

THE  TIMES

# MAGAZINE

21.01.12

KARL  
LAGERFELD  
COMES CLEAN



*On Victoria Beckham*  
'Her designs?  
Not that bad'

*On Sarah Burton*  
'Kind of a genius'

*On John Galliano*  
'Burnt out'



# THE WHITE HOUSE

*An interior designer's flat was once the scene of a Victorian whodunnit. Today, the mystery is how she makes so much of such a small space*

REPORT Vinny Lee PHOTOGRAPHS James Balston



Opposite: exterior with window of flat to the right of the front door. This page: dining area by the french windows



It's possible to create style with very little if you know what you are looking for," says interior designer Amber Jeavons. She's talking about a small budget, but going by her South London home, she could just as easily mean a small property. The flat is tiny – with living, dining, cooking and sleeping areas all in a space the size of a double garage – but everything is beautifully arranged and furnished.

It's as if Jeavons has refused to allow the dimensions – just 17ft by 18ft – to compromise her grand vision. Sweeping curtains made from a 6m length of ticking are draped over smoked glass corbels; a huge mirror bought on eBay

**'The Chinese cupboard is the wardrobe and I keep the linen for the sofa bed in a chest. It's important to maximise space'**

and painted white takes up most of one wall and reflects light back into the room, making it appear bigger. What was, at the time, "the largest lampshade in the Conran Shop" hangs in the centre of the room and a round, ornate Melksham mirror creates a focal point by the door to the entrance lobby and bathroom.

Jeavons uses every inch of space. On a raised windowsill is an arrangement of lamps and objects on a chest. "The chest contains all my books," she explains. "The Chinese cupboard is the wardrobe and



The living area with sofa bed, eBay mirror and Tai Ping rug. Top left: view from the garden



I keep the bed linen and pillows for the sofa bed in another chest. In a small flat it is important to maximise space, so I look at every corner carefully."

In the entrance lobby, the door to a storage cupboard and another to the bathroom are hinged in the centre so that they concertina back on themselves rather than opening straight out.

Transparent Kartell Mr Impossible chairs by Philippe Starck stand around the table, creating a "room within the room" dining area. Because the chairs are barely visible they don't seem to take up space. "I grew up with the table," says Jeavons. "It's a Thirties piece that came from my family home. It was black, but I painted it white to make it appear less solid. I also painted the floor white, but it has got a bit scratched because I keep moving the furniture around and trying pieces in different places."

Jeavons, 38, confesses to a couple of indulgences, such as the Ephemera rug from the Vestige Collection by Tai Ping and a pair

---

**"The dining table is a Thirties piece from my family home. It was black – I painted it white to make it appear less solid"**

---

of lights: the Fiorella Tavolo and the Comodina, which were designed by Nigel Coates for Slamp. "The Juju Cameroonian dress hat from Design My World was something I had lusted after for ages," she says. "When I become focused on something I will do anything to have it, even forgo a holiday or not go out in the evenings for a few weeks to save money."

Those evenings spent alone take on a different complexion when Jeavons tells the tale of the house of which her flat was once the dining room. "It was at the centre of a Victorian mystery, one that is still unsolved," she says. "It involved the murder of the lawyer Charles Bravo. Some think that

he was trying to poison his wife with antimony but inadvertently poisoned himself. Others believe that his wife administered it to him and some think it may have been the housekeeper. But no one was ever charged with the crime." The BBC made a docudrama about it with Julian Fellowes and the case has also been the basis of a novel and a film.

The other mystery, although partially solved through careful investigation, is how Jeavons has managed to put so much into such a small space. Although it is only a one-room apartment, she has a trick up her sleeve. Throwing open the double doors, she reveals a small patio that leads onto a shrub-edged lawn shared by the eight other apartments. "At 20ft, the garden is bigger than my whole flat," she says. In summer it serves as an extra room and with the doors open, even in winter it gives Jeavons's flat a welcome sense of space. ■

[amber-interiordesign.co.uk](http://amber-interiordesign.co.uk)