

ALL GROWN UP





The children have gone, so it's time to party. This Highgate townhouse proves that maturity doesn't have to be boring.

By India Block



WHAT DO YOU DO when your children fly the nest? You could turn their bedrooms into a shrine and mourn the newfound silence, or turn one of their bedrooms into a walk in wardrobe and transform the family home into the perfect summer dinner party pad.

One Highgate couple did just that, with more than a little help from Almas Shamsee. Shamsee isn't your typical interior designer. Having originally trained as an economist, she spent ten years working in the City working for investment banks, including a four year stint at Goldman Sachs. Today she's swapped trading shares for hunting down fabric swatches for her studio, Maisha Design, but that doesn't mean she's left the discipline of the City behind her.

"The creative side is all well and good, but the reality is that it is a lot of project management. It's getting the job done and managing people, and these are all skills I have from my previous job," Shamsee explains. "The creative side is about 40 per cent of it, the rest is delivery."

Far from hindering her career reincarnation, Shamsee finds that

Highgate Close, photos courtesy of Maisha Design





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clients are far more inclined to trust her to keep a keen eye on their budget thanks to her background. In fact, her Highgate client initially reached out to her after a Google search revealed she attended the London School of Economics, his own Alma Mater.

“That was a funny connection,” laughs Shamshee. “We’ve ended up becoming quite good friends.” She worked closely with the couple over the course of six months. Initially they had only engaged her to do the dining room, but quickly realised they wanted

her to cast her eye over the entire three storey townhouse. “The longer we spoke the more he wanted us to do,” she explains.

“It was very collaborative,” Shamsee says of the project. “He was very hands on. He was ringing me in the middle of the night with ideas he had.” Her client had very firm ideas about using a muted colour palette throughout, but Shamsee managed to slip in a whisper of very dark navy blue in the kitchen / diner “to tie in with the garden outside.”

Adding in the bi-folding doors was a particularly inspired move, allowing the dining area to open out onto the terrace for a seamless summer evening of entertainment. “They like the area a lot, they like the house and their children grew up there,” she says. “But they wanted a house where they could entertain; it didn’t need to be child friendly any more.”

The finished home is the height of sophistication, with luxurious custom upholstery and rich fabrics that suit a lifestyle that’s moved beyond the sticky fingered fun of raising children. The smart fabric wallpaper is by Brian Yates and definitely not suitable for a home with scribble-happy small humans.

The result is tasteful and refined home that still retains a youthful air. After all, you shouldn’t have to grow up too much. ♦

