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INTERIORS TO ENCHANT, INSPIRE & COMFORT

Down the RABBIT hole

British architect SALLY MACKERETH looked to *Alice in Wonderland* to conjure the eye-catching makeover of old Dickensian-era stables near London's King's Cross station.

By Ian Phillips Photographed by Stephan Julliard

OPPOSITE PAGE in the sitting room of this London home, Groovy lounge chairs by Pierre Paulin for Artifort; 1960s Hollywood Regency-style chair found in Miami; 1960s bamboo-framed palm tree mirror screen found in a Paris flea market; 1960s lamps with Murano glass bases found in Italy.





THESE PAGES in another view of the sitting room, **sofa** by Ico Parisi upholstered in silk from Dedar; **Cumulus sofa** (on right) from Heals, upholstered in green wool from Dedar; **Architettura Trumeau cabinet** by Piero Fornasetti; 1970s Italian travertine triangular **nesting tables**; metal **screens** (behind sofas) found at a Paris flea market; **Serpente rug** by Piero Fornasetti for Roubini Rugs.

THIS PAGE in the kitchen courtyard, homeowner Sally Mackereth with 1960s Italian outdoor travertine **table**; Re-Trouvé **outdoor chairs** by Patricia Urquiola for Emu, enquiries to Ke-Zu; circa-1970s majolica ceramic **plate** (on wall) found in Florence. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the ground-floor corridor that leads to the kitchen and study, cats Cedric Bartholomew (CB) Riley (in foreground) and Kusama.



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SALLY MACKERETH

One of Sally Mackereth’s architectural heroes is John Lautner, whose place in history was guaranteed thanks to a series of James Bond-like homes he built in Los Angeles and Palm Springs. “He was the master of playful,” says Mackereth, who founded her award-winning architectural practice, StudioMackereth, in 2013. “I think somebody called it ‘Martini Modernism’. I believe that when you do private homes, there has to be a sense of joy.”

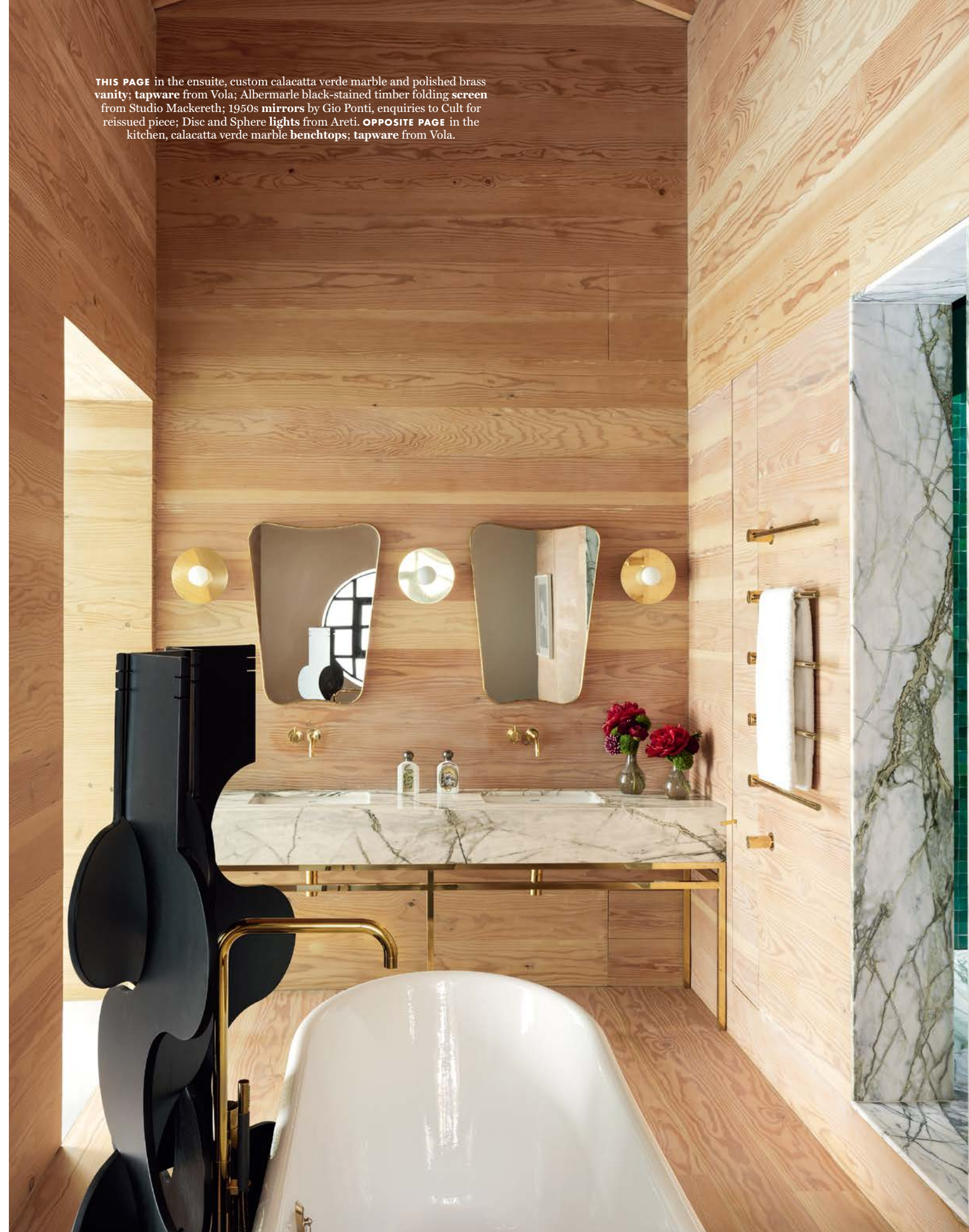
There is certainly a touch of exhilaration to much of her own work. In a house in London’s Little Venice, she installed a winch and winding gear in the main bedroom so the client could hoist his television up and down. Her own weekend retreat used to be a lighthouse on the coast of Norfolk, England, which was mentioned in *Robinson Crusoe*, and her primary residence today — a five-bedroom, 500-square-metre home — is similarly spellbinding. It is located close to King’s Cross train station in what was originally a pair of stable blocks built in the 1870s for Midland Railway.

