



Chantal relaxes at her kitchen table, in front of salvaged library bookshelves, which display some of her treasures, the source of her inspiration

Chantal saw the homely potential of the flat to house her vintage finds, and loved its architectural elements, such as bare brickwork and columns



"I'm from the south of Italy, so light is important to me - it helps me think"

“Home is a museum of memories”

Chantal Martinelli's home is a 'jewellery box' of precious things – but it is also full of inspiration and fun

WORDS OLIVIA GORDON PHOTOGRAPHS ALUN CALLENDER

Architect Chantal Martinelli is standing in her kitchen brewing strong Italian coffee. Her lively eyes sparkle as she explains, in her lilting accent, why her home is filled with cacti: 'I think succulents bring in the sun.'

Chantal's flat is in the centre of creative Hackney, in east London, but it is also a slice of the Mediterranean. Chantal, from Matera, in southern Italy, moved to London to work for famous architect Norman Foster – including helping design what she calls her 'baby',

the new Crossrail Whitechapel station. She fell in love with east London: a place, she says, 'where everyone is different and can express this difference'.

Six years ago, while looking for a flat with her French husband, Julien, and their eldest son, Lucio, now seven, Chantal found this spacious apartment in a former shirt factory, complete with high ceilings, light-flooded windows, exposed brickwork and columns. It was terribly rundown – 'there were mice and you couldn't even see the wooden floor because it was so grey' – but

Chantal could see its huge potential. She remembers: 'It was the right shell, and I thought, "This can be my home".'

Today, the flat mixes the arty Hackney lifestyle Chantal has embraced with a flavour of *la dolce vita* – the sophisticated, breezy Mediterranean style from her homeland. Her beloved succulents and fragrant, home-dried eucalyptus throughout the flat give it an air of Italian summer, even when it's bracingly British outside.

Chantal's home is testament to the poetic, enthusiastic person she is. She >>>



TOP AND ABOVE
The eclectically furnished family dining room and Chantal and Julien's cosy bedroom reflect Chantal's belief that home is a cocoon; a space where the emotions of its inhabitants mix

RIGHT Chantal has playfully turned a corridor off the guest bedroom into a study, which doubles as a cinema

"A friend told me my home reminds them of an Almodovar movie, with its contrasting colours - he is one of my favourite directors!"



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Bold Mediterranean colours in the kitchen are an expression of Chantal's roots; the spare room is also a peaceful sitting room; and that Italian essential, a pot of basil



>>> sees her living space as a 'jewellery box', in which she stores special things; and it's full of experimental fun, too, like an old cupboard, the doors of which are covered in the collages she made with Lucio, a cinema room in a corridor, and a mezzanine sleeping area in the boys' room. Chantal's second son, Marcel, is three. She says: 'Home is a place of experimentation. It is a cocoon where it is easy to make new ideas flourish in the softness of my own environment.'

Chantal is also an avid photographer, taking pictures of 'ugly but beautiful' neglected urban spaces, such as derelict buildings. She also loves shopping for vintage paraphernalia, and the flat is full of her rare finds, including a working gramophone. 'I find inspiration in the

shapes and simplicity of objects from the past. Today, things are overly complex,' she says, adding that the high ceilings, 'help ideas fly' because 'space has an impact on us'.

After Marcel was born, and Chantal was on maternity leave from her position at an architecture firm, a friend asked her to redesign their home. She agreed, working a few hours a day while he slept. Her friend recommended her and Chantal received so many commissions as a result, she decided not to return to her job, instead starting her own firm, Martinelli Architecture & Design.

She has an office near home, where she works full-time after dropping off the boys at the local school and nursery. 'I have to juggle being a mum, a woman

and an artist within myself,' she admits.

The family love to explore, and find it 'amazing' to use Airbnb to rent out their home while they are away. They also use a website called Vrumi to hire out the flat as a workspace on occasional days, for fashion or food photo shoots or to people who want a beautiful place in which to work. Chantal says: 'I enjoy the fact that a house doesn't stay closed - so it's open for others to experience.'

She adds: 'Home is a museum of your feelings and memories. It is not only *your* museum, it is the museum of the people you share it with; the place where your emotions mix. My imagination will be part of the children's memories. And here, I am always happy.'

Martinelli Architecture & Design, mad-atelier.com