



Ugly brick walls in the living room (left) are hidden by plain hessian, and Alexander Calder prints hang above a silk-upholstered chaise longue. In the hallway (right), antique table lamps with interesting bases are judiciously placed



colour



Oliver uses possessions such as clothing, furniture and objets d'art as a starting point for a decorating scheme

ing eagerly through the pages of interiors and, less predictably, of art, architecture and nature.

"Paint is usually the cheapest element in a decorating scheme. But it's also the easiest to get wrong," he explains. Oliver tells a story about Ruby Wax, who revealed in her autobiography that the strain of choosing between 30 shades of cream put her in The Priory. "I call it paint analysis paralysis," he laughs. Thus, the 250-plus colour pictures in his book are underpinned by sound advice on taking the pain out of paint.

Oliver, 40, with his faint Australian twang, was brought up, tough and rough, on a cattle farm in New South Wales. "There was a three-mile dirt track from the road to our gate, and only 12 children in the local school," he recalls. The harsh light of the outback has permeated his whole life — "it's so strong and vibrant and the colours are difficult to ignore". Then, in the late 1970s, Australian rocker Pee Wee Wilson of the Delltones (a top Australian rock band in the Sixties) moved next door with his beautiful daughter, Roxane. This inspired a spate of travel in Oliver, who ended up living with Roxane in New York and working as a stylist. He

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returned eventually to study fine art at the National Art School in Sydney before another four-year stint of European travel, exhibiting his artwork. Finally, he ended up in London to open the Paint & Paper Library in 1996.

Today, Oliver's home is a small, square, modern house in Ladbroke Grove, where he wrote most of his book. Renting at present (following the break-up of his marriage), he hopes eventually to buy the lease. Flair, showmanship — and a few canny visual tricks — have already turned this little two-storey brick box into a flamboyant, stylish home. Of course, it is colourful — after all, this is the man once

dubbed the "prince of paint". The more muted champagne and mushroom shades of the ground floor move into bright citrus lemon in the hall to the hot shock of a terracotta/orange bedroom. A single width of aqua hand-painted Chinese silk wall covering sweeps from ceiling to floor alongside the stairs. This is a favourite Oliver device — simply to take a wallpaper, attach it at the top of a wall, and let it roll as artwork, like a big banner.

THE exposed brick walls were ugly and aggressive. But Oliver has another trick up his sleeve. They are covered with reams of hessian, bargain-bought from an old Yorkshire family mill, and tacked in place at the top. "The hessian came by post and was very creased. I thought that added to the texture, so I left it unironed." Everywhere are judiciously selected antiques — table lamps stand out in particular, each with an unusual base, softly shining on the heavy glass pieces that Oliver collects.

Fens architectural salvage shop near Oliver's second showroom in Chelsea Harbour has yielded several treasures, such as the heavy chains that hang as a screen between living room and kitchen. Other favourite haunts are nearby Myriad — "wonderful for unusual lighting" — and Macdonald in Munster Road, SW6, and in Fulham. Old and new work well together — heavy old aluminium stools surround a simple modern table from Habitat. Monochrome Alexander Calder prints hang above a curved Perspex coffee table in front of a modern silk-upholstered chaise longue. Engravings from an old Victorian picture book have been put in heavy box frames (Habitat again) and hung in a striking group. Window coverings are heavy taffeta curtains, again from Habitat, very full and trailing on the ground.

■ Homes & Property readers can purchase *Paint & Paper: A Masterclass in Colour and Light*, by David Oliver (£25, Conran Octopus) at the special price of £20, with free p&p. Available from 1 October. For credit-card orders, call LBS on 01903 828503, quoting CONR18.

GET THE LOOK

Paints

Paint & Paper Library (David Oliver Ltd), 5 Elystan Street, SW3 (020 7823 7755; www.paintlibrary.co.uk). Also at Chelsea Harbour Design Centre, SW10 (020 7352 8001)

Hessian (jute)

Whaleys of Bradford (01274 576718; www.whaleys-bradford.ltd.uk). Three widths: 100cm (39in); 135cm (53in) and 183cm (72in). From £1.47 to £3.28 a metre

Architectural salvage

Fens, 46 Lots Road, SW10 (020 7352 9883)

Armchair

Nina Campbell Furniture, Chelsea Harbour Design Centre, SW10 (020 7349 7577; www.ninacampbellfurniture.com)

Antiques, including lighting

Fiona McDonald, 97 Munster Road, SW6 (020 7731 3234). Hemisphere Decorative Art, 173 Fulham Road, SW3 (020 7581



9800). Myriad Antiques, 131 Portland Road, W11 (020 7229 1709)

Walk-through curtains, dining table, curtains

Habitat, 26-40 High Street Kensington, W8 (www.habitat.net)

Modern chaise longue

Christopher Wray, SW6 and WC2 (020 7751 8656/8701; www.christopherwray.com)

Twentieth century decorative antiques (mainly French and Italian)

Caira Mandaglio, Arch 18, Kingsdown Close, W11 (020 7243 6035; www.cairamandaglio.co.uk)



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