

**DETAILS**

What A traditional  
Georgian townhouse  
Where Edinburgh's  
New Town  
Interior design Hubert  
Zandberg Interiors



## *Reading the room*

Interior designer Hubert Zandberg has spent decades writing design stories for these treasured clients. This, he says, is the masterpiece

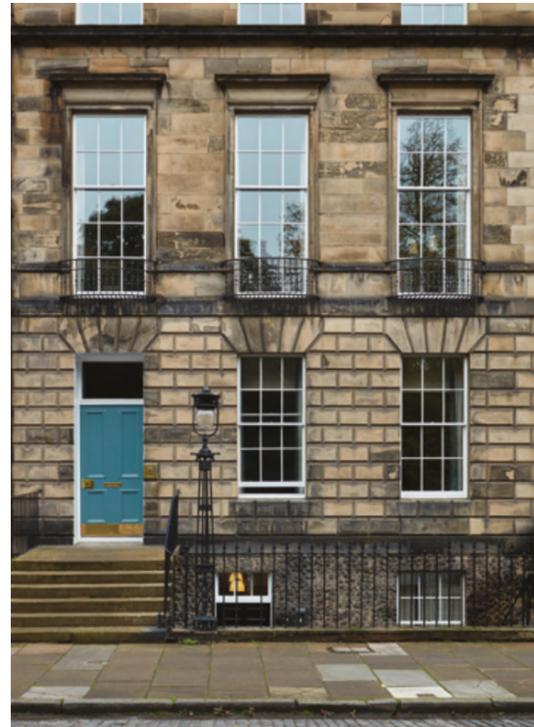
Photography James McDonald Words Natasha Radmehr

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ubert Zandberg once sat on a design panel where an audience member asked, "What should you do if a relative bequeaths you a hideous clock?" One panellist started talking about ways to hide it. "And while I didn't say it out loud," says Hubert, "I was

thinking, 'Well, no. You put it in a Plexi box and make it ironic.' Present it so that people understand it's a conversation piece. Part of your story."

The founder of internationally acclaimed design studio Hubert Zandberg Interiors is, he says, "South African first, storyteller second". Some homes come to him as blank pages while others, such as this A-listed Georgian townhouse in Edinburgh, are already a few chapters deep. His working relationship with its owners spans three decades, five houses and three countries. "In a way we've grown up together, so I arrived at this home knowing their entire back story," he smiles.



The main characters here are a married couple and their four sons. Then there's the five-storey house, built in the early 1800s on Heriot Row in the New Town. An assortment of items from previous homes forms the supporting cast: Brazilian modernist furniture, vintage chandeliers, works by Cape Town artist Tracy Payne, and more besides. No questionable clocks in sight, because Hubert helped acquire many of the pieces. "We've been helping them to curate and collect over so many years," says the designer, "and I'm not in the business of 'out with the old, in with the new' – we wanted to make use of what they had."

As for the narrative? Well, a house steeped in history demands a certain reverence. But it also had to support the lifestyle of a family with four active, sports-mad kids. The owners wanted to keep the grand reception spaces intact, but they also needed to ▶

**Previous pages** This is Hubert Zandberg's first ever yellow kitchen. The cabinets' paint colour is matched to RAL 090 70 60, which pops against the cool tones of Zoffany's Quarter Quartz Grey wall paint. **Left** "Nobody does it better than Bulthaup," says Hubert of the industrial kitchen island, sourced from Cameron Interiors. The pendants above were found in a flea market in Paris. **Opposite** Solid Floor's Landmark Compton engineered wide-board oak flooring connects the kitchen and breakfast room. Planning permission was granted to create an opening between the two areas. Guy Goodfellow's Fez wallpaper and a vintage hand-blocked fabric on the curtains lean into a countryside vibe, while the clients' midcentury table speaks to the sculptural quality of the Bulthaup island. The chandelier is Porta Romana's Crawford design





**Above** "We wanted to play the game of counterpoint, where something allows you to be barefoot in the room," says Hubert of the decision to layer Solid Floor's herringbone parquet flooring with Tim Page's Singh water-reed rug. It makes the room feel inviting, rather than intimidating, even in a sea of opulent details that include a cut-glass Osler & Co chandelier (from Denton Antiques), Jasper Fabrics by Michael S Smith (sourced from Jamb and seen on the curtains and custom HZI armchairs by the window), bespoke marble radiator consoles and the clients' own Art Deco chairs. The room is painted in Farrow & Ball's Pigeon



**Opposite** A 1970s French two-tier console sits back-to-back with Howe London's Basset sofa in a different section of the room used for entertaining, having tea, "or even taking Zoom calls and enjoying that magnificent room as a backdrop," says Hubert. **Left** Bespoke stained-oak panelling adds warmth in the library-cum-family room. Above the HZI sofa (upholstered in Dedar's Belsuede) are giclée prints by Jonny Lyons, flanked by Collier Webb wall lights. The chandelier is another Denton Antiques find. **Below** The interior designer sensitively added to the home's existing plasterwork - this border circling the cupola is new. The colourful artwork is by Tracy Payne

fit in a few more rooms, including a games room, a chill-out area, a gym, two more bedrooms, a utility and a wine store. It made most sense to remodel the two 'basement' floors (the lowest of which is at garden level) to accommodate those needs and amplify the natural mood shift between the upper and lower storeys. "A chance for a so-called maximalist like me to stick with the austerity we often see below stairs in these houses," adds Hubert.

