

Cosmopolitan collection

The cool, modern look of this Bayswater flat is a reflection of the various cities in which its owners, a former model and an art dealer, have lived, and forms the perfect backdrop for their collection of contemporary art

TEXT **HATTA BYNG** | PHOTOGRAPHS **ALEXANDER JAMES**

A video installation by Bill Viola hangs on the wall which divides the dining room and the sitting room; the Versailles parquet floor is from Walking on Wood



Spend any time in this Bayswater flat and you forget you are in London. In fact, ‘apartment’ seems a more appropriate term – you could be in Paris or New York. It is partly because this was once two flats, so it is wonderfully spacious but on one level. Rooms open off a long corridor that runs in an L shape, starting with the dining and sitting room and ending with the children’s bedrooms, taking in a playroom, study, larder and utility room, as well as the kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms along the way.

But it is not only its size and layout that make you feel as if you were in another city: it is also its decoration. The owner, Bodil Bjerkvik Blain, is a Norwegian former model, who has lived in many places, including New York, and her husband is a gallery owner, as the walls of the flat attest. Bodil worked with a friend, designer Fiona Johnston of Johnston Parke Interiors, who has worked for Todhunter Earle for the past eight years, but the ideas were Bodil’s own, reflecting the influence of her travels and a life surrounded by art.

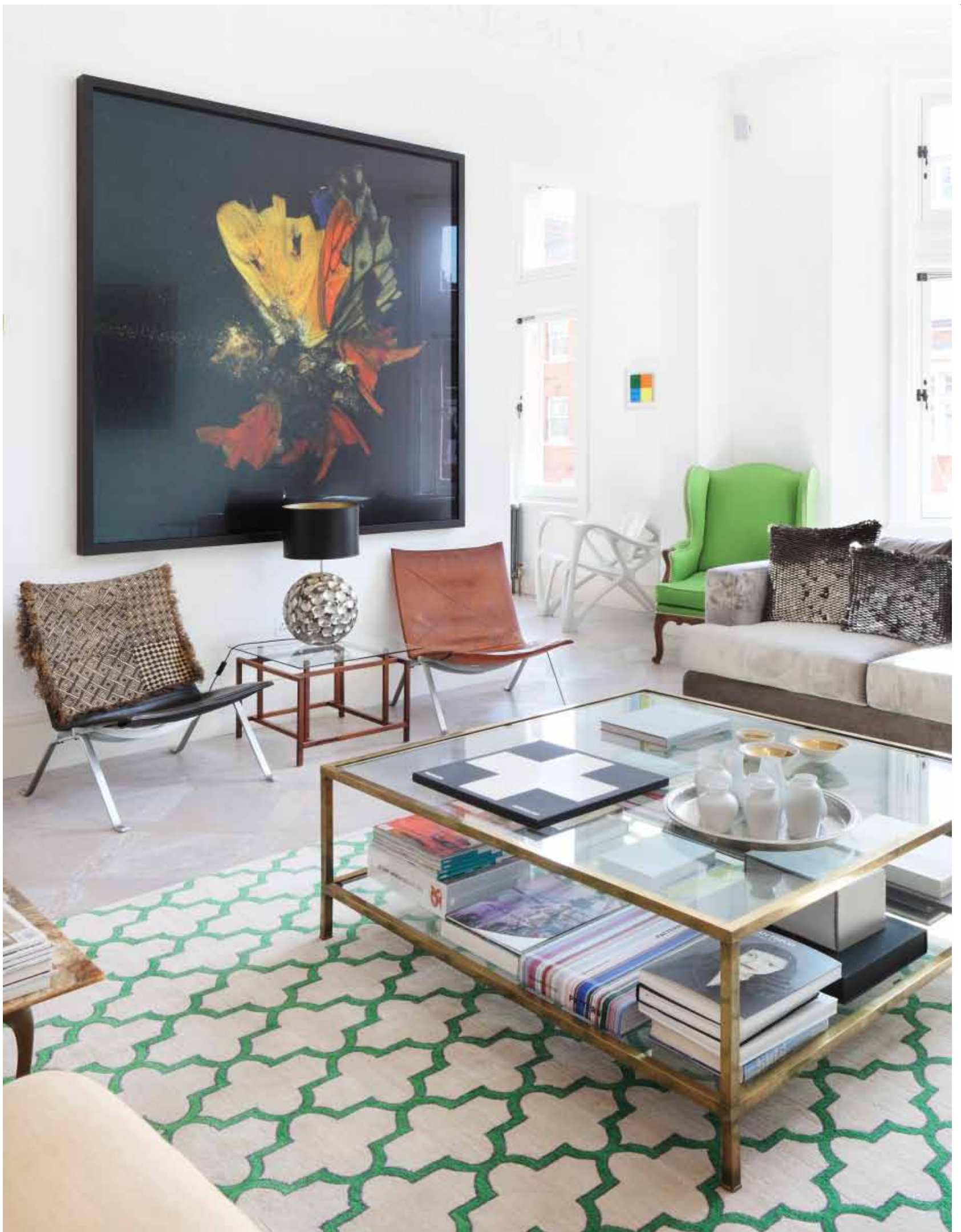
Bodil describes herself ‘waddling in’ to view the flat when she was heavily pregnant. ‘I realised I couldn’t do the five-floor living of a typical London house, and I loved the proper hall,’ she says. She and her husband lived here for a year without doing anything. ‘It’s the best advice I can give,’ she says. ‘After that you really know what is needed and what isn’t.’