Mackereth had actually driven past the building for years. “I was always intrigued by it,” she admits. “It appealed because it was hidden. I was looking for a property you could enter almost through a secret garden.” At one stage, it had been owned by a scrap-metal dealer; at another, it served as an art space. By the time she acquired it, the property was in a severe state of dereliction. Her approach to its renovation and transformation was both to pay homage to its past, but also to transport it into the 21st century. “I wanted to retain some of its characterful aspects but also add much more contemporary elements that heightened the sense of Dickensian London due to the contrast,” she explains. »





THIS PAGE in the ensuite, custom calacatta verde marble and polished brass vanity; tapware from Vola; Albermarle black-stained timber folding screen from Studio Mackereth; 1950s mirrors by Gio Ponti, enquiries to Cult for reissued piece; Disc and Sphere lights from Areti. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen, calacatta verde marble benchtops; tapware from Vola.



“There’s a child in all of us that loves the thrill of the unexpected”

THIS PAGE in the main courtyard, Cast 001 **table** and **chairs** from Studio Mackereth. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the dining area, 1970s travertine **table** by Willy Rizzo; 1950s Medea **chairs** by Vittorio Nobili for Fratelli Tagliabue; Cherry Lamp **ceiling light** by Nika Zupanc for Qeeboo; early-19th-century Belgian **tapestry**.



SALLY MACKERETH

« She salvaged cobblestones from inside the old building and laid them in the courtyard. She kept a series of arched windows, with parts of the brickwork missing where equine teeth had taken a nibble. “Nowadays, my two cats perch on the sills, tormenting the birds,” quips Mackereth. She also added a 20-metre-long arcade to the house’s main facade, framing its arches in black steel. “They’re sort of like eyelids to each aperture,” she says. The first floor, meanwhile, was created by the addition of a monolithic glass box, which breaks markedly with the more traditional aesthetic of the ground level. At its centre is a patio planted with tree ferns, topped by an oculus that is open to the sky. “I can watch the moon and stars through it,” she says, “or even check the weather in the morning. In winter, it’s quite magical when the snow falls through it.”

Mackereth wanted a similar sense of enchantment in the rest of the house. One of her inspirations was Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. “There’s a child in all of us that loves the thrill of the unexpected,” she says. She adores things that are out-of-scale, such as the huge bird-shaped dressing room handles. Her bedroom off the living room, meanwhile, is accessed via a concealed door — an element she often integrates into her projects. “It’s like in grand houses and palaces, where there would be a secret passage from the King’s chamber to the Queen’s chamber,” she says. “They’re all over Versailles. It’s that sort of moment where you go from one world into another.”

Her choice of furnishings is at once refreshingly unique, theatrical and vibrant. She avows a love of colour and is a fan of the whimsical creations of Piero Fornasetti, as witnessed in the living room by the trompe l’oeil drinks cabinet and rug decorated with a slithering snake motif. Another of her signature traits is to mix high and low — signed pieces like the vintage Pierre Paulin chairs with flea market finds — and to come up with some wonderfully quirky combinations. One of the best can be found in the dining area, where an august early-19th-century Belgian tapestry has been paired with a ceiling light in the shape of two cherries. “They’re very silly and make the tapestry appear not so serious,” she says.

The influence of the natural world is also very much in evidence, such as the jellyfish made from bright orange netting, which hang under the arcade. “They twist in the wind,” she says. “It’s almost like they’re floating up to the surface of the sea.”

The very first night Mackereth spent in the house, she initially thought she was hallucinating when awoken by the sound of a cow mooing and a horse neighing. “I really didn’t understand what was going on because this is central London,” she recalls. Much to her relief, it turned out that she had not slipped down a rabbit hole. Instead, she discovered the garden of the Royal Veterinary College is located right next door. **VL** studiomackereth.com





THIS PAGE in the courtyard underneath the oculus on the first floor with a view of Mackereth's son Oscar's bedroom. In the bedroom, Fornasetti Senza Tempo Nuvole **wallpaper** from Cole & Son, enquiries to Radford.
OPPOSITE PAGE in the dressing room with a view into the ensuite, Martinique banana-leaf patterned **wallpaper**. In the ensuite, **towel warmer** from Vola; shower in green Moroccan zellige **tiles** from Emery & Cie. *Details, last pages.*