

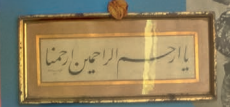
TURKISH DELIGHT

Unwrap the white stucco packaging of a certain Notting Hill apartment and you'll discover a rich Technicolor retreat worlds away from its buttoned-up neighbours. Indeed, the London home of Istanbul-born Rifat Ozbek has been crafted to send every sense soaring, blending the seductions of an Ottoman pavilion with glam-rock, psychedelia and the interior designer's kaleidoscopic collection. Not to mention all those confectionery colours... a sweet-toothed Cosmo Brockway savours each morsel. Photography: Mark Luscombe-Whyte





Previous pages: two convex mirrors warp Rifat Ozbek's vibrant salon. Orbed by damascene tables and underlaid by a striped 'dhurrie' from Joss Graham, the room's central ottoman is enrobed in a kente cloth from Duncan Clark. Coiled on a table covered in embroidered animal print – a textile found in an Indian bazaar – is a beaded snake made in 1917 by blind Turkish prisoners. Above: a Syrian inlaid commode throngs with figurines, many of them gifts from the late Leigh Bowery, a great friend. The vintage Andy Warhol poster brings back memories of 1980s Amsterdam. Opposite: a Fornasetti find forms the ocular centre of one of Rifat's altar-style 'set pieces'. The woodwork's colour pays homage to the hues of Istanbul's river mansions, as does the inherited gilt-framed Koranic script hanging on high





Previous pages: Rifat's ground-floor garçonnière teems with the treasures he's collected, including, to the left, a Yoruba beaded chair found in Cape Town, draped with a mascot scarf by Bella Freud. The naive portrait of the fez-toting man just above was the designer's first antique purchase, bought with his mother in Istanbul. In the foreground, Ottoman calligraphy is draped over a sofa upholstered in Bennison fabric, while, glimpsed through the far doorway, a male nude surmounts a Tibetan cabinet bearing ceramic pomegranates. Above: the palette of the studio/dining room – carved out from a 'bleak second bedroom', he recalls – was inspired by that of Tibetan temples. Over a papier-mâché piece from Mexico City hangs a star lantern brought back from Rifat's family 'yali' on the Bosphorus



Previous pages, right: holding court in Rifat's bedroom is a carnival-like floral creation – fluorescent under blue light, it's a souvenir from the designer's interior for Loulou's. The antique suzani came from his mother, while the room's colour he accredits to Christopher Gibbs: 'In my old party days, this room was Majorelle blue, but I needed a colour to mirror the garden.' These pages, opposite: a vintage Fornasetti chair sits in the bathroom, where the clever use of stained glass, refracted by an Indian 'chik' blind, achieves a jewel-like effect

I bought this from Chrissie Gibbs – it had hung in Barbara Hutton's house above the Tangier kasbah.' Rifat Ozbek introduces me to his bathroom mirror (Moorish, etched crescent, freckled glass) as though it were another guest at a get-together. It's an expansive touch typical of the Istanbul-born fashion turned interior designer, whose conversation fizzes with bons mots and anecdotes as he moves through the jewel-coloured rooms of his Notting Hill apartment – his sanctuary and creative space, as well as the setting for some renowned parties.

He made his home here within a half-moon of stucco villas more than three decades ago, and in the time since has overseen several incarnations of the interior – veiled, until now, from the public eye. 'My first sight of the flat was a warren of badly partitioned rooms,' he says. 'But I felt emboldened by the high ceilings and the huge windows framing both ends to carve something more spare and open. Having grown up in a *yali* [waterside mansion] on the Bosphorus, there was something in me that needed to break down walls and breathe out.'

Inspired by a set of 36 antique miniatures of Ottoman padishahs that his father gave him, Rifat painted the salon walls gamboge yellow and covered low seating in serge-green cotton, iced with drifts of suzani cushions from his own company, Yastik. 'I had as a starting point for this room the ballroom in Visconti's *The Leopard*,' he says. 'The huge ottoman in the centre of the room, so simple and so rich.'

