

# Bring the outside in

Known for making outdoor spaces chic, garden designer Charlotte Rowe has also used her distinctive signature on the inside of her London home, says **Pattie Barron**

**G**ARDEN designer Charlotte Rowe is renowned for making chic town gardens that have strong structure and lush planting. Her home, a four-storey house in Brook Green that also contains her design practice, has the same basic stamp: fine proportions that are the inheritance of a Georgian town house, and rich detail that is the inevitable result of much globe-trotting and souvenir collecting.

"If a space has good bones, whether it's indoors or outdoors, you can't go far wrong," says Rowe, who made the move nine years ago from Clapham back to Brook Green, where she grew up.

"Everything else is cosmetic. I added shutters to show off the sash windows, painted the dodgy

small but it suits Rowe just fine. "I had a huge kitchen in my old house in Clapham but it wasn't nearly as ergonomic as this one. It's wide enough for two of us to be in here cooking and not step on one another's feet. I've come to realise that a large kitchen, just for the sake of it, is not necessarily a good idea. I inherited this one and although it's not new, the units are handmade and have stood up well over time; all I've done is swapped wooden knobs for brushed steel."

What the kitchen does provide is a direct route, linked by a quarry-tile floor, to the dining room, as well as a through-view to the streamlined garden beyond, with its striking focal point of a contemporary outside fireplace right at the end. In summer — and, thanks to the fireplace, at

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terracotta walls in the living room off-white and threw a beautiful woven straw rug that I bought from the Nomads in Mauritania on to the less-than-great beechwood floor. The worst mistake I made with this house was choosing a pale cream carpet, which gets absolutely filthy. I've had to have it steam-cleaned about 10 times since I bought it two years ago. Now I'm changing it for a more practical beige cord.

"The other mistake was buying cheap bathroom taps, because they got furred up in months. I've since invested in a decent brand."

Some people might find the galley kitchen too

other times of the year, too — dinner parties are inclined to spill out from the dining room to the garden. "The dining room was originally painted red," says Rowe, "and funnily enough, I've always had red dining rooms — red is supposed to stimulate the appetite as well as conversation — but it needed to be white to make an easy transition to the garden."

The Thirties wooden dining table, complete with six chairs, cost Rowe just £12 when she was a student, but the heavy wooden chairs have been partly replaced by lightweight transparent ones of the neoclassic Louis Ghost variety. "They're



The dining room, with the original quarry-tiled floor, leads straight out to Rowe's contemporary garden, which has a striking focal point at its end in the form of an outside fireplace



Rowe's crisp white bedroom is an extension contained above her house and five neighbouring houses





The north-facing conservatory, has the ideal light for drawing up garden plans (above left); a woven rug Rowe bought back from Mauritania, more usually used by Nomads as a lining for their desert tents, covers the living room floor

perfect for a small space, they're surprisingly comfortable and, best of all, I can take them outside to supplement the garden seating."

As in the living room, where an ornate cupboard from the Gujarati region of India, inherited ceremonial swords and Burmese statues add

colour and character, Rowe's unique collectables give the plain dining room personality. Silk hangings from Cambodia are used as vertical wall panels, a Bedouin set of shelves brought back from Morocco hangs on another wall and a magnificent Chinese trousseau cupboard that used to contain Rowe's television sees new life as a drinks and glasses cabinet.

The last owners built a long, lean conservatory the length of the kitchen, which Rowe uses as a studio for her garden design practice; a first-floor bedroom, painted a lively hot pink, serves as her office. "The conservatory might be a bit of a useless space for other people but it's fantastic for me and my assistant, Jonathan, because it faces north, which is the perfect light for drawing," she says.

Her smartest move, however, was corralling her neighbours living in the five adjacent houses to get together and make a sweeping extension right along their roofs so that they all gained an extra

floor. "We couldn't get planning permission initially because of the period of the house; the roofs are traditional Georgian, with no mansard," she explains. "We appealed, making the case that this whole area has been built up in a hotchpotch style, and that we would do it in one style that would be sympathetic to the architecture of the houses, and we won the appeal. I had just sold a house I had in France as a holiday home, so I had some money to get it done."

The work, including decorating, took three months, and at the end of it, Rowe had exactly what she wanted: a roomy bedroom with plenty of wardrobe space and luxurious en-suite bathroom with an outsize-framed shower and limestone floor. "Everyone was content with a window to look out on but I insisted on a proper glass door as well, with railing, so you can feel as if you're part of the amazing rooftop landscape. It's a wonderful sensation to be out there among the chimney tops."

Living room delights



A Gujarati cupboard is a favourite piece

The galley kitchen adjoins the dining room and is just the right width to make entertaining for friends easy

Pictures by Clive Nichols



HOW TO GET THE LOOK

- Shutters from the New England Shutter Co (020 8675 1099; www.nesc.co.uk)
- Cushions on sofa from Fine Cell Work, made by prison inmates (020 7931 9998; www.finecellwork.co.uk)
- Gujarati cupboard in living room from Artique at Tetbury (01666 503597; www.artique.uk.com)
- Kartel Louis Ghost dining chairs, adjustable Samiba stool in studio, all from Purves & Purves (020 8893 4000; www.purves.co.uk)
- Handmade American oak console table at end of bed and bedside tables from Channels (020 7371 0301; www.channelsdesign.com)
- Black-and-white merino wool bed throw by Muskett & Mazzullo (020 7354 5976; www.muskett-mazzullo.co.uk)

