

# SLIDING DOORS

To make a moveable feast of their living space and their art, Louisa Guinness and Ben Brown came up with a simple solution...

REPORT VINNY LEE PHOTOGRAPHS RAY MAIN

They say that magic is achieved with smoke and mirrors, but in Louisa Guinness and Ben Brown's home it is done with sliding panels and concealed doors. When the couple bought their first-floor South London flat three years ago they set to work with the architects to bring out the best in the attractive, 13ft-high rooms. First they tackled the problem of the doors. "There were too many of them," says Louisa. "Five in the entrance hall, a couple in the main room and others opening into the bedrooms and bathroom. We enlarged some rooms, and where we needed doors had them made so that they open flat against a wall or disappear into it."

Once the problem of the doors was solved, attention turned to making the most of five long south-facing windows. "The kitchen was at the back of the flat in what has become our son Hector's bedroom, and where the kitchen is now, there was a bathroom," says Louisa. "The kitchen is important for us because we love to cook and often entertain friends here," she explains. So a cooking space was created with two steel sinks, an oven and a broad white Corian-clad unit which conceals machines and storage. The white unit also creates a divide between the food preparation and dining areas.

The focus of the dining area is the interlocking, extendable dining table by Ron Arad which, with a gentle tug, grows from a six-seater to accommodate 14. Over the table is a sparkling light feature by Georg Baldele with suspended candles and crystals that reflect in a mirror panel fixed to the ceiling, and on the end wall is a figurative painting by Tim Stoner.

More classic pieces by Ron Arad are found in the sitting room. There is a Little Heavy stainless-steel chair and Boop coffee table, the shiny surface of which creates dazzling displays of reflected light on the wall. That is, when the wall is there, for it takes the form of a large white panel that can be pulled forward to separate the kitchen and dining area from the living room, and bring the >>

Left: Louisa Guinness, with a portrait of Sid Vicious.

Right: view from the sitting room through to the dining area, which are separated by a moveable panel





**'YOU CAN RUIN THE APPEARANCE OF ART WITH UGLY LIGHT SWITCHES OR SOCKETS'**

« crimson-hued artwork by Peter Halley into the line of view from the parallel sofas by the fireplace. Or it can be pulled back so that the panel and painting conceal the rows of bookshelves and storage, and open up the vista through to the adjacent room.

Between the living room and entrance hall there is a giant pivoting door of elm. From the hall, with its underheated limestone tiles, to Hector's bedroom and the shower and steam room, there is another door painted the same colour blue as the hall walls so that it blends in with the surrounds. The third opening, leading through to the main bedroom at the back of the apartment, has another giant floor-to-ceiling pivoting door which opens flat against a section of



wall. This is a very quiet room, benefiting from the additional insulation of one wall of floor-to-ceiling cupboards with featureless white panels.

The emphasis on reducing the number of doors was not just an aesthetic requirement, it was also necessary to free up vital wall and floor space. Ben, who specialises in 20th-century art and worked for Sotheby's and Waddington's before setting up his own gallery last year, had some paintings to hang. Louisa, who has her own art and design showroom, also had a collection of furniture to house, many pieces by artists such as Ron Arad and Donald Judd whom she has recently exhibited.

Other artists and designers the couple know have been influential too. For example, Louisa held a show of Rolf Sachs's work last year, and some of his work is made in felt. "When I was looking for something to put on the floor in Hector's room I thought of Rolf's use of felt and through his supplier sourced some in a wonderful bright blue. Then I ordered an orange piece for the floor between the sofas in the sitting room."

Relaxing on one of the sofas, she describes how she has also persuaded some well-known artists to explore new fields. "Artists are

**Clockwise from above: the dining area, with extendable Ron Arad table; the steam and shower room; the main bedroom**

often categorised by one specific area of work, for example sculpture or photography, but I asked some of them to work on a different scale and create jewellery or furniture." The limited-edition pieces that resulted were created by Anish Kapoor,

one of whose rings Louisa wears as she speaks, Antony Gormley, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gavin Turk, whose "chewing gum" earrings she also sports.

And doing up their apartment from scratch gave Louisa and Ben the ultimate control over where the "hardware" was located. "You can ruin the appearance of a painting or artwork with ugly fixtures such as light switches or plug sockets, which poke out by a frame or restrict the amount of wall space available. When we did the rewiring I chose discreet switches and kept them to a minimum, and sockets were put into the skirting or floor rather than the walls". Like a good magician, Louisa kept the practical aspects out of sight so that the illusion of light and space and the drama of the artworks could take centre stage. ■

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