

'COLOUR JUST HAS TO BE VIBRANT!'

Ruth Canning threw away the rule book to create a stunning apartment that's full of brilliant colour



BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL From the moment you walk through the front door of Ruth Canning and Peter Sheridan's London loft apartment, you're confronted with striking colour. The once-white hallway has been transformed with a dramatic red on the ceiling and walls. 'I have a natural inclination to colour and will always gravitate to bold and vibrant options,' says Ruth. 'At night when we turn the spotlights on the red it creates a really welcoming feature' Walls and ceiling painted in Crimson Red, Dulux. Siberia cone Christmas trees, Habitat



A RIOT OF COLOUR 'People always say "Wow! you've got a pink sofa and orange chairs," which I love as I like to create exciting contrasts,' says Ruth. 'It works because both colours are warm.' Another passion of Ruth's is lighting, and she has used super-sized ball lights to define the living, dining and TV-watching areas in the open-plan living space. 'At night it can feel like you're in a nightclub,' she says. 'We also have spotlights that throw light up to illuminate the beams and emphasise the brick walls' Sofa, Hitch Mylius. Rug, for similar try Momo Interiors. Ball lights, Tom Dixon. Curtains, Designers Guild. Tree and decorations, John Lewis. Cushions, Clarissa Hulse. Pink side table, Paperchase



HIDDEN STORAGE

An open-plan living space requires clever storage, so Ruth and Peter had a wall of white cupboards put in to hide all their paraphernalia Cupboards, Lauren Nichols. Table, IKEA. Dining chairs, Philippe Starck; for similar try Içône. Cake stand and goose decorations, Habitat. Table runner, Marks & Spencer. Wine glasses, Woolworths

Loft living tends to conjure up images of vast, white, minimal spaces. Ruth Canning and Peter Sheridan's stunning warehouse conversion in South London is certainly vast, but it's definitely not white and minimal – it's a beautiful riot of colour. It wasn't always this beautiful, though. 'When we first saw it, it was very tired looking as it hadn't been refurbished since it was converted in the 1980s,' says Ruth. 'The original kitchen and bathrooms needed replacing, but the original beams, brickwork and windows were fantastic, and it had a wonderful mezzanine level that was perfect for us as our design business was expanding and we needed a live-work space. Peter and I knew we could be happy here.'

What was top of your priority list when it came to refurbishing?

Besides sorting out the bathroom and kitchen, and dividing up the bedroom to create a second bedroom, it was adding colour, without a doubt. I love colour, especially warm shades, and I always gravitate towards bold and vibrant options. I like choosing colour combinations that stun people into silence.

What's the secret to using so many different colours?

I suppose the key is to use the same type of colours. I've used mostly warm colours. If you start mixing warm and cold shades that might cause a problem visually. I think most people would like to use more colour in their home, and it's partly confidence and partly experience that makes you realise what you can and can't do.

How have people reacted to your bold scheme?

People walk in and say, 'Wow! You've got a pink sofa and orange dining chairs!' I'm sure it's not to everyone's taste, but that's what it's all about, having a home that's just the way you like it.

Do you think this look would work in a smaller space?

