

LULU'S *Likes*

Lulu Lytle, founder and creative director of Soane Britain, is used to making furnishings and accessories for the marketplace, but her most personal accomplishment is the interiors of her family's home

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Opening page: The main hallway in Lulu Lytle's London home that she shares with her husband and three teenage children is lined with her collection of French eighteenth-century depictions of parrots. The walls are covered with Soane's hand-painted *Osmunda* pattern. Above: Reflective of Lytle's penchant for animals, her drawing room features many zoological renderings, including a nineteenth-century watercolor of a rhinoceros. Walls are painted with a Farrow & Ball egg shell.



Above and left: An informal dining area off the kitchen reflects Lytle's fascination with Islamic patterns, motifs, and architectural details. The Soane oak dining table is surrounded by Soane chairs upholstered in a Turkish-motif fabric. The copper owl lantern was made by artisans in Sheffield. Hanging over a buffet is a nineteenth-century Qajar portrait of a prince.

Lytle emphasizes that all of the vintage Sheffield plates and silver displayed in her kitchen, as well as the Islamic metalware, are items she uses daily. "That room all started with my love for that lovely turquoise tile," she says. The rattan Hurlingham vase on the island is made by Soane artisans. The shelving and cabinetry colors are by Papers and Paints.



The master bedroom is papered in Soane's *Dianthus Chintz* wallpaper, an elaborate pattern inspired by an eighteenth-century sarong. Both the Anglo-Indian chest of drawers and the fantastical Italian *capriccio* painting date from the eighteenth century. The bedside wall and table lights are from Soane.





Right: Her daughter Bunny's bedroom features nineteenth-century bedding, combined with a Soane-designed headboard, upholstered in Soane's *Ripple Stripe*, in raspberry. The fixed wall light is Soane and the table lamp is antique German from the Hanover Royal Collection. This page: Bedding in another bedroom reflects Lytle's penchant for all things Middle Eastern.



LULU LYTLE'S FAVORITE decorative element in her London home is one over which she has little control. She doesn't choose it, but always welcomes it when it appears. "Because we have three teenaged children, there is a constant stream of teenagers coming through the home," says Lytle, "and I can't tell you what a lovely sight that is every time I come home and find them, sitting in the rooms, talking, eating, having fun together, gathered at the kitchen table. That my children's friends feel welcome here is a very, very nice feeling. It means that our house is an open one."

As a co-founder and creative director of Soane Britain, Lytle is used to having an open mind when it comes to design. Years ago, she and her then-business partner, Christopher Hodson, founded the London-based company in response to what they saw as a fast erosion of traditional British craftsmanship. While the company designs and manufactures furniture, upholstery, lighting, fabrics, wallpapers, and accessories, what truly distinguishes it is Soane's embrace of expert artisans and craftspeople in Great Britain. Crafts and trades once thought to be moribund in the nation—everything from silversmithing to wicker making, blacksmithing to saddle making—endure now, in significant part because of the efforts of Soane. Not surprisingly, the rooms of Lytle's five-bedroom home in London's Bayswater that she shares with her husband and children are filled with Soane creations, as well as antiques.

Because the apartment is situated on the top floors of a series of contiguous 1860s townhouses, Lytle likens the views from the windows "to feeling like we're in the jungle, among the treetops, though this is London." In decorating her rooms, filling them with her finds from around the world and those made in the Soane workshops throughout Great Britain, Lytle says that her first self-directive is "to make the most of the extraordinary natural light that fills this home from both sides of the building." From most of the windows, there are direct views onto enormous plane trees. Seemingly immersed within a virtual canopy of trees, Lytle, who is actively involved in animal rights causes and an avowed birder, says that she and her family often watch birds buildings nests, right from their own living room perches.

No room in the home is absent of color and pattern and texture, the more layered, the more in keeping for Lytle. With the abundance of natural light, Lytle never shies from

introducing elements, no matter how busy their patterns. "I am constantly energized by these rooms," she says, "and I'm always changing things, rearranging pictures, moving furniture to different spots. I enjoy playing with the elements of a room and thinking how they might look in a different incarnation. As for color, I am always drawn to it." So much so, that when Lytle eavesdrops on her children, she takes particular delight when hearing them remark on the room colors and multitude of objects on display.

Given her love of animals, mammals and birds figure prominently into the décor. The apartment's main hallway, papered with a hand-painted Soane wallcovering with leafy green stripes, serves as a gallery of sorts that features rare eighteenth-century depictions of parrots. "When I changed out the plain boring wall color that used to be there and put in this paper, the backdrop suddenly seemed perfect for the parrots, as if they were in the trees," says Lytle. Meanwhile, the drawing room is a menagerie of rhinos, lions, cats, tigers, cows, camels, and other creatures, including the family's pet Whippet, Panther, often found on the sofa. "Am I allowed to say that Panther is the love of my life?" Lytle asks.

Another favorite decorative motif of Lytle's is Islamic art and detailing, whose rich patterns continue to inspire her. "It's an aesthetic that speaks to me and always has more than just about any other" she remarks. "Early Islamic designs hold a particular appeal for me because of their powerful underlying geometry."

Many of the Orientalist paintings that hang throughout the home show images of camels. Lytle is intimately involved in the Wild Camel Protection Foundation, a nonprofit that works to save endangered Bactrian camels, native to the Gobi Desert. "They are the only mammal that drinks salt water," says Lytle "and I have visited the foundation's breeding center on the Chinese border, whose medical work is extraordinary."

Maybe it sounds like an ominous sentiment at first hearing, but Lytle likes to invoke it. "I often say an old proverb that goes along the lines, 'When a man finishes his house, he dies.' So, naturally, I keep decorating." ■

Lulu Lytle's home is included in *Near & Far: Interiors I Love* (Vendome Press), by Lisa Fine, photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna, foreword by Deborah Needleman.

"We're all OUT during the day, so making interiors that are welcoming are even more important."

—Lulu Lytle

