



DREAM WEAVER

FOR HIS LONDON HOME, MALCOLM JAMES KUTNER
LOVINGLY RESTORES A 1725 SILKMAKER'S HOUSE WITH CHIC SENSITIVITY

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After three years and a search involving more than a hundred flats and houses, interior and garden designer Malcolm James Kutner finally found a place in London to call home. "I would have been just as happy to find a sleek modernist moment as a paneled and proper early-18th-century Georgian," he explains. "But I knew that what I did not want was to be caught in the middle with a Victorian pastiche."

The England of George I won, though Kutner still had to wrestle the 1725 brick house from a developer more interested in salability than period charm. "Once I convinced him that I was serious about the place," the designer says, "I did my best to steer

him in the direction of sensitive restoration rather than a coldhearted modernization."

The whole process reads like the peripatetic academic path that led Kutner—a native of Houston who also has a home in Key West—to interior design. He studied English literature but spent some time in Southeast Asia exploring careers in archaeology and anthropology before migrating to South America and Europe to study theater and set design on a Thomas J. Watson fellowship. Once established in London, however, he got interested in garden design, inspired by the seamless integration of indoor and outdoor spaces he had experienced in places

Facing page: Designer Malcolm James Kutner takes a break in Spitalfields, his London stomping grounds. In the drawing room, an 18th-century bench serves as a cocktail table, a George III wing chair is upholstered in Cupard rayon-cotton by Claremont, and an antique hob grate from Lasso shields the fireplace; the 17th-century Venetian tapestry was cut from a larger panel, the overmantel mural is by Ian Harper, and the ceiling was painted using an 18th-century distemper recipe. See Resources.





like Indonesia and Guatemala. A few gardens later, his clients began asking him to work his magic on their interiors, too.

His own four-story house, near Old Spitalfields Market in East London, was built by silk-weaving Huguenot immigrants, French Protestants who left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 denied them religious freedom. Many went to Louisiana and Quebec but some 40,000 arrived in England, where their skills as master craftsmen, silversmiths, and weavers had a resounding impact on English decorative arts of the period. Outside the control of the City of London's restrictive guild system, Spitalfields was a draw for such enterprising foreigners. Subsequent waves of Jewish, Irish, and Bangladeshi immigrants followed the French, though today's most recent arrivals are far more likely to be members of Britain's literary and art worlds.

For Kutner, it was this mix of cultures and classes that attracted him to the neighborhood, not to mention its architectural integrity. His street is one of the few in all of London to maintain an uninterrupted run of early-18th-century townhouses.

"There's a distinctly Georgian formality to the paneled public rooms downstairs that gives way to the French tradesman's practicality in the more modest upper floors, where the families lived and where the looms were placed," Kutner notes. His bedroom on the top floor, which stretches the full length of the building and was the weaver's loft, stars two rows of casement windows designed to bathe the looms in optimal daylight. Now they provide Kutner with picturesque views of chimney pots and Christ Church Spitalfields, a 1729 charmer by Nicholas Hawksmoor.

Serendipitous quirks like this abound in the house, which has just two rooms per floor and only one bedroom—a considerable luxury in a building that previously would have slept several generations of a family as well as workers. Kutner says that while he originally planned to have a guest room, his priority was to create inviting spaces for daily living.

"I can't abide rooms that go unused or untouched for days or weeks," he says. "If my bedroom weren't



The George II armchair in the drawing room is upholstered in a Claremont silk, the camelback sofa is 18th century, and Piranesi engravings hang on paneling painted with Dauphin by Farrow & Ball. Facing page, from top: A George III desk and a built-in bookshelf in the study; the carpet is a circa-1900 Heriz, and the table cover is an antique suzani from Robert Kime. An 18th-century demilune and a 19th-century painting by Abraham Hulk in the main-floor landing; the walls are painted Light Stone, the paneling Drab, and the doors and trim Mahogany, all by Farrow & Ball. See Resources.





The library's wing chairs are Georgian, and the metal-embroidered Versailles cushions are by De Le Cuona; the oil portrait is circa 1660, and the wood-and-rope shelf was designed by Kutner. Facing page, clockwise from top: the cabinets, island, and hanging rack are by Chalou, and the Tara sink fittings are by Dornbracht. The fourth-floor view takes in 18th-century townhouses. In the candlelit dining room, the Georgian table is a Kutner family heirloom, the ikat runner is by Robert Kime, the vintage French walnut chairs are from William Yeoward, and a 17th-century portrait hangs on paneling painted with Etruscan Red by Farrow & Ball. See Resources.



The mahogany table in the dressing room is by Philippe Hurel, the chest-on-chest is 18th-century English, and the alabaster light fixture is by Robert Kime. Facing page, clockwise from top left: A collection-filled mahogany cabinet in the study. In the master bedroom, the leather-upholstered bed was designed by Kutner, as was the bedding, made of wool paisley, silk velvet, and jute; the antique Chinese cabinet was found at a local market, and the Tolomeo table lamps are by Artemide. The bathtub surround and vanity counter are made of limestone from Paris Ceramics, the Tara bath fittings are by Dornbracht, and the woodwork is painted with Farrow & Ball's Mahogany; the African antelope statuette is from Andrew Martin. See Resources.





on the fourth floor, I'd never go up there, and I frankly love that it isn't cluttered with clothing. Elsie de Wolfe once said, 'Nothing should interfere with your repose,' and I think she was right." Thus the master bath and dressing room are on the third floor; the drawing room and study on the second, the dining room and library on the ground floor, and the kitchen is in the basement. Out back, at the end of the garden, is a small mews house with Kutner's office and a suite for guests.

The main structure, the designer says, has a "good English flow." If a friend drops by for coffee in the morning, Kutner and his visitor will settle into the Georgian wing chairs in the library. At dinner parties, guests head up to the drawing room for drinks, then descend to the dining room below, which remains without electricity to enhance its cozy aura. That doesn't mean dim meals, however. A Georgian mirror and original water-gilt and brass sconces enhance the firepower, says Kutner: "When the candles are lit, they gleam like 18th-century bling."

He fondly recalls one visitor who stopped in just after the house was finally finished and asked if Kutner would be renovating it floor by floor. The designer was thoroughly delighted by the comment. "Frankly, that's the greatest compliment I can imagine for a house like this," he says, "that it has such a credible patina of age and character that people think it hasn't yet been touched." ■

