

ENGLISH TEXT



British architect Sophie Hicks portrayed in her new home in Earl's Court district, London

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SOPHIE HICKS: MY PRIVATE BRUTALISM

The English architect has built her own home in one of London's most exclusive neighbourhoods. A dramatic box of glass and cement reflects her simple, discreet self

It wouldn't be remarkable if it were located elsewhere. But we're in London, in the very central Earl's Court district, a stronghold of classical style, with its succession of impeccable nineteenth-century buildings, statue-like in their elegance. And Sophie Hicks, a British architect with many years of experience in the fashion field, is eager to get people to understand how difficult it is to create contemporary architecture here. «It's important to know that it is very, very rare for modern houses to be built in central London. We don't like change around here, and it is very complicated to obtain the necessary permits in a conservation area like this» she explains, with a calm voice and the accent of someone born and raised in the UK capital. It's here that she started out at a very young age working as a fashion editor for magazines like *Harpers & Queen*, *Vogue* and *Tatler*, as well as a stylist

for Azzedine Alaïa. Fashion is part of her Dna. Her mother was a model in the 1950s, and the oldest of her three children, Edie Campbell, has gone down the same road. Sophie, meanwhile, realised at a certain point that it wasn't for her. And after a short break in cinema in Rome with Federico Fellini (which earned her a cameo in the film *Intervista*), she went to study architecture, and opened her studio shortly afterwards. Making the most of her background, she quickly became famous, designing shops for brands like Paul Smith, Chloé and Yohji Yamamoto. And then, three or four years ago, she decided to stop doing interiors, and instead to concentrate on her sole aim – building things. «I'm interested in buildings as a whole, their relationship with the landscape and with people. And I want to be taken seriously as an architect. Very little is built in London, and when we build something new we have a habit of making it seem old. I think that's the wrong attitude to take». So, she set about buying a few small plots of land, so she could build things her own way and then sell them. Her building in Earl's Court was one of these projects. «While the house was under construction, I began to grow attached to the way it was taking shape, so I decided to keep it for myself». She left her large home in Notting Hill, and moved here, with her partner and daughter Olympia. There are few furnishings, and no concessions to decoration. The new house is located in what was a private garden. «I wanted it to recall a greenhouse, so I decided to surround the structure with glass». Using a 3D model, she studied the movement of the sun to ensure the light also reached the basement, while the structure was designed to use as little energy as possible. «It's all thanks to concrete, a material I love. I use it often, but here I wanted

to make it look more beautiful, giving it the appearance of wood, and making the most of its thermal mass to maintain a constant temperature». The optical white of the facade is a sign of respect for the neighbouring Victorian buildings it sits sensitively in between, despite being completely different from a formal viewpoint. «I like the fact that it is slightly hidden from the street. The interesting thing is that it doesn't feel like it's in the centre, despite being in such a busy neighbourhood. The windows are very tall, and from the inside you can see the trees, the birds on the branches and the aeroplanes passing over. I also really like it when it rains hard: the rain hits the glass, but you feel safe inside. It might look cold to look at, but it is actually extremely welcoming». Sophie loves to surprise people, and this starts with her appearance. She has thick glasses, short hair and casual clothing, but her androgynous look conceals an unusual grace. «When I was young, I was sometimes mistaken for a boy, but that's no longer possible at my age». And she isn't embarrassed by her looks: «I like the uncertainty; I don't want to be a stereotype». Nevertheless, femininity is a central aspect in her work. «I'm convinced that being a woman gives me a unique sensitivity: balancing work and family means I am used to thinking about how to keep everyone happy and avoid arguments, which is very similar to what architects do with their buildings». Her architecture speaks for itself – simple, discreet and modest. «I believe it is very close to my personal style», she says. She's not interested in exotic forms. It's no surprise that she cites the buildings of the Southbank in London and the Mexican engineer Felix Candela among her influences. «I think that today being modern means building without exhibitionism, the opposite of showing off. I don't like buildings that seem desperate to be looked at; I prefer calm, tranquil architecture». Just like her home in Earl's Court.

PAGE 63 MARRAKECH: RESORT LIFE

A Parisian couple have found the crossroads of ancient Morocco and French chic in their home on the family's resort. Age-old building methods meet boho style

