





MODERNIST FAMILY

The editor of Wallpaper shares a sleek, high-concept yet child-friendly home with his wife and young daughter. By **Talib Choudhry**. Photographs by **Alexander James**

Georgia Dehn and Tony Chambers in the living room of their Barbican apartment. The sofa is by Hans J Wegner for Carl Hansen & Son (available from skandium.com) and the painting above it is by the British artist James White. A wooden stool by the late Brazilian designer Sérgio Rodrigues (available from espasso.com) sits on a rug from Christopher Farr (christopherfarr.com). The shelves and staircase (opposite) are original. **The hallway** The bust depicts Dehn's father as boy and the painting is of an ancestor. **The view** The apartment is laid out over two floors and has a terrace on each, with enviable views.

'You might not like it aesthetically, but no one can argue that this isn't an outstanding piece of design'









The imminent arrival of visitors prompts most of us to view our homes in a different light, bringing all the debris of life that usually recedes into the background into pin-sharp focus. We might have a quick sweep-it-under-a-rug tidy, plump up some cushions and hope for the best. Most of us would not go to the extreme of painting the dining room, *60 Minute Makeover*-style, an hour before our guests arrive. But then Tony Chambers is not like most of us: as the editor-in-chief of *Wallpaper* magazine, he is one of the most influential arbiters of taste in the design world, and used to setting the style agenda – to judging rather than being judged for aesthetic decisions. It is understandable, then, that he would want his three-bedroom apartment in London's Barbican development to look its best when photographed.

'I don't mind admitting that we've had a bit of a clear-out, which has been very cathartic,' Chambers says with a soft Liverpudlian lilt. 'You are looking at it in a slightly John Pawson-esque light. You see his spaces and think there's nothing there, but there's a nightmare lurking behind closed doors. You know, even John has secret cupboards that are full of shit. We have more stuff – you're just not seeing it.'

Chambers later admits that he rents two storage

The kitchen was built by Brooke Marine, a now-defunct company that also made ships for the Royal Navy. **The living room** The armchair is by Jorge Zalszupin, bought from Espasso (espasso.com) The paintings on the wall are by Toby Paterson. **The dining room** The chairs, which have been reupholstered, and table are vintage pieces by Pel. The photograph is by Chris Floyd, taken for *Wallpaper* and given to Chambers and Dehn as a wedding present.

units to provide shelter for all the books and graphic-design ephemera he collects, and the 'perfectly good things' he can't bear to throw away. Despite this, he claims not to be much of a consumer in the traditional sense.

'It's quite a contradictory position to be in as the editor of a magazine that talks about the design, making and consumption of beautiful things, but I've never really had that desire or need to own lots of expensive art or design,' he says. 'Maybe it's because I'm surrounded by it all day.'

And Chambers is quite literally surrounded by modernist design all day, both at *Wallpaper*'s riverside headquarters and in the home he shares with his wife, Georgia Dehn, a writer, and their daughter, Olive, two. Conceived in the post-war modernist design boom, the two-storey apartment is one of 2,000 that were built at the Barbican during the 1960s and '70s together with an arts centre, gardens and all manner of leisure facilities. Now increasingly privately owned and eminently desirable, this brutalist housing 'utopia' fell out of fashion during the recession-hit 1980s.

'Friends thought I was mad when I moved in,' Chambers says. 'You might not like it aesthetically – that's a matter of taste – but no one can argue that this isn't an outstanding piece of design and architecture. This place is so brilliantly designed that whatever I do with it is kind of trivial, I think. It just doesn't matter.'

Chambers has lived in the apartment, which he bought from the City of London Corporation in 2000, for 22 years, and has sought to preserve as many of the original features as possible, including the galley kitchen and bathroom fixtures. Dehn joined him eight years ago and, despite hankering after a dishwasher and a larger fridge-freezer, claims that the kitchen works well for the family and the development is a surprisingly child-friendly environment.

'There are gardens with climbing frames, a huge botanical conservatory and a nursery on-site,' she says. 'When the estate was designed, the whole idea was that people would walk on the podium level, above any traffic. It's brilliant with a toddler because you can just let them run around.'

Although the couple have aimed to preserve the fittings and layout of the apartment, it has been furnished with a sophisticated mix of modern and era-appropriate designs (note the vintage Pel dining table and chairs). There are several contemporary Brazilian pieces ('the tones of the wood just work perfectly') and classics by some of Chambers' design heroes, such as Jens Risom ('I met him a number of years ago and he's a lovely man'), as well as works by designers and artists







Olive's bedroom features a patchwork alligator, which was made by the Campana Brothers as a gift for her.
The master bedroom A lamp by Michele De Lucchi for Flos (available from utilitydesign.co.uk) stands beside a Habitat bed (habitat.co.uk). The photograph is by Stephen Shore, from Sprüth Magers (spruethmagers.com).
The light-filled study has a barrel-vaulted ceiling. The Arthur Casas desk is from Espasso (espasso.com).

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whom Chambers has championed during his tenure at *Wallpaper*.

This month sees the 200th issue of the magazine, which launched in 1996. Chambers has been at *Wallpaper* for 13 years – first as creative director, and for the last 100 issues as editor-in-chief. In that time he has moved it on from the sleek, high-camp Scandi aesthetic championed by its founder, Tyler Brûlé, giving it a richer, more eclectic feel while retaining its design DNA.

'People understand design more now and are much more aware of it. There's no doubt that *Wallpaper* has been instrumental in that,' Chambers says. 'From day one it preached Scandinavian design and modernism, which perhaps people hadn't thought about before, and presented it in a very attractive, lifestyle way so it looked warm as opposed to academic and hard.'

For Chambers, the best aspect of his role is visiting designers' studios and seeing them at work. The contemporary chandelier by Michael Anastassiades in the living room of the apartment is a recent purchase that he first saw as a prototype earlier this year. 'There are few people whose work I really, really love, and Michael is one of them. It's uplifting to have things of such great design quality and beauty. It's the way I feel about the Barbican as a whole – it makes me feel "right".' ■





The bathroom fixtures – including the recessed mirrored cabinets – are all original. **The upper terrace** is a vantage point from which to observe the changing London skyline. When Chambers moved in, there was a view across to St Paul's Cathedral. 'We also had a perfect view of the Cheesegrater, which is about to be blocked, and we have an incredible view of the Shard. Let's hope nothing else goes up.'

