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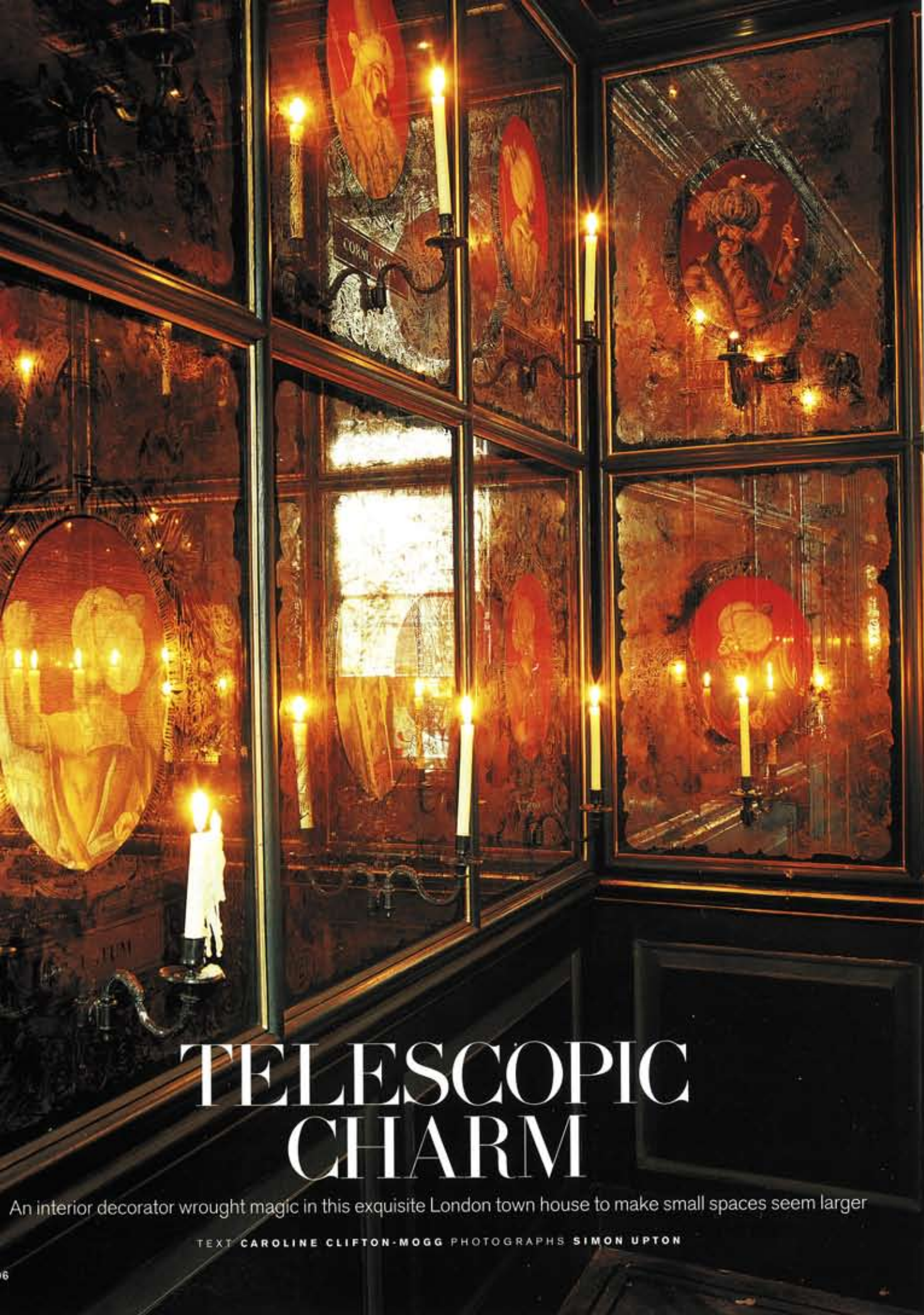
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# TELESCOPIC CHARM

An interior decorator wrought magic in this exquisite London town house to make small spaces seem larger

TEXT CAROLINE CLIFTON-MOGG PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON UPTON



BOTH PAGES In the dining room, candles illuminate romanticized portraits of turbaned sultans within verre églomisé panels. The chairs are covered in a cut velvet, '6065/008/2', from Pierre Frey, with gold braid from Peta Smyth (tel: 020-7630 9898)





