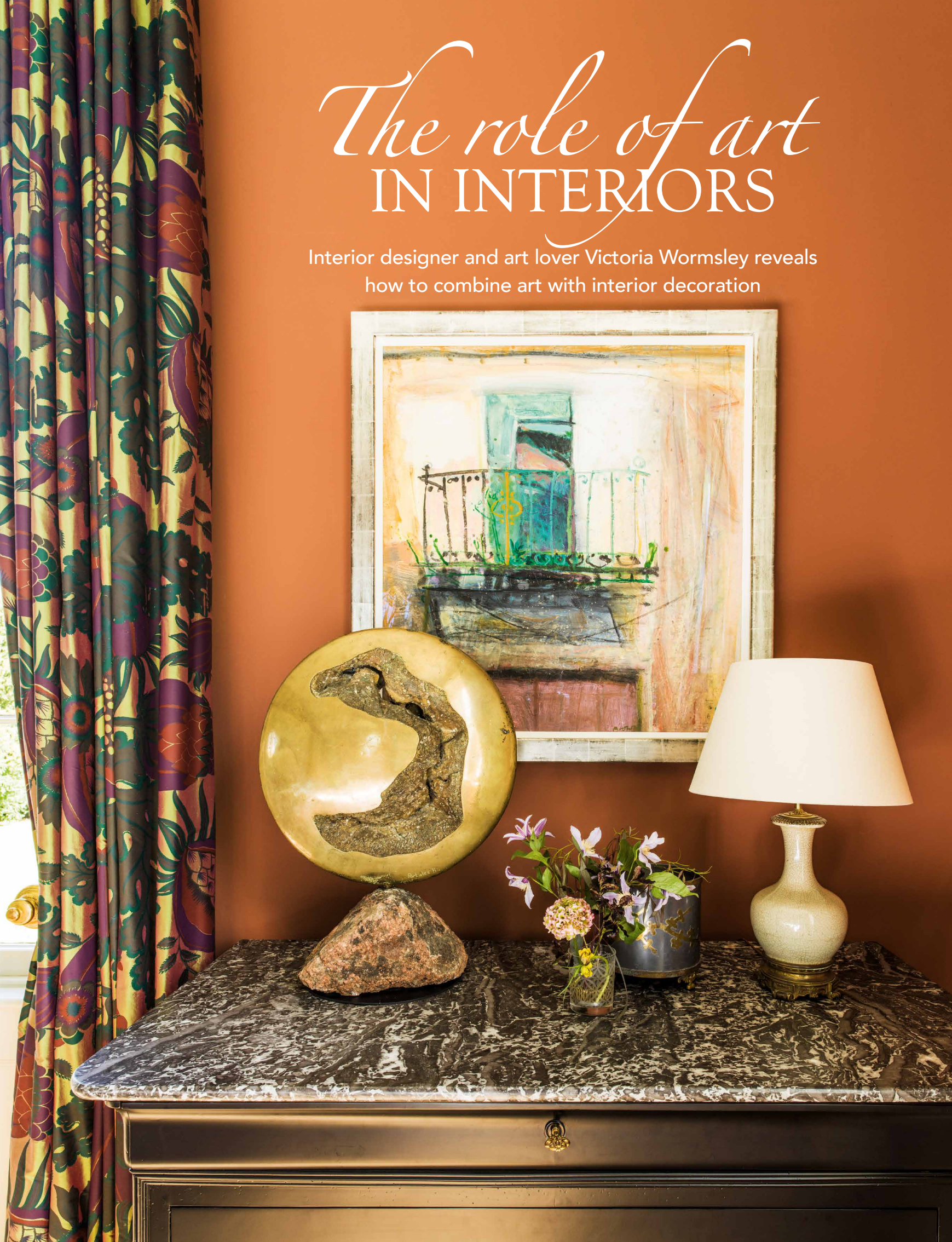


The role of art IN INTERIORS

Interior designer and art lover Victoria Wormsley reveals how to combine art with interior decoration



Details make or break an interior and art is perhaps the most important detail of all. Interior designer Victoria Wormsley of French-Brooks interiors is passionate about incorporating just the right pieces to add character and express the homeowner's interests and personality. Here, she reveals what to choose, how and where to place it and other important factors for making artwork sit to best effect in well-considered interiors.

Why is art so important in an interior?

"Art adds soul to a room – even the most stunning interior can give an impression of emptiness without it. It is innately subjective and brings a sense of personality, it enlivens a space. For example, the gallery wall of framed Matisse prints transformed this sitting room (left), adding a sense of playfulness to quite a traditional scheme. Another example might be adding a majestic stone head sculpture at the end of a hallway to make a strong focal point to draw you through a corridor."

At what point in the process do you add art?

Presumably some clients have collections to work around, whilst others ask you to source for them?