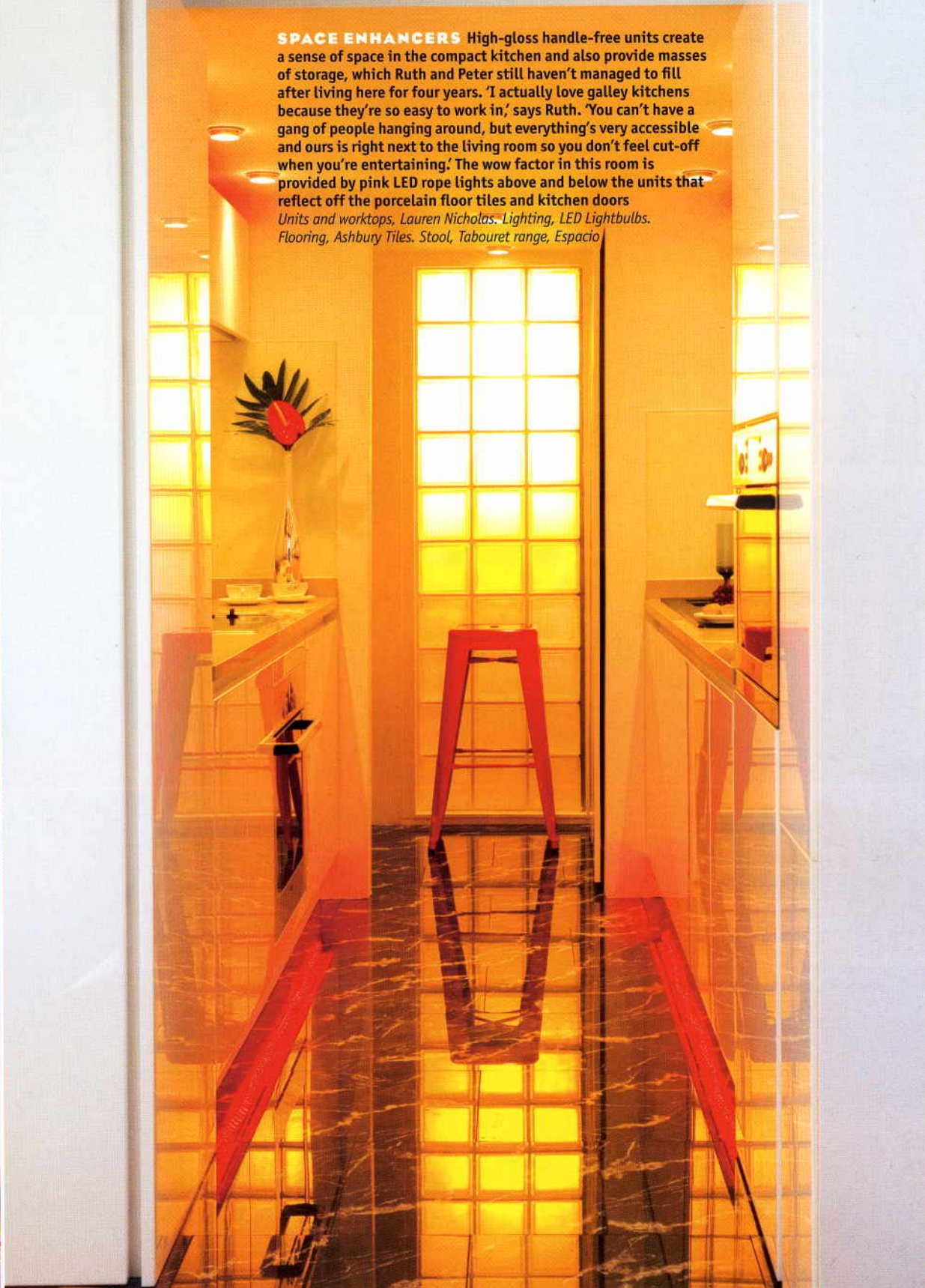
Sure, why not? Our shower room »



THE BIGGER THE BETTER Big rooms with extra-high ceilings require statement accessories – hence the floor-to-ceiling canvas in the bold colours Ruth loves. The large mirror is actually a radiator. 'The original radiators were totally useless and it took just one cold and shivery winter to convince us to replace them,' says Ruth. 'These produce a radiant heat and are very efficient in a large room because they throw heat outwards not upwards'

Canvas, Canning & Sheridan Interiors. Mirror-style radiator, Corner Fridge Company. Sofa, Hitch Mylius. Cushions, Clarissa Hulse. Spike light, Tom Kirk

SPACE ENHANCERS High-gloss handle-free units create a sense of space in the compact kitchen and also provide masses of storage, which Ruth and Peter still haven't managed to fill after living here for four years. 'I actually love galley kitchens because they're so easy to work in,' says Ruth. 'You can't have a gang of people hanging around, but everything's very accessible and ours is right next to the living room so you don't feel cut-off when you're entertaining.' The wow factor in this room is provided by pink LED rope lights above and below the units that reflect off the porcelain floor tiles and kitchen doors
Units and worktops, Lauren Nicholas. Lighting, LED Lightbulbs. Flooring, Ashbury Tiles. Stool, Tabouret range, Espacio



ALL ABOUT US

WHO LIVES HERE? Ruth Canning and Peter Sheridan, who both run an interior design and furnishing company (www.canning-sheridan.co.uk), and their dog Sally, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel
PROPERTY A converted two-bed loft