This is austerity in relative terms, of course; these areas have a well-crafted, heritage feel. The original flagstone flooring was restored, and the walls were painted in chalky neutrals that mimic the patina of limewash. The gym is kitted out with vintage equipment and one of the bedrooms, with its brown leather headboard, pale blue walls and woollen textiles, could double as a Ralph Lauren shoot location. "I like that old-school Ivy League vibe," ▶







“We could have gone all out and filled the home with the most elaborate of antiques, but that wasn’t the energy we wanted”

The overall palette of blue, green and yellow threads together beautifully in the master bedroom. “The clients have spent time in America and Hong Kong so it has a very strong narrative about them, and for me it was just a fun room to work on,” says Hubert. Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler’s Squiggle wallpaper makes a lively backdrop, turbo-boosted by zesty Tibor curtains (a kitchen callback), Tim Page’s Funky Flora rug and Trove’s Avalon dressing table, custom-painted aquamarine. Studio HZI designed the headboard, upholstered in Dedar’s Dante velvet



says Hubert. “Making it feel ultra-designed would feel wrong.”

The previous layout had the kitchen in the lower basement, but the owners requested it be moved to ground level. “We kept the cabinetry classic – perhaps bordering on pastiche – then added this ultra-minimal interventionist Bulthaup island, which reminded me of a Donald Judd sculpture, to serve a practical function while making a statement of art,” says Hubert. To warm up the sleek block of metal, the cabinetry was painted a vivid citrine and the fridges were concealed in bespoke oak units that look like an old French dresser. “We first did that in [fashion editor and ceramicist] Deborah Brett’s kitchen and it worked really well.”

The connecting breakfast room picks up on the nostalgic, almost cottagey details and turns the dial up with a breezy mix

of floral prints, daubs of yellow and wicker. “I wanted it to have a cheerful country feel, slightly different to the rest of the house,” says Hubert. “It feels authentic rather than contrived – like if David Hicks did a room in an old English country estate in the 1960s.”

Some rooms warranted what he calls “decoration in the true, old-fashioned sense”. The house has the presence and period details to absorb the William Morris wallpaper and brocade fabrics that would read as ‘statement’ in a more modern build. “We could have gone all out and filled it with the most elaborate of antiques, but that wasn’t the energy we wanted,” he adds. There had to be a sense of evolution and comfort; an easy ask for someone with such finely tuned curatorial instincts. The first thing anyone notices in the duck-egg blue reception room is its beauty, ▶



“I wanted the kids to be able to show off their rugby balls and their trophies, and I love that stuff anyway – aesthetically it’s so cool,” says the designer of the sporty theme underlining the boys’ bedrooms. The photo above the bed is by Jessica Hillout, captured during the 2010 World Cup. Welsh blankets, an antique table from Georgian Antiques and a custom HZI headboard upholstered in Marcus Gear leather create a varsity aesthetic

not the unexpected union of a Chippendale-style mirror, Art Deco armchairs and a rug woven from water reeds. The master bedroom (“One of my favourite ever rooms,” says the designer) blends chintzy chinoiserie with the generous proportions of a Hamptons retreat. “We also used the palette to tell a story through the ages. Greens and blues have a historic feel, but the midcentury browns and injections of contemporary brights move it through the decades.”

The result is a home where the interiors seem to transcend time, if not owner; anyone who knows this family knows that this house could only belong to them. Though he’s loved every project he’s worked on for these clients, Hubert believes this one is the “jewel” – the forever home most authentic to who they are. Now it’s time to let them be the authors of what happens next. ■



**Above** A thick border of Morris & Co’s archival Pimpernel wallpaper draws the eye up to the cornicing in the entrance vestibule, but there’s plenty to admire on the way, from the original floor tiles to Jamb’s Faulkner lantern. The console to the right was custom made by HZI, and just in view on the left is Jules Wabbes’ Vestiaire Horizon coat rack, a midcentury icon.

**Left** How cool is this gym? Vintage equipment from Georgian Antiques and industrial ship lights from a flea market in Paris show how to add character to what is so often a soulless space. There are only a couple of rugby pictures up at the moment, but the idea is to keep adding to the grid over time