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THE
LONDON
ISSUE

PRINCE HARRY AND
PRINCE WILLIAM AT THE WINDSOR
WEDDING OF THEIR FATHER



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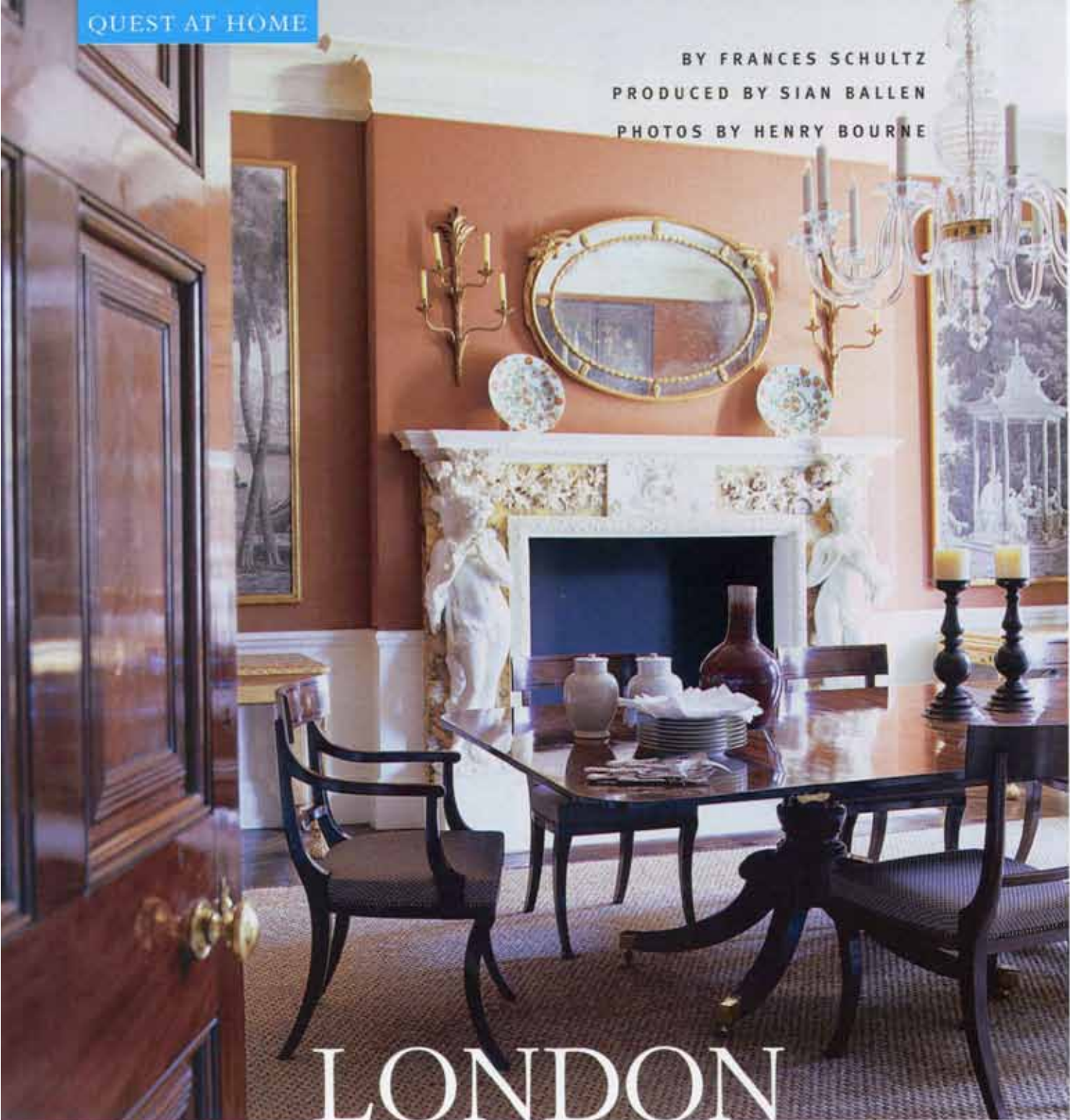
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LONDON LUXURY

IT IS A LONG WAY FROM MILWAUKEE TO LONDON'S Montagu Square, but for New York designer Timothy Whealon, the journey was as natural as it was rewarding. For the young Sotheby's trainee, it was also a path of discovery, not only of art and architecture, but also of the self. For it was in London that Whealon landed his first major design project—impressive for a fellow who had only been in the

business for two years. "I was still a whippersnapper," he says.

