

# DEPARTURES

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# URBAN RE NEW AL

With a rigorous sense of detail and a keen eye for history, architect Sally Mackereth reimagines a former stable as her luxurious London house.

*by Becky Sunshine*

*Photographs by  
Stephan Julliard*

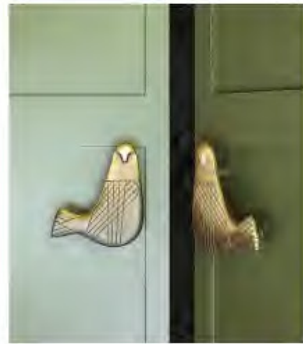
*Styled by Ian Phillips*

Arched windows in Sally Mackereth's living room offer views into her courtyard. A Fornasetti rug is joined by a pair of vintage chairs by Pierre Paulin for Artifort. For details, see page 138.





This page, clockwise from above: Mackereth sits in an Emu chair on a patio off the kitchen; a vintage Italian desk and a Fornasetti chair in the study; bedroom doors covered in Little Greene paint have midcentury door handles.



Clockwise from far left: Tree ferns sit under a steel oculum on a terrace that connects Mackereth's dressing room and the children's bedrooms; the bricks in the courtyard garden were salvaged from the stable floor; the kitchen was designed by Mackereth with Gaggenau appliances.

## In King's Cross,

on an unassuming street in the heart of industrial North London, where you're more likely to find building-supply companies and rundown student accommodation than stylish private residences, there's an intriguing black gate. Beyond it, what was once a derelict Victorian stable is now an imaginatively designed family home. From the gate you enter a cobblestone courtyard, and that leads to a 4,500-square-foot, two-story building, which at once places you in the neighborhood's industrial past, while reminding you that you're in contemporary London.

Architect Sally Mackereth, who moved into the four-bedroom residence with her two kids, Lola, 18, and Oscar, 16, in 2017, had bought the property five years earlier, after driving past it numerous times while on a hunt for an unusual space to transform.

"I've always liked this idea of a place tucked behind a gate—it's something you see all the time in Milan and Paris," says Mackereth as she sips loose-leaf tea from a white porcelain cup in her study, which is filled with books whose subjects range from Eileen Gray to Herzog & de Meuron, Henry Moore, and Ai Weiwei, sitting on shelves salvaged from the building's original rafters. "I could see the tail end of a dilapidated old site, but one

that you could do something with. I was keen to find a property with a courtyard, set back from the road—that's what attracted me in the first place." The location of Mackereth's house is convenient as well. She can walk to St. Pancras station in less than ten minutes.

Yorkshire-born Mackereth, who graduated from London's Architectural Association School of Architecture, where Zaha Hadid and David Chipperfield also studied, cofounded the practice Wells Mackereth in 1995 before forming Studio Mackereth in 2013. Known for both her residential projects and retail spaces for brands such as Royal Salute in South Korea and Bumble & Bumble in New York City, her roots are decidedly modernist, but her interiors are all about comfort and convenience, accented with luxurious materials, rich tones, and elements of surprise.

After wandering past a 65-foot-long external arcade with a row of 10-foot-high arches, you arrive at a wide front door that leads to an entrance hall, from which you can take in the full length of the house. The front and back walls are glazed from floor to ceiling in custom-made, Scottish cast glass, allowing just enough light into this otherwise dark space. It's deeply moody. There's no mistaking that this was once a part of Dickensian London.

"There's trickery here," says Mackereth. "It's basically a brand-new, steel-framed building, and everything is square and true, but I wanted to keep the feeling of being in a stable." That feeling comes, in part, from the proportions. It's big: Walls are expansive—ideal for her artworks by Grayson Perry and Damien Hirst—and ceilings are high. There's definitely a sense of history as you walk around the large living room: from original iron columns where horses would have been tethered

and exposed-brick walls to the original end-grain oak timber floor, which looks like smooth wooden cobbles, set within new polished concrete. The enfilade designed by Mackereth—paneled, pivoting doors disappear flush into the walls—serves to connect the downstairs rooms. There's the kitchen, dominated by a Calacatta Verde marble and brass island; its adjoining dining room to one side of the living room; and a secluded, Army-green master bedroom at the far end. When the bedroom's foot-thick door—brick slips on one side and wood paneling on the other—is closed, you barely notice it's there. "A lot of the devices in the house are about moving through secret doors. I love this idea of secret passages and secret gardens," says Mackereth.

