this former cosmetics factory when Camilla Johnson-Hill bought it, so architect Tom Bartlett set about adding a few – including the four high industrial-style ones in the first-floor kitchen and a skylight above the central stairwell.

The revamp of an old cosmetics factory in northwest London by fashion producer Camilla Johnson-Hill went more than skin deep. Aided by architect Tom Bartlett, she transformed its dingy interior into an airy Japanese-style home, filled with vintage treasures and artworks with stories attached. Indeed, it's what's

inside that counts, says Jt James Sherwood. Photography: Annabel Elston

**All Made Up**





Cajigas: "We had to liberate the view from the kitchen," says Johnson-Hill, so Bartlett cut through an external wall to create a long landscape window at his client's eye level. Aki-yellow and brushed-steel work units stand beneath



Top: planning restrictions meant that the wall panel at the foot of the stairs had to remain in place, so Bartlett turned it into a mirror to make it a feature. Above: this 1960s office desk is from Philip Thomas. Right: an eBay find, this 1950s stacking chair was designed by Carl Jacobs for Kandy







A Mario Testino image, taken for *L'Uomo Vogue* and produced by Johnson-Hill, dominates this office wall panel – which hides a guest bedroom. The floating shelf, holding Johnson-Hill's books and magazine archive, runs through both rooms.





Above: in her office, Johnson-Hill has hung a series of eight French educational posters (only four of which can be seen here) above an early 1960s wooden console unit – the fashion producer was taught in France from the age of six and the naively illustrated images remind her of her schooldays. Among Johnson-Hill's boxes of personalised Smythson stationery stands a vintage Barbie doll, a gift from London fashion PR Mandi Lennart. Opposite: in Johnson-Hill's first floor bedroom, the building's original freight doors are concealed behind floor-to-ceiling Lincoln-green velvet curtains.





**Fashion producer** Camilla Johnson-Hill's world makes *The Devil Wears Prada* look like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. There isn't an edition of *Vogue*, a Mario Testino shoot, a Gucci campaign or a supermodel's ego that has not come into her orbit. So it's a surprise to be greeted, not by a hatchet-faced, whippet-thin fashionista teetering on Alexander McQueen heels, but an urban Snow White wafting contentedly round what was once a cosmetics factory in Kensal Green.

On paper, the old works seems unappealing. It flanks a railway line and overlooks acres of Victorian Gothic mausoleums that wouldn't look out of place on the set of *Twilight*. Windows were almost non-existent, staircases comprised vertiginous steel catwalks and a hydraulic lift-shaft drilled through two floors. 'Remember, I am a producer,' says Johnson-Hill with a twinkle in her eye. 'My job is to interpret a creative concept for fashion editorial or advertising shoots according to budget and make it happen. I tell you how best to play your money.'

Applying the same principle to the factory, Johnson-Hill commissioned Tom Bartlett – founder of the Waldo Works architectural practice, whose projects have included Garrard's Mayfair flagship and the Ibiza *fina* of Jade Jagger (see Oct 2004), the royal jeweller's former creative director – to eviscerate the shell and create a series of public and private spaces arranged round a central stairwell. 'I put together a research file of inspirations and ideas,' she says, 'but Tom taught me to consider the psychology of the space: the importance of good architecture in moving you round the space, and living in it rather than just looking at it.'

Bartlett built a dramatic staircase, based on right angles, leading to a first-floor kitchen/dining room, where he added four authentically industrial windows and cut an audacious eye-level landscape window through a previously solid brick wall. He concealed bedrooms off the ground and first floors, and constructed a penthouse on the roof between two large terraces.

'When I started the project, I had just seen an exhibition called *Skin and Bones* at the Museum of Modern Art in LA, about fashion's relationship with architecture,' says Johnson-Hill. 'My approach to the space was basically to tailor materials, textures and colours together with a simplicity inspired by Japanese architecture.'

