

The international theatre producer Eilene Davidson has a nose for a winner. The critics ran out of superlatives for her poignant 2020 co-production of *Uncle Vanya*, which starred Toby Jones, and her sizzling version of the musical *Anything Goes*, currently on tour, was lauded as 'A flat-out triumph!'. Eilene knew that she had found her perfect house within minutes of opening the front door of this Victorian civic building in London in 2017. 'The house has gravitas,' she says. 'It has high ceilings and stone floors, and walls so thick it's completely quiet inside, yet it is only a 10-minute cab ride from the West End.'

She rang John McCall, who has designed four family houses for her and gave him a deadline of 11 months – and a brief. 'There's a shorthand with John,' she explains. 'So when I say, "You can go really bold in here", he knows it means *really* bold. We are a lively modern family with four children [aged eight to 19] and two dogs and, for us, the kitchen is where it all happens – we had a group of 15 teenagers in here last weekend. I'm aware it's a grand house, but I don't want to draw attention to that – I want it to be fun, relaxed and colourful. And quite dramatic. I am in the theatre, after all.'

John has fulfilled all those demands and more. The front door opens onto a long hall, its walls painted a strong yellow and its stone floor strewn with antique rugs, leading to a glass door onto the garden – a private glade of tall trees and Italianate stone arcades. In the kitchen, the largest room in the house, John has amped up not only the colour – with terracotta walls and cupboards in a strong lettuce green – but also the scale, by introducing large cabinets in proportion to the room's vast dimensions. Brass wall lights from Soane, with custom extra-large shades, direct the light downwards to create an intimate atmosphere and appear to lessen the great height of the ceiling.

Beyond the kitchen, a conservatory opens onto the terrace. On the opposite side of the yellow hall, the drawing room – also with yellow walls thanks to a de Gournay chinoiserie paper – opens onto it as well. The sofas here are pink – one of Eilene's favourite colours – and are three metres long, and you fall back into the pure down cushions with a satisfying 'plouffe'. A pair of Italian 18th-century cabinets, a Persian Ferraghan carpet and a specimen marble table provide a handsome backbone to a room of soft pastels and even softer upholstery.

Upstairs in the main bedroom, the warm blue of the walls and the rusty pinks of the four-poster bed hangings take their cue from the colours of a suzani John found at an antique textiles fair. He has used these colours for the embroidered curtains, a special order from Chelsea Textiles. A door leads to Eilene's bathroom. 'It is the best I have ever designed,' says John, of this light and beautifully finished room. That is quite a claim: a giant of interior design, John decorated his first houses in the Eighties and his current clients range from 30 to 90 years of age.

Eilene's dressing room next door is everything a leading lady's should be, with large wardrobes, their bulk made glamorous by swirling wooden tracery backed with distressed mirror. And there is, of course, a dressing table surrounded by light bulbs.

Nothing could be more theatrical than Eilene's office in the garden: built on the site of a former swimming pool, it has a wall of bronze and glass doors that open completely to the



HALL Walls in a custom-mixed yellow emulsion set off the red of the antique Ersari carpet from Robert Stephenson.
CHILDREN'S SITTING ROOM A framed theatre costume hangs above a sofa in C&C Milano's 'Palea Unito' in cherry