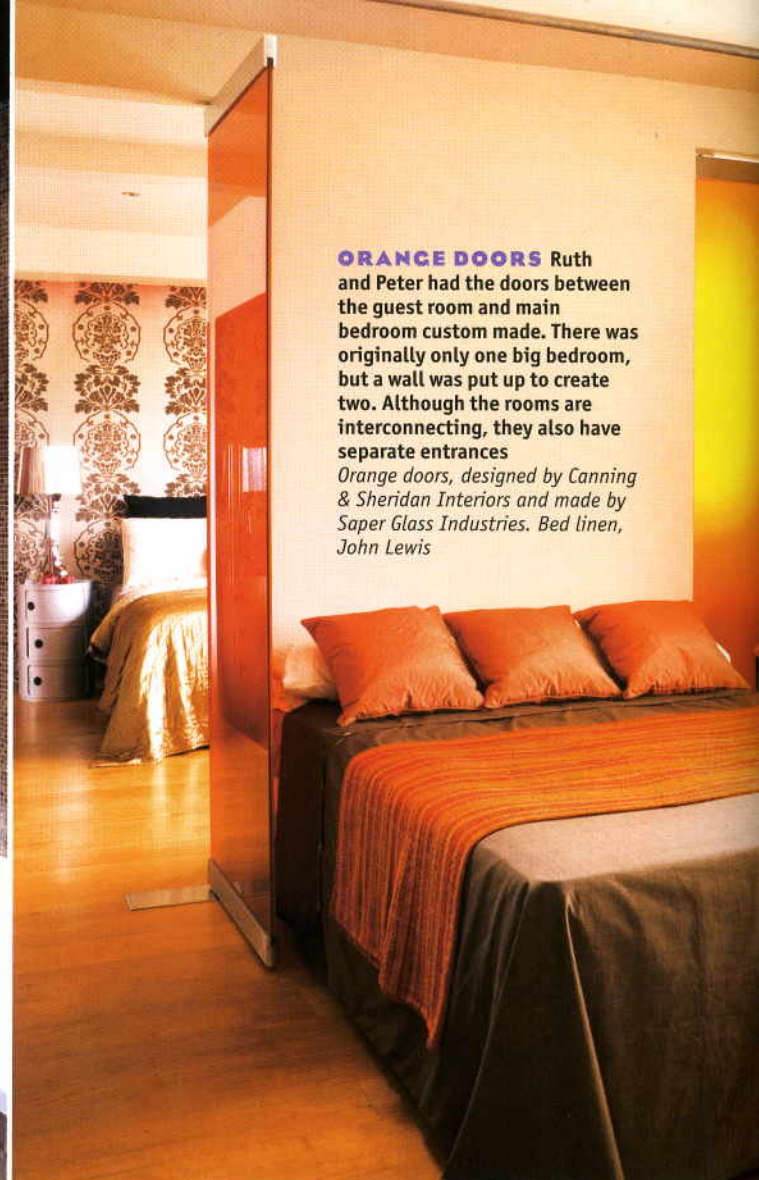
apartment with mezzanine level within a former warehouse in South London, originally built in the 19th century
BOUGHT FOR £500,000 in 2003
SPENT Around £100,000
WORTH TODAY £695,000

THE WOW FACTOR

PURE LUXURY The basin sums up the indulgent look of the main bathroom perfectly – it's a slab of marble that has a slight slant so the water runs down into the drain below
Sink, West One Bathrooms. Tiles, Bisazza



ORANGE DOORS Ruth and Peter had the doors between the guest room and main bedroom custom made. There was originally only one big bedroom, but a wall was put up to create two. Although the rooms are interconnecting, they also have separate entrances
Orange doors, designed by Canning & Sheridan Interiors and made by Saper Glass Industries. Bed linen, John Lewis



BLUE MOSAICS 'Our shower room is a small space, so I had the option to underplay or overplay that fact,' says Ruth. 'I decided to go for it big time with floor-to-ceiling blue mosaics. It's like diving into a swimming pool and the fact you're surrounded by a colour makes the small space look really striking'
Mosaic tiles, Bisazza. Sink, Bathstore. Shower unit, Majestic Showers



GLAM FACTOR 'I wanted an element of glamour in our bedroom,' says Ruth, 'so I chose metallic patterned wallpaper, a mirrored lamp and a golden satin throw.' The red heart-shaped cushion that's moved with the couple from property to property adds a playful touch to the room

Wallpaper, Designers Guild. Bedside lamps, Bourgie range; bedside cabinets, Componobili range; both Kartell at Selfridges. Bed linen, John Lewis



is a good example. We decided to emphasise its size by covering it in blue mosaic tiles and painting the ceiling blue. The fact you're surrounded by a colour makes the small space look really striking, so you can make it work for you in that respect. I don't think people should be afraid to use colour in a small room.