"Absolutely. It's usually a combination of the two. Most people have collected something on their journey through life, so I usually help them work out what they would like to include and how to display it within the interior design as a whole. Some clients have quite specific collections that require careful consideration, for instance, glass, which benefits from being backlit,

and small items, which need to be displayed so the detail can be seen close-up. Probably the strangest piece I've had to accommodate was a large plaster ear that needed to be plastered into the wall. Others need help finding art that they love and which sits well in the interiors we're working on together."

If sourcing on behalf of a client, where do you go and what considerations come into play with choice?

"I always like to get to know my clients' tastes, habits and their outlook on life, and, equally importantly, their spending priorities. Then I make suggestions, which are often quite instinctive: I try to visualise what will appeal to them. As art is so personal, sometimes it's a matter of suggesting art galleries and websites rather than being too prescriptive."

Does the genre or choice of media, colour palette or subject matter of a piece of art inspire or dictate a scheme or, indeed, limit it?

"There are no hard and fast rules about combining art with interior decoration. Whilst in the past people may have felt that a room's architecture, decoration and art needed to be of the same period, now most clients are open to a more eclectic approach, mixing up different periods and styles. However, colour, scale and proportion are still important considerations: whilst art which 'matches' the decorative scheme would be horribly trite, the colours need to sit comfortably together. If the colours are harmonious and the art is a good size in relation to the scale of the room and the

OPPOSITE The bronze and terracotta tones in the 1970s Brazilian sculpture and painting by John Brown RSW (framing by Brien & Brown) are echoed in the curtains and paint on the walls for a cohesive scheme.

ABOVE LEFT Victoria Wormsley, founder of French-Brooks Interiors, has been an interior designer for 15 years and has had a lifelong passion for art and antiques.

ABOVE RIGHT Hanging a neat row of antique naval flag lithographs c1840, sourced and framed by Etalage, above the beds brings further focus and character to this bedroom.

proportions of the furniture, pieces from very different eras and places can be combined successfully. For example, in a dining room in a Regency house with period detailing I juxtaposed traditional curtains and antique furniture with a contemporary painting and a mid-twentieth-century Brazilian sculpture (see page 92, middle image). The painting's colours picked up on the colours in the curtains, its frame toned with the ebonised chest and the sculpture was a good size for the height of the chest and connected with other brass elements in the room. Combining art and decoration from contrasting periods and cultures can be more exciting and unexpected as their characteristics are thrown into relief."

From an aesthetic point of view, what are the important considerations when it comes to where art is hung?

"Proportion is one of the most important considerations, that is, making sure that the art fits well into the proportions of the room, and ensuring that it has sufficient impact. One way to do this is to group smaller pieces together: a large painting can be balanced on a big wall by a pair of smaller drawings or prints to one side, or smaller paintings can be hung one above the other. Gallery walls can be created either by hanging identically framed works in a rectangular group on a wall or, if the components have different sizes, shapes and frames, by making an asymmetrical grouping. This can look interesting and impressive, even if the individual components are not particularly special.

"It's also worth considering hanging art with more impact – for instance with strong colour, large proportions, unsettling subject matter – in high-traffic areas such as halls, where it will make an impression on people passing through. More subtle works can be hung in rooms where people relax and can take time to appreciate them. It is also good to consider hanging works with lots of detail in areas where one can stand close-up, for instance in a corridor, not over the fireplace.

"Finally, the way that art is lit can transform the way it appears in a scheme. I often advise people to use LED lighting, which has the correct colour rendering – avoiding that clinical white look – and which is subtle enough to incorporate into period houses, through the use of downlights, track lighting or traditional picture lights."

What are the most common errors made by inexperienced eyes when hanging art in a scheme?

"One of the most common errors is to spread small pictures thinly around the room rather than group them, so it looks like they've fallen out with one another. Another is to hang works of art too high, which can make the room feel very unrelaxed." ▶

TOP RIGHT Prints protected behind glass are the best choice for the more moist conditions of a bathroom. Humidity control is wise. For similar early twentieth-century watercolours, try Harry Moore-Gwynn Fine Art.

BELOW RIGHT Here an agate stone sculpture by Emily Young on a column acts as a dramatic focal point to draws the eye down a corridor. **FAR RIGHT** A contemporary piece, Firwood Ride by Ivon Hitchens, adds the perfect finishing touch in the master bedroom in Victoria's own home. Hitchens was known for his panoramic landscape paintings created from blocks of colour.