Just outside Marrakech at the end of a dusty country road, a whole new world awaits you. The Beldi Country Club is a peaceful oasis just 10 minutes from the medina. The luxury resort is built to resemble a traditional Berber village but with perks aplenty. The French owners, the Leymarie family, have created an eco-friendly retreat complete with its own souk that contains a bakery as well as many artisans workshops and stores selling blown glass, Safi pottery, hand-embroidered linens and Berber carpets. The bliss factor continues to rise with the resorts' three restaurants serving local and French cuisine, four swimming pools and a spa. But that's not all. Apart from the ancient-style riads, narrow alleyways and arch-lined courtyards, beyond the tennis courts and pottery workshop that make up this pampering paradise, there's a hidden abode with privacy galore. This is exactly what Alexandre Leymarie and his wife, Julie, the second generation to manage the club, wanted. The globetrotting entrepreneurs have escaped from the urban jungle and their respective businesses to settle in a home nestled inside the estate and surrounded by centuries-old olive trees. «We had no idea what it would be like to settle permanently in Morocco after having lived in cities like Mumbai and Buenos Aires», Alexandre confessed. «We had serious doubts about whether we'd enjoy such a tranquil everyday life. But Beldi has been a revelation for us and we love it». Both had travelled and lived in various parts of the world. Alexandre, who grew up in Asia and the Middle East, works in renewable energy and finance. Julie, in turn, studied in England, Spain and Argentina. She headed to Mumbai as a L'Oréal executive and Alexandre followed her. After helping the cosmetics brand establish itself in India, she opened the fashion boutique Le Mill (lemillindia.com) with partner Cecilia Morelli. Julie travels to India six times a year to check up on the store. But there's no place like home. And home is now Beldi so the two have transformed themselves into hoteliers. «The club is organic, a citadel of handicrafts and sustainability, full of activities tied to craftsmanship and design – our passions», Julie said. Their style-maven credentials are on display. Their house is made of stone and rammed earth, or pisé, a mixture of clay, dried grass and chopped straw rammed together using ancient building techniques. It blends in and almost disappears in the olive grove. «We built the house without knocking down a single tree», Alexandre bragged. «Luckily, these massive, 150-year-old trees are spread apart. The home's layout follows their course, winding around the trees and in certain spots incorporating them into the architecture. The garden seems like an extra room. We wanted everything to look as if it's always been here. The house is new but so well integrated into the landscape and in line with the local traditions that it appears ancient. In turn, our nomadic spirits are expressed in the home's furnishings. Traditional craftsmanship, design, antiques, souvenirs are all combined». There are textile partitions, geometric-

designed maiolica ceramics and Moorish influences. All together it's very bobo, as the French like to say, a blend of bourgeois and bohemian with local crafts and design thrown in. «We drew from Morocco's classic beauty – a texture-rich mix of humble materials and precious accents – combined with 1950s masterpieces from Denmark and France and antiques discovered in Mumbai and Marrakech markets», Julie said. «The covered veranda offers our favourite view, while the roof terrace is the spot for starting the day with breakfast and finishing it with cocktails». Alexandre added, «We have a team of full-time, highly skilled workers. Between work on the house and the club, the estate is in constant evolution». The buildings increase, but the proportions and the blend of old and new remain the same. A bedroom for their third child was added followed by a new master bedroom suite. The latest addition is for their friends. «If the club is fully booked, we host them in our private Eden. We're now thinking about adding a greenhouse and a playground for the little ones». Without a doubt, a house plopped down in a resort is paradise for eight-year-old Carmen, six-year-old Salomé and Vadim, who is just two. «We never expected to raise our children in this way, but here they have freedom unlike anywhere else». This microcosm is immersed in 15 hectares of palms, olive groves and orchards, wild herbs, flowers and 15,000 rose bushes. With views of the Atlas Mountains, Beldi is a wonderland. And the Leymarie's newly old house is its hidden charm.

PAGE 87 VENICE DO-IT-YOURSELF BIENNALE

The exhibition is packed with art that pleases but also challenges us. Free-spirited and without a set theme, this Biennale draws in the visitors, involving them in the art. Eyes are opened, minds expanded, reality questioned

Universally recognised as one of the most important contemporary art event on the planet, the Venice Biennale (which runs until 24 November) is once again defining not only contemporary art trends, but also the ways it represents itself, offering the widest possible range of forms and messages. «May You Live in Interesting Times» is the title of this year's event, now in its 58th year, and it is perhaps also the hope of its artistic director Ralph Rugoff who, in such a challenging age, seems to want to maintain a balance between pleasing the eye and challenging visitors, since, he argues, «art is more than a mere documentation of the times in which we live». However, in what is a very «DIY» Biennale, every visitor has the chance to create their own different, indeed divergent, pathways and approaches. It is, in many ways, an enjoyable exhibition, varied in its offerings, with equally large quantities of figurative and abstract work, sound installations, sculpture, painting and a lot of photography. And the artists featured in the exhibition (the director has «only» chosen 79, with more women than men) are all living and still active, albeit with different levels of productivity. Rugoff explained this year's approach and structure (which is either twin or cross-eyed, depending how you see it): «The exhibition follows two parallel pathways, in the Giardini and the Arsenale. Each artist is exhibited in both venues, with works on a different theme and using a different method. I wanted to show art that discusses reality and imagination, to highlight how the borders between these two worlds are often confused. The same goes for the various languages used: in many rooms I mixed figurative and abstract works to encourage reflection on what these categories are and whether they are still valid in the world of art». It is therefore a «blob» biennale, which requires visitors to take their own decisions and demands a lot of energy, as away from the official pavilions there are also parallel events and (too?) many private initiatives. Since everyone wants to be in Venice during the Biennale, the options available are increasing, which means more visiting opportunities but also more confusion: it is hard to tell which are part of the Biennale itself, which are in the Biennale fringe, and which are independent events that have sprung up on their own initiative to jump on the bandwagon. As well as Rugoff's exhibitions A and B at the Arsenale and the Giardini, one shouldn't miss Baselitz at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Burri at Fondazione Cini and above all «Dysfunctional», an exhibition combining art and design, at Ca' d'Oro and the nine Iranian artists featured in «Parasol Unit» at Palazzo Pisani, the home of the Benedetto Marcello conservatory of music. In addition, the Italian pavilion, curated by Milovan Farronato, is also an essential visit, welcoming Chiara Fumai, Enrico David and Liliana Moro (to the soundtrack of the Italian resistance song «Bella Ciao») with the title «Neither Nor: The challenge to the Labyrinth». A shared challenge that, we are reminded, involves looking for the centre, not the easiest escape routes. While the show at the Arsenale and Giardini sometimes risks reducing some works to mere decorations, there are many highly effective pieces, and some are capable of communicating