As an interior designer, was it easier to style your own home?

No – harder! When I'm dealing with clients I'm constrained by a brief. With myself as the client there were no restrictions and, as I'm aware of the vast array of products available, the decision-making was very difficult. The plus side was that I had more time to evolve my ideas.

The apartment seems like the perfect place to have a party – do you entertain a lot?

Oh yes, it's a great party place and we love to entertain. Peter and I were just saying that we've been so busy recently we've neglected our friends and should get back into throwing parties and cooking dinners. The open-plan living space can accommodate lots of people, but even though it's a huge space, our guests always manage to find a little area to chat. The most popular space is by the wood-burning stove, which was here when we bought the flat. Whenever we have friends around there is fierce competition over who will get the spot in front of the fire.

Any final top tips for using colour at home?

Experiment. It doesn't cost much to buy those sample paint pots. Paint large patches on the wall and see how the light affects it during the day – colours can look really different in natural and artificial light. Oh yes, and don't go crazy with one particular colour.

Do you ever yearn for an all-white scheme?

I like white, but I have a natural inclination to colour. If we ever did move, I might use a completely different palette, but I will always include strong colour tones. ■



Size does matter when it comes to loft living – you'll need big, bold furnishings to fit into the large, open space

LOFT LIVING SECRETS

Fallen for Ruth and Peter's fab loft apartment? There are a few need-to-know tips that can make your empty space a warm and inviting home

KEEP IT REAL

Don't deny your building's past – if there are original features, make the most of them. Leave brickwork exposed – and even pipework that's still visible in some former industrial spaces can look good. Original warehouse windows can be draughty, so make the room cosier with either floor-to-ceiling curtains or smart blinds.

MAKE IT FLEXIBLE

Open-plan spaces need to be divided up into separate areas for sleeping, living and cooking. You can still have the open-plan effect, just use room dividers and furniture to mark out each zone. Pieces that come on castors mean you can easily reconfigure the space when you want to. Make sure moveable room dividers are considerably lower than your ceiling if you don't want its sense of height to be lost. If there's going to be a guest bedroom and bathroom, simple stud walls can provide privacy and are also easier to move

if you want to change the internal layout in the future.

CHECK WATER PRESSURE

If your loft conversion is on the top floor of a tall building, you'll need to check water pressure particularly carefully – a plumber (Corgi registered if you have a gas boiler) can make sure it's sufficient for baths and showers if need be.

STAY WARM

Loft apartments need well thought-out heating and adequate roof insulation. Underfloor heating is a good option if you want to keep walls radiator-free. Alternatively, do as Ruth and Peter have done and make a feature of an oversized, sculptural-looking radiator – Bisque has a great selection.

LIGHTING IS KEY

Good lighting is important, not only to define separate areas and create different moods, but also because some conversions –

despite their lofty proportions – can be dark, especially if there's a mezzanine level or gallery built above the window line. If you want to keep your space looking open and uncluttered, halogen spots and track lights make a good alternative to floor and table lamps.

THINK BIG

Choosing furniture that doesn't get lost in a loft space is a challenge. If you can't find the right sizes on the high street, take the commercial route and check out office suppliers and kitchen fitters. Alternatively, a good architect or The Crafts Council should be able to help you track down or commission suitable pieces.

CONSIDER COLOUR

Because most loft conversions work on such a grand scale, a minimalist look can seem too cold and clinical. Brighten up the space with colour and texture in the form of paints and wallpaper, as well as more unusual materials such as coloured glass panels. If your space is smaller, consider using various tones within the same colour palette to create a sense of unity.

USE TEXTURE

Touchy-feely rugs, cushions and throws in materials such as wool, silk, leather and linen can all create a sense of cosiness in a large, high-ceilinged space. Rugs on walls as well as floors make great sound-absorbers for echoey rooms.

ACCESSORISE

It's all about size and wow factor, but if you can't find the right artwork, buy a canvas from an art supplier and paint your own in colours that match your scheme or have a photo made into a canvas – see www.snappy snaps.co.uk.

Useful contacts

Crafts Council 020 7278 7700;

www.craftscouncil.org.uk

RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) 020 7580 5533;

www.riba.org

Federation of Master Builders 0800 015 2522; www.fmb.org.uk

Wallpaper* Architects Directory www.wallpaper.com/101/architects-directory.html