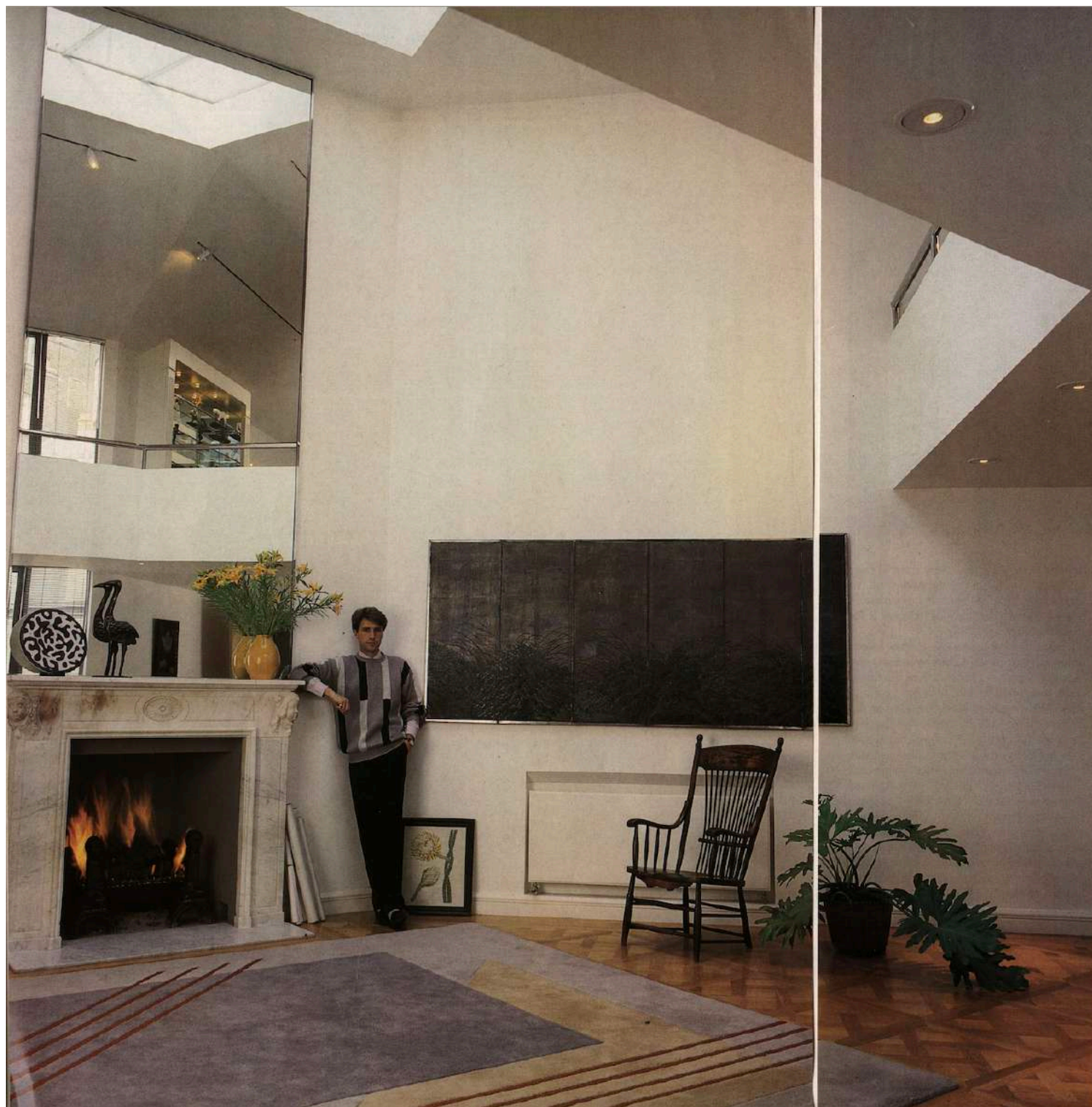


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Written by June Ducas

Photographs by David Montgomery



CAPITAL DESIGNERS

June Ducas talks to Derek Frost about the style that informs his new Pimlico house, to Susan Bottomley about following Fowler, and lists eleven rising stars over the world of interiors. Photographs by David Montgomery.

Cool...

Derek Frost at home

WITH HIS cerulean blue eyes, boyish charm and melting smile Derek Frost is something of an Adonis. And a talented one – he has just built and designed the most exciting modern house in London and seems poised to become the golden boy of the interior design world. Against the odds, he is also unpretentious and modest, talking unaffectedly about the subject which is clearly his obsession: 'It's a way of being creative without being a fine artist.'

Derek came to design by a circuitous route. The son of a colonial banker, at 16 he joined a family art firm, Frost and Reed, with a view to becoming a dealer. His career there went well – he immediately boosted sales, most notably of a reproduction print called 'Blue Waterfall', the hottest seller at Boots. Rather prematurely he took a sabbatical, travelling extensively in the East, before ending up as a *gepack arbeiter* (a junior railway station porter) in Germany where he sated his eyes in every museum, gallery and private collection he could get to see. On returning to London, he worked briefly as a clerk for the GLC, took a job with Toynbee Clarke, the decorators, while doing a Rhodoc correspondence course for interior designers ('If you don't have the time or money to go to the Inchbald School of Interior Design it is a very good course') and finally landed a job with Mary Fox Linton, who at that time was working with David Hicks. The link is interesting, as Derek could be to the 'eighties what Hicks was to the 'sixties. As a trio, they all shared a love of architectural space, and a taste for simplicity, clean lines and colours, and good

lighting. As Hicks went his own way and Mary began to design her admired range of fabrics, carpets, dhurries and tiles, Derek's contributions at Mary Fox Linton grew. In 1980 he was made director in charge of interior design, and he has now started his own company.

So what are Derek's aims and to whom does his work appeal? 'I am a contemporary traditionalist,' he says, 'because I like the order, balance and symmetry of the 18th century, and am interested in architectural details – capitals, pediments and fluting – but I like to use them in a modern fashion. Also I think people want to live more simply; the multilayered frill scenario requires hard work to keep up. Nowadays people live in shrinking spaces, which means things have got to be worked out more carefully. Function intrudes everywhere, things must be cleaner and simpler. It is exciting that more and more English people, and younger ones, are interested in the contemporary.'

Derek is a purist. He likes to 'rarify', upgrading a collection of objects and jettisoning the surplus as the years go by: 'I would prefer to have one wonderful object displayed well against white than a clutter. The chintzy room, which incidentally I find very beautiful, seems to detract from each object in isolation.' Yet he sympathises with those who find modernism hard and aggressive. 'I would hate to live in a spiky, Memphis-ridden, primary colour kind of place,' he smiles. 'I like luxury and sumptuousness.' Both are in evidence in this house, because along with the pleasurable feeling of 'actual' physical space and drama, there is also great warmth, lent by books, antique furniture and pools of light.

Derek never loses sight of the personalities who will live in his interiors and firmly states that he never, never imposes ideas: 'In fact I make my clients work very hard. The more they are prepared

to give of what they think and feel, the more the end is tailored to them. I like to express individuality, personality, excitement, fun and drama. Oh yes, and comfort.' Only once has he misconstrued the ideas of a client. He was working on a huge house in Cheyne Walk and when the job was nearly completed the owners decided that an 18th century house should be lit only by candles. 'I had peppered the place with spotlights, because I thought they wanted to light their pictures brilliantly,' he explains. Instead of being praised, he was thrown off-site. What is more, the owner was seen, in an alcoholic haze, shooting down all the spotlights with a shotgun. 'He was de-Frosting,' says Derek.

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