Sicilian bombast aside, here is all the visual narrative of an Ottoman imperial tent that might at any moment be carried down the Portobello Road to a far-off campaign. As we discuss a 17th-century writer describing 600 camels taking the sultan's tents to war, Rifat, the consummate host once more, ushers me in front of his own 'tent flap': a deep-red chinoiserie

blind hung across his front window. 'This was made for Diana Vreeland's "garden in hell".' He waves his arms. 'Billy Baldwin had some extra bolts, which he used for my old friend Marguerite Littman's London interior. One day over lunch, she gave her curtains to me. I unpicked the lining so it's translucent and sort of dances in the late afternoon, dragons and birds...'

On a steamy midsummer day, the dappled rooms are as cool as they might be with the waters of the Bosphorus lapping on an outside deck. Here, Rifat moves with the slow grace of someone deeply at home. Cocooned in his favourite striped armchair, a book and ashtray to hand, he looks out over the jungle garden below, which he has recently acquired having gazed at it for three decades, and which he will soon turn into a wildflower meadow. Settling in, he describes the small lightning bolts over the years that led to his obsession with the *form* of interiors. 'Visiting Nureyev's house on the Quai Voltaire was a quiet epiphany,' he tells me. 'As was Palazzo Fortuny, the colours of Benares, Leighton House and – of course – staying with Chrissie.' He describes the thrilling shock, during one weekend with Gibbs as his host, of coming across a bathroom painted in the same arsenic green that now adorns his own bedroom. 'I was entranced by the idea of an Englishman painting a room the same colour as the Anatolian peasant houses I had seen as a child.' The film *Performance* was also a seminal influence on his vision.

Rifat was admitted to what is now Central Saint Martins in 1974 on the strength of a few designs scrawled on a train en route to the interview. He talks of being a 'full glam-rock' student, and suddenly the 'psychedelic and spiritual' elements of his inner world come into sharp focus in his home, where a 19th-century fireplace is bedecked with a priapic totem of ink-blue South American feathers, a statue of

Ganesh and a nazar eye. He recalls listening to Daphne Guinness's 'phantasmagorical' disco album *Revelations* on loop as he sketched and wove in the twilight hours at his table, alongside thundering climaxes from Bach and Philip Glass.

Then, shifting a gear, the designer motions me towards what he calls the 'terracotta-burgundy-coloured' woodwork and rhapsodises about his love for Tibetan temple hues, which inspired so much of his stage setting. 'In my mind's eye, I could see the electric blues, the mustards, the ochres. I find them sacred and moving, I wish I had the money to paint murals of awnings in the cornice...'. Although he leads a more somnolent life here nowadays, these were rooms that witnessed high jinks in the past with friends such as Kate Moss, Anita Pallenberg and Ramona Rainey.

'I want my interiors to touch all the five senses,' he says, pointing out that the delicious scent in the air is a combination of 'Bitter Orange' by Agraria and Dyptique's 'Feu de Bois'. The sensory seduction at play certainly had an effect on Robin Birley, a dinner guest one night with his wife, Lucy. On the strength of what he experienced, the club maestro commissioned Rifat to design the interiors of the private members' haunt 5 Hertford Street in Mayfair and its basement *boîte*, Loulou's. 'Robin said to me: "There is no budget. Mistakes are allowed. Take as long as you need – but I want it to be timeless." It was an irresistible overture.'

He is now busy with a Manhattan outpost, to be named Maxime's, after Birley's aunt Maxime de la Falaise, and so the designer has his quiver full. 'I only work with Robin now,' he says. 'It's a collaboration that fulfils me on so many levels.' And with that, he returns to sketching his imminent garden and studio, a fresh chapter for a man who knows the secret of evolving with the new moons ☽