The decor throughout feels cleverly curated but never too serious. Mackereth is a flea-market fiend. "I love vintage furniture, sourcing things," she says. "There's nothing I like more than going to a flea market in Italy—that's my perfect weekend, finding bargains that have a story behind them." She points out treasures like a pair of glass sconces in the downstairs guest bathroom, just \$17 in a Florentine bric-a-brac store, and a pair of metal folding screens in the living room that were found at a Paris vintage market. There are also more valuable pieces: a limited-edition serpent rug and a Gio Ponti-designed cocktail







A light fixture by Nika Zupanc for Queeboo hangs over a vintage Willy Rizzo dining table. The antique tapestry was sourced from Retrovius.



The bed in the master suite is by Cappellini, and the '70s table lamp was sourced from Sans Pretention.



In the master bath, the Albemarle folding screen was designed by Mackereth.

cabinet, both by Fornasetti; a pair of cherry-red Pierre Paulin Groovy armchairs; and an Ico Parisi sofa recovered in a Dedar silk. It's all so pleasingly relaxed. "I can't abide furniture that looks immaculate but isn't comfortable," remarks Mackereth as she sinks into her green silk sofa. "What's the point in that? I think furniture becomes like a family, and it's lovely the way it interacts. A large space can seem intimidating, but how you carve it up with furniture, rugs, and lights is all part of making it feel welcoming."

Creating unexpected light sources was key in transforming the building into a livable space. "Because it was designed for horses, it didn't have—didn't need—daylight," she explains. "So I configured it in a way that there are a lot of gardens, which are like the lungs of the building, to give it some greenery." The kitchen courtyard, with its travertine-top table, metal chairs, and potted herbs, is a favorite spot for breakfast.

What Mackereth does so beautifully—and admits she has borrowed from her design hero, John Lautner, with whom she spent time as a student in Los Angeles in the 1980s—is to dissolve the border between inside and out by creating framed views everywhere you look. Seated at the back of the study, you can see across the kitchen garden and into a sunken, wool-lined television room. Looking from the arcade side of the house into the kitchen, you can see straight through to the metallic-painted dining area, outfitted with a cherry-shaped light fixture by Nika Zupanc and an antique Belgian tapestry. Black metal frames, which line windows and doorways around the house, lend a dramatic emphasis to every view.

"There are lots of instances in the house of lining crumbly old

brick with sharp metalwork," explains Mackereth. "I like this idea of blackened, dark metal. It looks like Victorian engineering."

The tiniest room in the house, a pantry that's roughly six feet square and painted sunshine yellow, has been thoughtfully designed too, with plenty of storage and a compact surface for food preparation. It's where you'll find the toaster and a kettle. "I've always wanted a larder, which is a terribly grown-up thing to want," says Mackereth. "It's a bit like a traditional butler's pantry, where you can fix gin and tonics and, in my case, cups of tea." This entire house certainly lends itself to entertaining, which Mackereth loves to do. Her home, she says, is often overrun with teenagers.

Upstairs the decor is back in the 21st century. Climbing the oak stairs, you enter what feels like a monolithic light box, encased in cast glass. Both kids' rooms are there—they each had a say in the design—as are two guest rooms. Oscar was keen to feel cocooned in the clouds: hence the Fornasetti wallpaper with clouds. Lola wanted the biggest bed she could possibly have.

A master bath is upstairs too, accessed by an ombré-painted staircase rising from the master bedroom. Entirely clad in Douglas fir with a freestanding tub and a stained-maple screen that Mackereth designed, it feels Japanese. However, what draws your eye is another small garden between her son's bedroom and her own dressing room: a small decked patio with planted tree ferns. If you look up, you see a double-curvature oculus, open to the sky. It's very James Turrell. "It snows in there, it rains in there, and the plants grow up through it," says Mackereth. "We've spent Christmas Eve out there in pajamas." 