OPPOSITE A seventeenth-century Flemish tapestry adds visual depth to the drawing room. ABOVE LEFT A George I wing armchair from Partridge Fine Arts is covered in a specially woven green silk damask. RIGHT Antique and modern tableware in the dining room



ABOVE LEFT In the drawing room, curtains are made from 'Van Dick Rigato Rosso', by Colony. RIGHT Bronzes, a still life and antique textiles form a signature Alidad composition. BELOW LEFT An eighteenth-century marquetry bookcase in the study. RIGHT A view into the drawing room

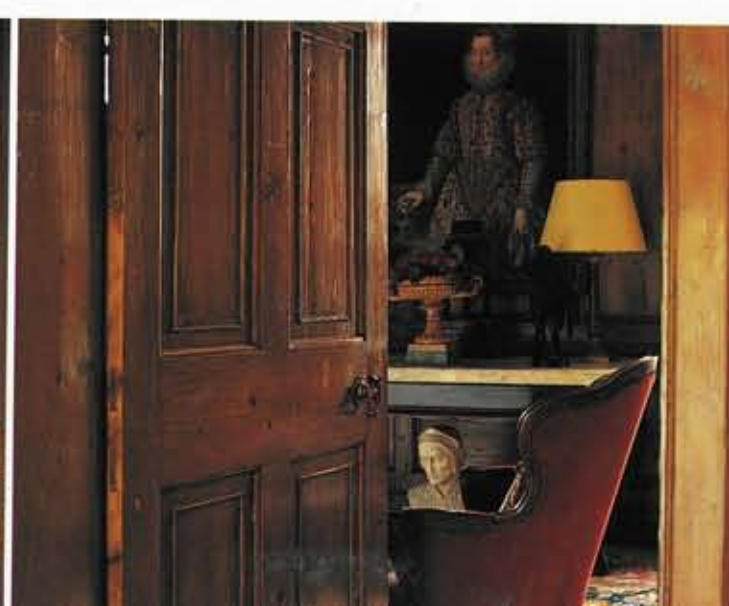
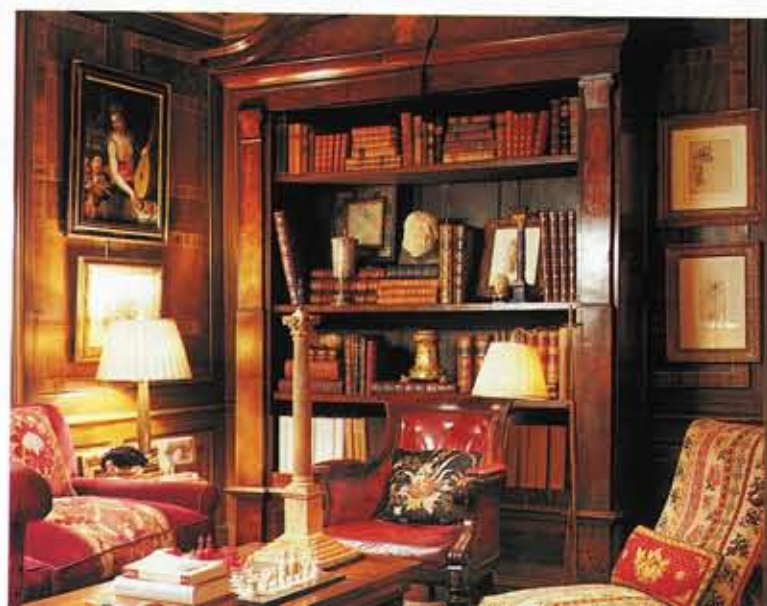
Alidad is in introspective mood: 'The fact is,' he says, 'decorating is a pain.' Pen poised, I wait for the complaint about ungrateful clients or tardy suppliers, but it transpires that far from complaining, he is in fact describing his creative process when in the throes of an interior-decorating project. 'There are several different stages of pain. The first stage is finding out what the house has to tell me. At the same time, I need to ascertain what the clients have to tell me. Then I have to interpret both stories and also do what I want.'

But surely, I ask, you do what the client wants? 'Not necessarily. People think they know what they want, but many of them have outside pressures which they can't see beyond, although they think they can. They bring

baggage and requirements from a different life or lives to the project in hand, and part of what they are saying is true but not all. My job is to extract the essence of what they say. I have to work out what they haven't told me: the unsaid is as important as the said.