VICTORIA RECOMMENDS: ART RESOURCES, GALLERIES & DEALERS

- **GODSON & COLES** for modern British art. London SW7 godsonandcoles.co.uk
- **DUNCAN R MILLER FINE ARTS** for The Scottish Colourists and others. London SW1 duncanmiller.com
- **THOMPSON'S GALLERIES** for modern & contemporary British art.
- **LONDON W1 & Suffolk** thompsonsgallery.co.uk
- **JOSIE EASTWOOD FINE ART** for contemporary figurative British art. Hampshire josieeastwood.com
- **RAMSAY PRINTS** for framed antique prints. London SW1 ramsayonline.com
- **HARRY MOORE-GWYN FINE ART** for late-Victorian to mid-twentieth-century British art. London & Oxfordshire mooregwynfineart.co.uk
- **ETALAGE** for affordable, framed antique and vintage prints & artwork. Gloucestershire etalage.co.uk

What practical considerations are key?

"Art should ideally be protected from UV light. In the case of works on paper, this means using UV glass which will filter it out, whilst other works can be protected by applying UV film to windows or fitting Holland (roller) blinds to filter the light when the room is not in use. In humid areas, such as bathrooms, it's safer to hang works on paper, such as prints, that may be less valuable [than paintings] and can be protected from moisture by (but not touching) glass*. Works on acid-free paper are also less likely to deteriorate."

What impact does the choice of frame and mount play in how art looks in a scheme? And should art be reframed if it isn't working?

"Mounts and frames make an enormous difference. I would always recommend reframing if the existing frame looks dated or has the wrong proportions for the piece. Reframing can make you appreciate a work of art in a completely different way, accentuating particular colours, giving the piece more 'room to breathe' and enabling it to fit into the decorative scheme more effectively. I often take the paint colour or wallpaper of the room to the framer so we can take it into account. However, if the frame was selected by the artist, I would consider it part of the original artwork and would always recommend retaining it."

Finally – how would you help or direct clients seeking to start or expand an art collection?

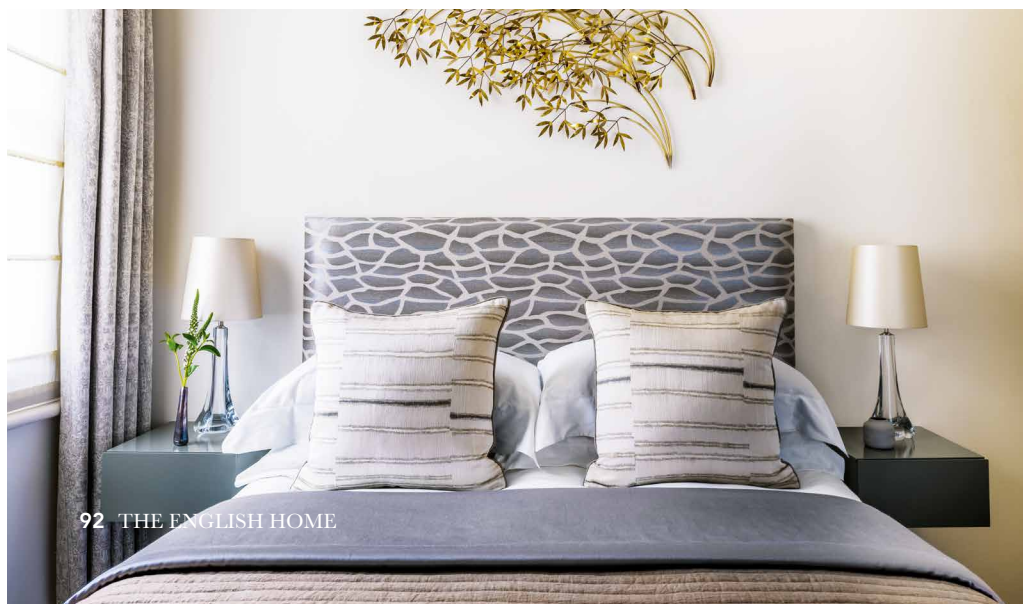
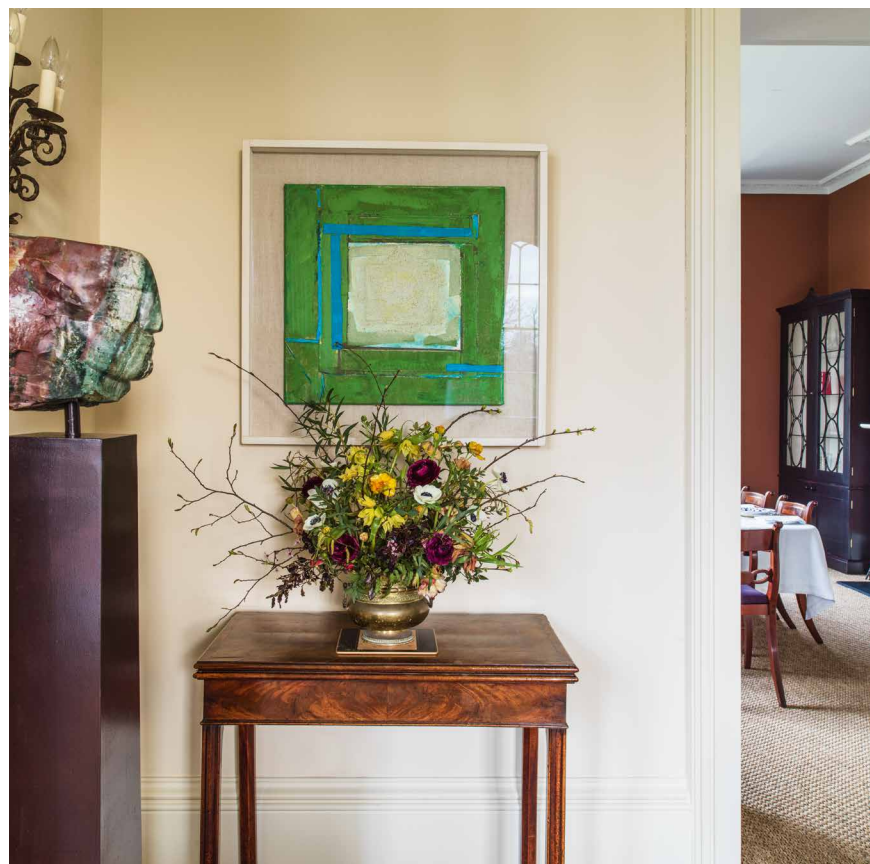
"If a client already has an art collection, they will already have an idea of what they like. I would work with them to see what pieces might be added that would fit into the interior design of their house, as well the collection as a whole. If the client was looking to start an art collection or just find lovely pieces to go in their new house, for instance, I would suggest that we visit a few art fairs as this is a very easy and enjoyable way to see a huge range of art in one place, meet some of the dealers and get one's eye in. I have relationships with many galleries and dealers where they are happy to lend works out so people can see how something will look in situ, which gives great peace of mind. When we find the perfect piece for a room, it gives me such a buzz." ■