The Japanese tone is set on the ground floor, where bleached-plywood panelled walls fitted with concealed doors define the stairwell. Step-cut plywood then rises in perfect symmetry, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. A large mirrored wall at the foot of the stairs creates a play on perspective reminiscent of an Escher sketch.

There is none of the sterility of the stereotypical Clerkenwell loft about Johnson-Hill's home. Internal walls and windows have been cleverly plotted to conceal or open up intimate spaces. Her bedroom is hung with deep Lincoln-green velvet hangings 'inspired by a 1970s porn movie set'. A floor-to-ceiling wall panel in the ground-floor office was built to support a life-size Mario Testino 'heaven is a disco' underwear shoot for *L'Uomo*

*Vogue*. It is flanked by lengthy and inviting curtains that hide a cute guest bedroom.

A floating bookshelf runs the length of the office and adjoining bedroom, supporting treasures from Johnson-Hill's travels that fashion bounty hunters would kill to possess. One such is a print from Bert Stern's famous *The Last Sitting* with Marilyn Monroe, photographed in 1962. A New York colleague of Johnson-Hill's was renovating his apartment and discovered a single strip of negatives under the floorboards. He found out that Stern was a former tenant and the negatives were identified as never-before-seen shots of the Hollywood star.

Every piece of art in the house tells a story. A Diane Arbus of a crying child was a parting gift from New York-based fashion photographer Pamela Hanson, for whom Johnson-Hill had worked – Hanson presented her with the print saying: 'This is how I feel.' A study by Jock Sturges was made on a nudist camp where Johnson-Hill produced a shoot. Another nude turns out to be the fashion producer herself, surrounded by human skulls and shot by photographer, diarist and artist Peter Beard. It is inscribed 'Special delivery to Camilla by hand.'

Johnson-Hill applies a true fashion producer's eye to furniture. A vast, black-domed lampshade in her dining room was copied by a set-decorator colleague for a fraction of the original's price. A matching pair of 1950s green steel school lockers with peeling name tags still intact were bagged on Ebay, as were a smattering of the mismatched dining-room chairs. There are also high-quality but battle-scarred vintage pieces from Paris flea markets and London-based 20th-century antique dealers Retrovius and Philip Thomas.

'I apply the same principles to my home as I would to a fashion shoot,' says Johnson-Hill. 'If someone comes to me with a budget of £250,000, I will make it work. If the bar is raised to £1 million, I will work to that brief. So, for example, I may have liked the floors to be resin-finished but I ran out of money – and, actually, I like the imperfection of the raw floors as they are now.'

Meanwhile, Bartlett's hand is visible beyond the factory's infrastructure. A 'flying' chrome standing lamp in the penthouse sitting room is the twin of one he owns; while Johnson-Hill's low, garishly painted, 1950s-style 'Wrong Woods' cabinet is an Established & Sons piece that Bartlett urged her to view. 'I thought it sounded hideous,' she says, 'but then I saw it and fell in love.'

Love would not be an understatement for what Johnson-Hill feels for her factory. 'My film-director friend Wes Anderson persuaded me to buy this building,' she giggles. 'He told me that the sound of the trains would become exquisite.' When I say, somewhat facetiously, that it is like living within earshot of the tide, Johnson-Hill agrees: 'Hearing the trains rush past is like the heartbeat of the house. Also, because the walls are so thick, the seasons can blow a maelstrom round me and I can see but not feel the weather. It is magical' ■

To contact Tom Bartlett at his Waldo Works architectural practice, ring 020 7313 9029, or visit [woldoworks.co.uk](http://woldoworks.co.uk)



Above: in the guest bedroom, Bartlett designed the Hong Kong skyline table de Jouy specially for Johnson-Hill. The cocktails sign was a gift from her mother, while the cockatoo bedside light (one of a pair) is from Crate & Barrel in New York.



Left: Johnson-Hill stands before the double front doors she found at Retrovius. Above: the fashion producer wanted her renovated factory home to blend in with its industrial surroundings, so painted its exterior brickwork slate-blue