She and Fiona started with her two children’s bedrooms, but the project grew so that little, in the end, was left untouched. A study became the utility room, and doorways in the corridor were heightened, with fanlights added to admit more daylight. The builder was Mark Kingsford of Kingsford PMB, and Sally Storey of John Cullen was brought in to advise on lighting for the main rooms.

One of the defining features of this flat now is the Versailles parquet floor that sweeps down the corridor and through the reception rooms

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A neon artwork by ?Tim Noble and Sue Webster makes a statement in the hall. The Hans Wegner dining chairs were reupholstered in yellow leather. The sitting-room sofa is by ?Francis Sultana. OPPOSITE Pieces in the sitting room include a Matt Collishaw *Insecticide 13* print, a ‘Bone’ chair by Joris Laarman, and a rug from The Rug Company









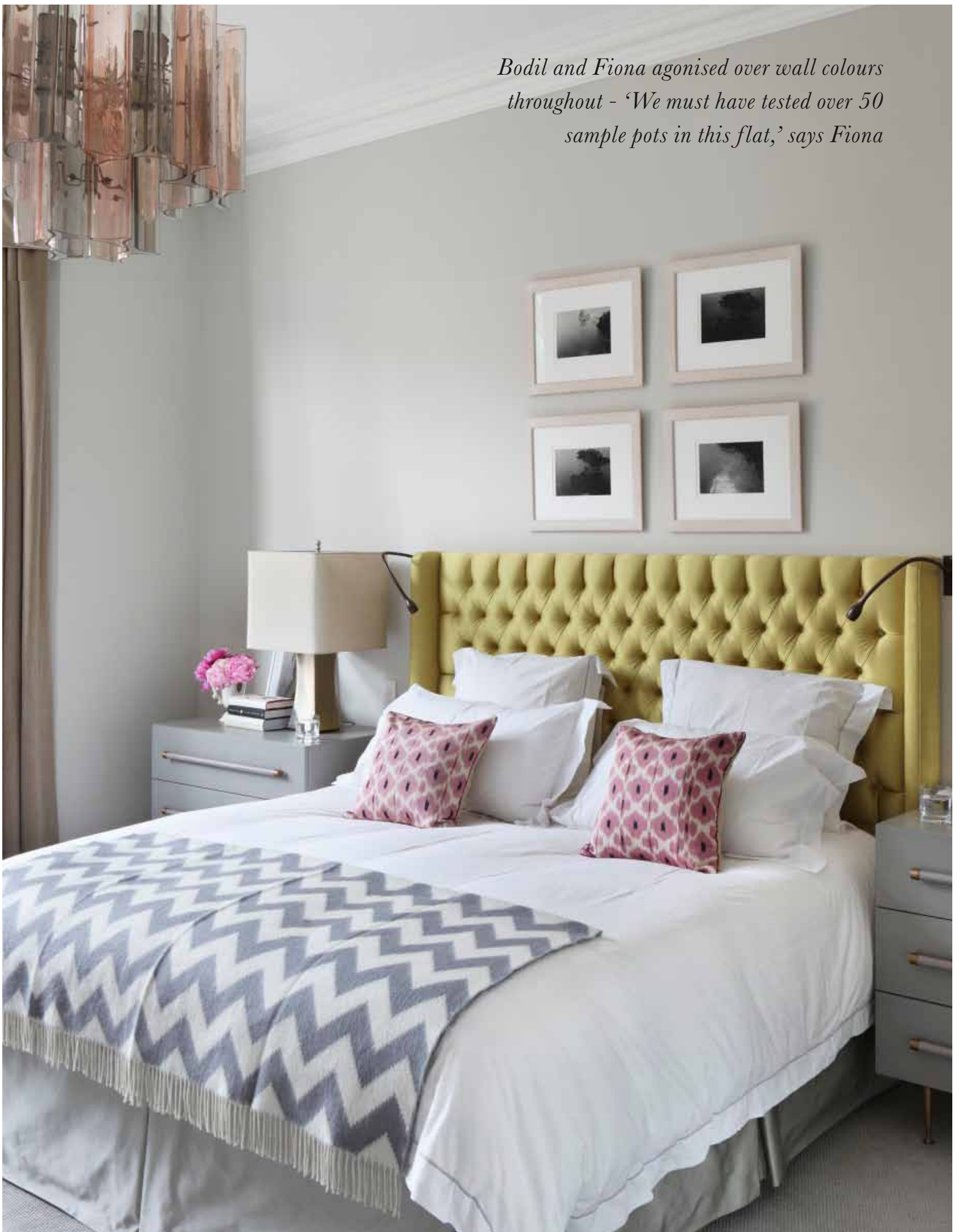
and study – Bodil looked at endless samples in her search for ‘a greyish white that felt fresh and elegant and not too rustic’. Finding the right ‘whites’ for the walls was also a preoccupation, as the paint colour needed to complement their collection of contemporary art. They opted in the end for ‘All White’ from Farrow & Ball for the hall and corridor, and a mix recommended by designer Francis Sultana, a friend of Bodil’s, for the main rooms. In fact, they agonised over wall colours throughout – ‘We must have tested over 50 sample pots in this flat,’ says Fiona. The main bedroom alone took several tries – it is now painted with ‘New Silver’ from Sanderson.

