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The ultimate Spitalfields fixer-upper

Hidden among the architectural gems of Spitalfields in east London, a local salvage expert and restorer found the perfect project property

The living area with Seventies Mario Bellini Camaleonda sofa from B&B Italia
TODD SUTHERLAND

Victoria Brzezinski | Saturday October 08 2022, 12.01am, The Times

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Owen Pacey is an East End raconteur who does not mince his words. Renaissance London, his antiques emporium cum treasure trove, has been a fixture on City Road in Shoreditch for nearly three decades. Brought up in a council flat in nearby Bethnal Green, with a stint in a squat in King's Cross, Pacey's glitzy client list spans A-listers to architects, bankers to barristers, and everyone in between.

The main bedroom, painted in Railings by Farrow & Ball, with Fifties-style Murano cabinet made by owner Owen Pacey's Renaissance company
TODD SUTHERLAND

The showroom, in an old Victorian pub, is packed to the rafters with fireplaces (antique, restored and reproductions so good you'd dupe a dealer), ornate mirrors and gleaming Murano chandeliers. You'll find artwork by Tracey Emin, magnificent marble busts and kooky artefacts sourced from Europe.

The exterior
TODD SUTHERLAND

Among Renaissance's earliest customers were the artists Gilbert and George – Spitalfields royalty – who strolled in 28 years ago on "a Monday night in the middle of winter" on a quest for a Queen Anne fireplace. Pacey sold them a perfectly fitting 18th-century one. They've since become "really good mates".

Palladian fireplace in Breccia Vesillia marble in the ground-floor lounge
TODD SUTHERLAND

He's less enthused about certain footballers' wives and "bored housewives in stilettos" purporting to be interior designers. "And we told Madonna to piss off," he says. The star's team had requested the keys to Renaissance for a private viewing. "I'm not letting her in my shop on her own." Other clients include Mick Jagger, Naomi Campbell and Kate Winslet. Orlando Bloom popped in for lighting.

Owen Pacey with his dog Maggie
GRAHAM AKTINS-HUGHES

In the mid-Nineties, Pacey's multimillionaire landlord arrived at Renaissance looking for a fireplace for his Mayfair apartment. "I put the puppy eyes on him and said, please would you sell me the building. He let me buy it off him and I gave him the fireplace," he recalls.

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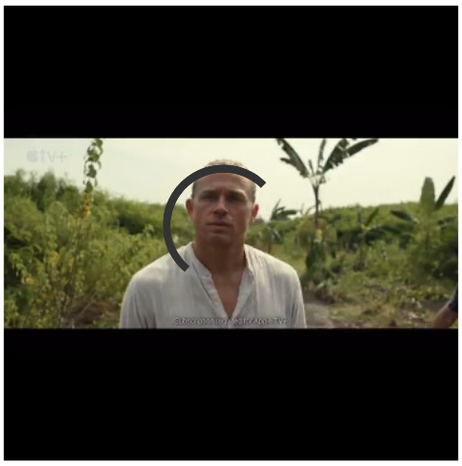


The basement is where Pacey and his team stash their stock and carry out restoration and reproduction work; what used to be Pacey's "proper bachelor" flat above the shop is now filled with old books and vintage Gucci mirrors.

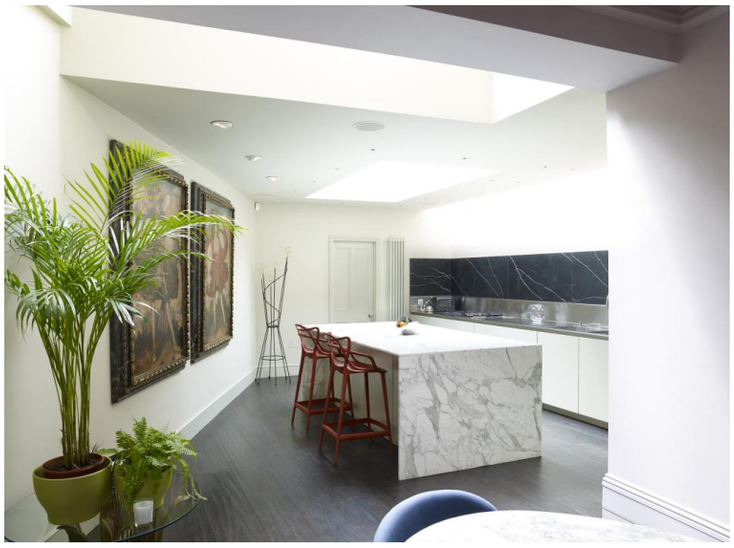
The garden
TODD SUTHERLAND

Pacey, 57, met his partner, Rachel O'Hare, a journalist, in early 2020. "She bought a table. That was it, as soon as I saw her." It's much the same story with the couple's new home in Spitalfields' conservation area: love at first sight. "Rachel spotted it," says Pacey. "I knew the house would need a lot of work. She was like, that's good, we can put our stamp on it."

In July last year they bought the five-storey 18th-century house from a German/American couple. "There was not one fireplace in there," Pacey recalls. They put in an offer a few weeks into lockdown. It was rejected. But a year later the owners U-turned. "Basically, we got it for what they paid for it four years earlier."

Murano glass chandelier
TODD SUTHERLAND

Their home (which they share with labradoodle Maggie) is the only house on the street not constrained by English Heritage restrictions; its fascia burnt down in the 1820s and it was remodelled in the 1840s. “For some reason it’s not listed. It should be,” says Pacey. Scrubbed clean of many original features, over the nine-month renovation fireplaces, skirting and simple coving were reinstalled, “true or close to what they would have been”, while 84 ghastly spotlights were removed. “What a palaver that was,” he says.



The kitchen, with Kartell Masters bar stools
TODD SUTHERLAND

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At more than 2,700sq ft this was not an insubstantial project. The radiators and valves alone cost £14,000. Naturally, Pacey made the fireplaces at Renaissance. “We’ve got all these tricks that make them look old. Can’t tell you too much,” he says. In the first-floor lounge, Farrow & Ball’s Smoked Trout is paired with a pink marble Brocatello Francese bolection fireplace – a type of fire surround, spun on a lathe, which has been around for 400 years. On the ground floor, a Palladian fireplace in Breccia Vesillia marble “adds some oomph”. The rust-coloured velvet Seventies Mario Bellini Camaleonda sofa is new, via B&B Italia on Brompton Cross; the orange Murano glass cabinet is a Renaissance Sixties reproduction.

Guest room with Louis XVI-style bed
TODD SUTHERLAND

O’Hare “has an amazing eye”, says Pacey. She “sniffed out” a full set of mid-century Pierre Paulin tulip chairs for the Knoll kitchen table and picked out the blue/black paint in their bedroom, Railings by Farrow & Ball. “I wasn’t sure, but when it was done I loved it,” he says. The gold bullion bar-inspired chandelier is from a bank in Turin, imported via his connection in Murano. It languished in the shop for a year but “since it went in there, everyone wants it. Rachel won’t let me sell it.”

The bathroom
TODD SUTHERLAND

Pacey has come a long way from his first job, stripping pine doors for £20 a day on Hornsey Road in north London. “I used to dream about living in Spitalfields,” he says. “To actually live there now – I’ve never been so happy.”
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