



Ireland's great houses, built in 1773 to the designs of James Wyatt. The onus to find a new home in London fell to Sita, who accomplished the mission by seizing a somewhat surreal moment.

'I was walking down the street and a woman was standing outside [what became] our house, looking distressed,' she recalls. 'I said, "What's wrong?" She said that she'd bought another house and already exchanged, but the buyer for her house had fallen through.' As the woman wept, de Vesci swiftly inspected the premises. 'I didn't even go up to the top floor,' she recounts. 'I just looked around the bottom, and thought, "That's fine." It's so much easier than going to an estate agent.' Later that day, de Vesci and the property holder crossed paths again. 'I said, "I really think we'll make an offer," and we did, three days later.'

Five years on, the de Vescis acquired the identical property adjoining their four-storey, four-bedroom house and knocked down the dividing walls to create a more expansive set-up. Their friend, the architect and designer Ashley Hicks, worked 'piecemeal', as he puts it, 'to make two ordinary homes special'.

Against Hicks's mostly stone-grey and inventively refurbished backdrop – including a pitched glass-roofed dining space within the kitchen, and a lower-ground-floor library featuring a dramatic double-height ceiling – de Vesci arranged various

**Above** the entrance hall is dominated by Abbyleix treasures, such as the antique chinoiserie screen.

**Below** the pitched glass-roofed dining space within the kitchen features a 19th-century Russian chandelier and a dining table built by the carpenter at Abbyleix, which de Vesci spruces up with perky table linen by Brigitte Singh



Abbylax treasures next to finds sourced on biannual forays to Jaipur (where her eponymous clothing line is hand-made), finishing touches by friends (an Allegra Hicks lemon bathroom blind) and precious keepsakes. Take the kitchen. Beneath a 19th-century Russian chandelier from Abbyleix stands a long dining table built by the estate's carpenter, adorned with table linen by Brigitte Singh, the French textile designer famed for her interpretations of Mogul block prints. Then there's a 1940s wall hanging of the Hindu gods Rama and Sita. 'I've had it since I was four years old and it was in my bedroom in Rome,' de Vesci explains.

The spacious entrance hall was created by incorporating a former sitting-room. Turkish-inspired rugs from the Abbyleix Carpet Works lie on one area of its floor. Established in 1906 by Ivo, 5th Viscount de Vesci, the now defunct enterprise produced hand-tufted carpets under the Kildare label for ocean liners such as the Olympic and the Titanic.

Two staircases lead to the drawing-room. Lining one is a handsome de Vesci portrait gallery (a further 17 portraits in the salon mingle with pictures of related maharajas and an oil by Richard Elliot depicting a regal Sita on her 30th birthday). The other flight of steps is painted shocking-pink – 'Sita's navy-blue,' says Francis





**Sources for the Sita de Vesci look**

**Home accessories** such as window blinds: Allegra Hicks, 28 Cadogan Place, London SW1 (020-7235 8989; allegrahicks.com)

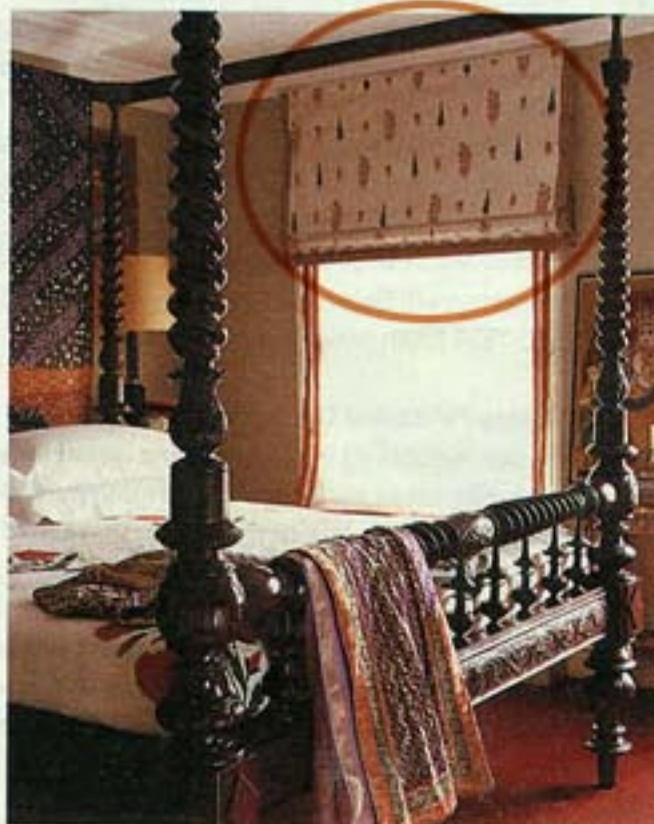
**Architecture** Ashley Hicks (dh1970.com)

**Bespoke furniture** such as the salon's table by Luigi Scialanga: David Gill Galleries, 60 Fulham Road, London SW3 (020-7589 5946)

**Silk velvet** on the salon sofas: Manuel Canovas, G2 Chelsea Harbour Design Centre, London SW10 (020-7351 0666)

**Dining-room tablecloth** Brigitte Singh Table Linen, Aleta Interior & Textile Design Unit, 83 Battersea Business Centre, 99/109 Lavender Hill, London SW11 (020-7228 9676; aletaonline.com)

**Above** a drawing-room cabinet designed by Ashley Hicks conceals the television, while the Turkish-inspired rug is from the Abbeyleix Carpet Works. **Below** the master bedroom boasts a 19th-century Bengali four-poster bed that Sita discovered recently while she was antique shopping in Delhi



Sultana, the creative director of David Gill Galleries. A wall separates the space into a formal, golden-hued sitting-room ('If any Indian aunts come to stay,' de Vesci says, 'they always sit there...') and a salon, which boasts a sinuous ebonised and silver coffee table with four stocky carved 'elephant' legs by the jewellery designer Luigi Scialanga. A saffron cotton dhurrie recently acquired at a Jaipur rug factory lends an air of casual cool. So do the stripy cushions scattered across the sofas. 'They come and go,' de Vesci says of the pillows covered with textiles she describes as the 'cheapest, common denominator stuff. But it's hard-wearing, really bright and looks good.'

'It's my favourite room,' she admits. She even operates her burgeoning business from there, at a Queen Anne desk she 'pinched' from an Abbeyleix passageway. Next up is a line of home accessories – cushions, tablecloths, napkins, bedcovers and quilts – that will be launched in September.

The set-up has its perks. A year ago, when a prominent department store buyer paid an unexpected visit, Sita de Vesci staged an impromptu fashion show in the salon, enlisting her three children as models. The buyer soaked up the handiwork amid the laidback luxury. 'And I got my first order,' de Vesci reveals.

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'Sita is very sophisticated. She never wears clothes Indian-hippie style. It's always aristocratic and very beautiful, and that style extends to her home'