**Safety is key when protecting art with glass in a bathroom. Be sure it is fastened securely to avoid an accident.*

ABOVE RIGHT A symmetrical hanging of a pair of vintage botanical prints from Etalage magnifies the sense of calm in this bedroom design.

ABOVE RIGHT Here a sculpture by Emily Young and a collage and acrylic artwork by Sandra Blow are juxtaposed with an antique table.

BELOW Sculptural wall hangings offer an elegant alternative to paintings. This bedroom features a piece by Curtis Jeré.



VICTORIA RECOMMENDS: FRAMERS

- **CHRISTINA LEDER FRAMING & GILDING** for gilt frames, hand-coloured finishes and restoration of antique giltwood. London christinaledergilding.com
- **GRAHAM HARRISON FRAMING** is a specialist in contemporary and twentieth-century works. London ghframing.com
- **PR ELLETSON & CO** for framing, gilding and restoration. Wiltshire. prelletson.co.uk



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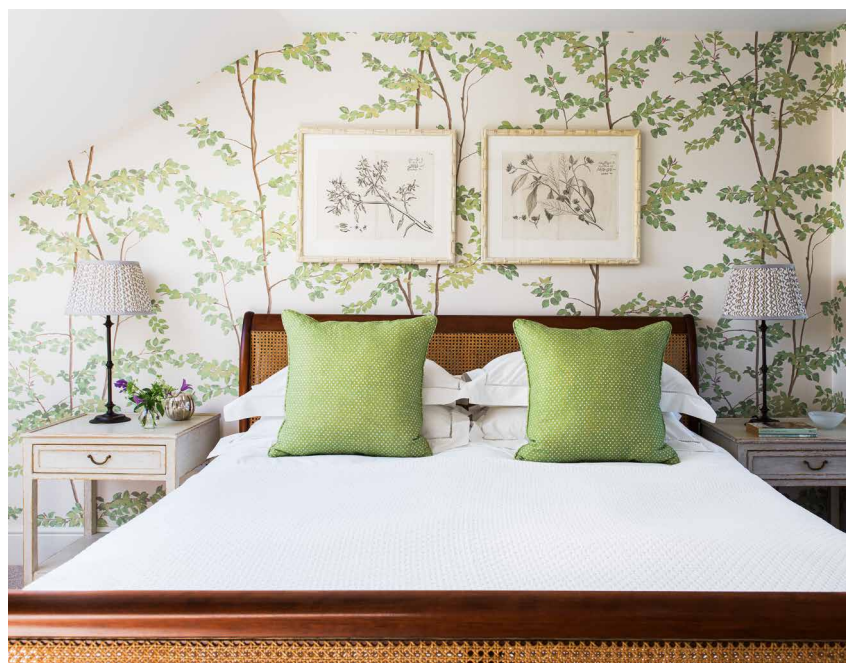
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