The designer may have been green, but his credentials were golden. After studying art history at the University of Edinburgh, Whealon went on to take the Sotheby's two-year works-of-art

Above: The dining room's carved chimneypiece, from William Beckford's Fonthill Splendens, was brought to the house in the 1970s.



Above: Whealon allowed the upstairs rooms, like this sitting area, a more relaxed and contemporary mood. The fireplace logs are gas burning. Below: A curiosity cabinet displays a shell collection and the bust of Charles Garnier, architect of the Paris opera house that bears his name.



course in London. He then was hired by Sotheby's New York for its management training program, upon completion of which he worked on special projects for the auction house and began his own art and antiques consultancy.

Whether it was beginner's luck or destiny's smile that brought him to Montagu Square, Whealon keenly appreciated the opportunity. "It was a dream job, albeit a stressful job," he tempers, in terms of its magnitude and scope.

Like London's other handsome residential enclaves, Montagu Square, in Marylebone near the Marble Arch, is a stately homage to Regency architecture, of which Whealon's client's house is a fine example. Characterized by clean lines and restrained decoration, the period refers to George IV's years as Prince Regent, from 1811 until 1820, but it is generally extended more broadly by five or 10 years on either side. Historically, the era was a time of rapid economic and social change, not unlike today, during which all sorts of new ideas and technology were brought forth.

Perhaps that dynamic aura was part of the house's appeal for Whealon's client, who is English, cosmopolitan, well-traveled, and well-read. He wanted the house to reflect his English past but also to resonate with his life in the present, "to bring in other perspectives," as Whealon explains. For the designer, this translated easily into public rooms that were slightly more formal, while the upstairs and private rooms were more casual and modern.

The house's "Grade 2" listing by English Heritage meant that any architectural modification must be approved by that body. Considerable wrangling on Whealon's part ensued, but all with



Above: Floor-to-ceiling bookcases adorn the library, made cozy by Paley chairs and a custom, Whealon-designed Portuguese needlepoint rug. Below: In the master bedroom, a cashmere/wool covered chaise longue and a Jacques Adnet side table create a soft landing by the fire.



felicitous results. The only real sticky wicket was a whopping great chimneypiece—improbable, but important, as it had come from William Beckford’s fabulous Fonthill Splendens (torn down, alas). Despite its grand provenance (or perhaps because of it), it overwhelmed the drawing room to which it had been added several decades ago. Chucking it was not an option, but relocating it was. The famous mantle now lords over the dining room, whose size and scale are worthy of it. Elsewhere, windows were restored to their double-sashed glory; floors were refurbished in parquet de Versailles from reclaimed oak; and the staircase landings were reconstructed using Portland stone.

With such elegantly proportioned rooms, Whealon reasoned, little embellishment was called for. And with such a busy life led by the one who lives here, sense of haven was highly desirable. The rooms exude a warmth of rich textures and bespoke meticulous attention to detail. Cottons, linens, silks, and cashmeres interplay in soft neutrals set off by swaths of color, from subtle to bold. So insistent was Whealon on getting it right that he had fabrics woven in Italy and antique textiles copied in India. Then he mixed in the decorative elements, grisaille panels, a large horse picture, Chinese porcelains, and English paintings.

True to his vision, the designer put a decidedly more 20th-century spin on the upstairs. Upholstered pieces are comfy, but with sleeker silhouettes. There’s more than a hint of Asian flavor, and an almost Zen quality to bedrooms and bathrooms. Art and objects are contemporary. Overall, the effect is fresh and light, antidotal to the weightier atmosphere of the floors beneath.



Above: In the morning room, Sean Scully prints hang above a slipcovered banquette. Side tables and coffee table give the room a global feel.

The designer's scheme offered a practical solution, but also a challenging one. Whealon finds strict period rooms easy, he says. "It's when you start mixing that it becomes more of an intellectual process, and you have to find harmony among the objects."

On a recent visit to Montagu Square, now six or so years since he left his mark on it, Whealon was delighted to find the house wearing well. A gratifying patina was beginning to creep up the stone stairs and seep into the floors. The fabrics and finishes

looked pleasingly lived in. The client had added here and there, works by British artists, Asian artifacts, and books, of course. "It looked the same but better," says Whealon, "and that's my biggest design mantra. I like for things to look timeless."

Like the English country houses he so admires, "a good design should evolve," he says. "It should always welcome another layer. That way a house can get better with age." A grown-up whippet-snapper should know. ♦