'For most people buying a new house represents a new period in their lives. They are often still attached to their previous way of life, even if they don't recognize that. It is my job to take them, or drag them, into the new world.'

No sooner has he coped with this first pain, than he is overcome with the second stab – the execution: will his ideas work? And, finally, will the client be happy? 'Once I start, I instinctively know what they want and that's when I need their total trust and confidence.' This last







ABOVE LEFT An ogival porch leads from the rear of the house to the garden. RIGHT Hand-painted wallpaper, vellum-bound books and painted woodwork add light to the garden study. The chair is covered in 'Eaton Check' by Colefax and Fowler

requires a leap of faith on the client's part, because Alidad can't show them anything. 'They can't see the fabrics, carpets, etc because I haven't got them yet. I don't do little storyboards. I want to be completely free. Sample boards are anathema to me.' Happily, this house is the second house Alidad has decorated for these clients; they allowed him to do whatever he wanted.

The house in question is a tiny eighteenth-century gem in a London backwater. From the outside it is unexceptional, but going through the front door takes you, like Alice, into a place of fascinating perfection decorated in a manner that belies its size – as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope. When Alidad saw it, he fell in love with it: 'I could see the old house, a jewel from another time, and I really wanted to bring it to life.'

The small panelled hall is dominated by a painting hung above a carpet-covered table. Off the hall is the dining room; it, too, is small, although its size is irrelevant. The room is a glittering fantasy, with walls panelled with *verre églomisé*, each panel portraying a turbaned sultan. On each panel a candle in a sconce flickers darkly. A painted and gilded galaxy shimmers on the ceiling, and scattered across it and hidden in the cornice are tiny fibreoptic lights that look like stars in this painted universe.

A simple, fine staircase of meticulously restored old boards leads to a panelled first-floor drawing room, which sits between two studies, one dark and warm, the other bright and light. 'Originally, this floor consisted of a drawing room, a bedroom and a bathroom. It needed rationalizing, so I designed different sitting rooms for different moods: the drawing room is formal, the study cosy and the garden study light and airy.'

The drawing room retained its original panelling, so Alidad added a bookcase in the same style. Initially, the angled corner fireplace posed a problem but he decided to regard it as a piece of furniture, which he found made it easier. 'I wanted to change the format of the room

completely, to make it look bigger and better proportioned by using pieces that were over-scaled. I found a tapestry which is as large as the wall. It includes an elongated figure which draws the eye up towards the ceiling.' The tapestry balances the bookcase. In all his decorating, Alidad aims for this sort of balance: 'I never have symmetry; instead I want balance.'

The cosy study was intended for use at night. This is another small room and again Alidad looked for the largest bookcase he could find: it almost touches the ceiling and is now balanced by a huge, ceiling-high screen. The scale of both pieces makes the room appear larger than it really is. In the narrow garden study on the other side of the drawing room, he created a lighter effect: the walls are hung with a delicate, hand-painted wallpaper based on an eighteenth-century Swedish document.

Bedrooms are on the second floor, where comfort and practicality are the watchwords. In the main bedroom, the television is hidden but easily accessible, while a seating area of a sofa and chairs in an alcove makes the room seem larger. Alidad changed the conventional bedroom layout by moving the bed from the middle of the room to one side.

The adjoining bathroom combines practicality with luxury. A long walk-in shower is finished in golden stone, the bath is faced with matt marble, and double basins stand beneath mirrors apparently flush with the wall but which conceal deep, shelved cupboards. The room is a triumph – simple, luxurious, antique in its associations but also modern, a microcosm for the whole house.

Presumably, I suggest, after the end of a successful job such as this, the pain finally goes? Unfortunately not quite. 'It never really goes,' says Alidad. 'On every job I always think, "I can't do this bit," but then I do and then I say, "I can't do the next bit," and I do. I think the day I say to myself, "I can do it," is the day I stop. I have to have the pain' □

Alidad (tel: 020-7384 0121)



ABOVE The bathroom is classical in inspiration, with a modern twist. Most of the fittings were designed by Alidad. BELOW In the upper rooms, the decoration takes on a lighter note. The walls in the main bedroom are covered in a Ralph Lauren fabric, 'FL144/01', available from Designers Guild