Virgil Abloh's Acqua Alta series for Carpenters Workshop Gallery is on show at Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro during Venice Art Biennale

profound meaning. We liked Cyprien Gaillard's dancing hologram devil in the middle of the Central Pavilion, the thick fog imposed on visitors by Lara Favaretto (who, along with Ludovica Carbotta, is the only Italian name in Rugoff's Biennale) and the many works dedicated to the topics of natural/artificial, real/fantasy and true/false (the concept of the fake, with which society is obsessed at the moment). From dehumanised machines to works rooted in humanity, and from Western imagination to appeals from a substantial African contingent (first and foremost Michael Armitage), the Biennale awarded its prizes, which, as always, say a lot about current tastes, fashions and trends. The Golden Lion for lifetime achievement went to Jimmie Durham, the Golden Lion was awarded to Arthur Jafa (USA, 1960) for his film «The White Album», and the Silver Lion for a promising young participant went to the Cypriot artist Haris Epaminonda. The Belgian pavilion received a special mention for Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys' project «Mondo Cane», and special mentions were also received by the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles, for her barbed wire fence, and the Nigerian Otobong Nkanga, who is now based in Europe. The Golden Lion for best national pavilion went to Lithuania, perhaps the most «political» of the bunch. Inside, a performance created by Rugile Barzdziukaite, Vaiva Grainylė and Lina Lapelyte depicted a group of people on a beach who, seemingly satisfied, are nevertheless slowly approaching their end: the sky and sea change colour, the cliffs turn white, and nature dies. Is the spectator witnessing the end of the world? These may be «interesting» times, as Ralph Rugoff wishes us, but in his installation at the entrance of the Central Pavilion, Antoine Catala declares that «It's Over».

PAGE 95 BALI: ON THE ROCKS

An eclectic villa is peacefulness defined. Colonial verandas and chairs by Pierre Jeanneret, Mondrian wardrobes and pastel tones, all this perched on the cliffs of Uluwatu

«Seems perfect, right? I can assure you it isn't». In southern Bali, on the cliff of Uluwatu in the Bukit Peninsula, the telephone line cuts in and out. Ben Jones, co-owner of Mandala The Rocks, is being sarcastic. He starts by listing the 'defects' of the luxurious pastel-toned rental villa, perched on a limestone rock above the Indian Ocean. «First of all, the telephone almost never works. So, forget about working 24 hours a day and the stress of the office. Second, the appliances. The house isn't just near the ocean, it's on the ocean. Do you know how many problems sea air causes? Third: the sunset isn't directly in front of you, it's slightly to the left. Imperfection is essential, don't you think?» Five hundred square meters, echoing the functional wisdom of Le Corbusier and the geometric shapes of Mondrian, with six plus-size bedrooms, almost exclusively locally-made furniture, rooftop terraces looking out over the waves, a private chef, a gym with yoga instructors, and a record player to get the most out of the vinyl collection. Yet it was rather complicated getting the house to look this good. «Considering the location and the extreme conditions, we had to hire three different teams of workers. They all gave up. The biggest challenge was the position on a sharp cliff. To re-do the floors, the walls and everything else, we had to build a conduit to transport the concrete and plaster mix. We were so tired once the work was done that, rather than a full moon party, we went straight to bed». Born in England but raised in Hong Kong, Jones splits his time between Bali and Singapore, managing M. Development, a company that rents out luxury properties complete with impressive interiors. With over 300 employees, the under-forty CEO oversees the development of boutique hotels, restaurants and houses, all thanks to an unstoppable passion for design that, along with a degree in economics, shaped his aesthetic-entrepreneurial vision. «We based everything off a neutral colour palette. The entire property is in relaxing tones of white and beige. To break it up, we added sorbet hues, soft but still able to make a difference. For the interiors, we were influenced by the mid-twentieth century, especially the expressiveness and lightness of Eero Saarinen, picking up on his romantic style of rationalism. Almost all the furniture, aside from a few iconic pieces such as the Pierre Jeanneret chairs, was made by local craftsmen using sustainable materials: Indonesian wood and fabrics». Jones's friend, Australian photographer and sculptor James Brown, livened up the rooms with his work and plenty of advice, which helped create a sense of hospitality while focusing on the details. No glitz; abundant simplicity and just one rule: leave the outside world at the doorstep.