In all other respects Bodil was decisive: Fiona describes herself as Bodil’s ‘interiors facilitator’, bringing her ideas to fruition. ‘Bodil is much bolder and braver with colour than I would be,’ she remarks. The hall, with its neon artwork by Tim Noble and Sue Webster and a French bergère clad in silver leather, set the tone – ‘I wanted a funky start to this classical flat,’ says Bodil. To the left is the light-filled dining room that doubles as a library space for a big collection of art books; Bodil wanted low-level shelves so that art could hang above. The sitting room leads off this through two openings, creating one large entertaining space. In these rooms, design classics, such as the Hans Wegner dining chairs upholstered in yellow leather from Ben Whistler, jostle with limited-editions pieces, including Joris Laarman’s ‘Bone’ chair, a handsome sofa by Francis Sultana, and antiques-shop finds, as well as intriguing taxidermy pieces by Polly Morgan. ‘It’s what I see and love,’ says Bodil of this personal mix.

Over the corridor is the kitchen, one wall of which slides back to incorporate the corridor. Bodil designed it herself so that she could ‘get the heights and proportions right’. She praises her cabinetmaker, Neil Straker of Cheverell, as ‘the most patient man on the planet’, adding, ‘We went through 25 drawings or more.’ The look, with its white units,

LEFT The marble-topped kitchen units were designed by the owner and made by cabinetmaker Neil Straker of Cheverell. **ABOVE** The corridor leads to a family sitting room and on to the bedrooms

Bodil and Fiona agonised over wall colours throughout - 'We must have tested over 50 sample pots in this flat,' says Fiona





marble worktop and crisp colours, reflects her time in New York, and indeed the handles came from the US, as she could not find what she wanted here.

Further down the corridor is the family sitting room, with its striking Stuart Haygarth chandelier, a Moroccan rug, and a sofa that Fiona had made and upholstered in grey wool. At the corner of the L is the main bedroom, with a Fifties dressing table chosen because 'it was not too frilly'. Chests of drawers from Chelsea Textiles, used as bedside tables, were spotted in *House & Garden*.

The main bathroom is the tour-de-force of Bodil and Fiona's teamwork. Clad entirely in marble and beautifully detailed, it is small but luxurious. They worked on technical drawings with an interiors architect – the shower was particularly complex to fabricate, and the marble vanity unit had to be made in sections that were then 'matched' to look like one piece. The wall behind the basins was brought forward, with a loss of floor space but allowing for hidden storage, and display for Bodil's shell collection.

Turning the corner you find the study, larder, utility room, spare room, children's bedrooms and a bathroom, to which Bodil and her 'interiors facilitator' paid every bit as much attention as to the main rooms. Her small daughter's very tailored bed, for instance, is based on a Kelly Wearstler design – and yes, for the record, it is a Damien Hirst that hangs above it.

Though this flat is now finished, Bodil and Fiona are continuing to work together on projects. For Bodil, having been surrounded by artists and designers for much of her life, it seemed a natural progression, and they are a well-matched team – Fiona with her well-honed interiors knowledge and expertise, and Bodil with an eye for striking colour and styling □

Johnston Parke Interiors: 077801-521000; www.johnstonparkeinteriors.com
B3: 020-7729 8111; www.b3designers.co.uk



OPPOSITE In the main bedroom, the photographs above the bed are by Thomas Joshua Cooper; the chests of drawers, used as bedside tables, are from Chelsea Textiles. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A dressing table is flanked by chairs from in the main bedroom. The marble vanity unit in the main bathroom was made in sections and 'matched' to look like one piece. A Damien Hirst hangs above the Kelly Wearstler bed in the daughter's bedroom

