

# Every picture tells a story

Artist Phoebe Dickinson's south London home is a testament to what drives and inspires her, from the portraiture on the walls to the cherished fabrics and pieces of furniture amassed over time

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KITCHEN Cupboards by DeVol in 'Pantry Blue', topped with Vitruvius marble, are combined with freestanding pieces, including a cabinet from Arcadia Antiques. On it stands a lamp by Penny Morrison and a plaster bust – a wedding present from sculptor and gallerist Raffaello Romanelli. Above the sofa, by Phoebe's interior-designer sister Octavia Dickinson, hangs a 3D collage by Phoebe in the style of Joseph Cornell. The cushions are in a fabric from Soane



The walls of the London house owned by artist Phoebe Dickinson and her husband Luke are filled with paintings, each with a story. Some she painted, others she has sat for and many are the work of friends. 'The portrait of us in the sitting room was a very generous wedding present from my teacher Nick Bashall. I am looking serious, because he had a mirror behind him as he painted and I was watching every brush stroke, so I could learn from him,' she explains.

Phoebe is known for her portraiture. In 2013, she appeared on the Sky Arts TV show *Portrait Artist of the Year* and, in 2018, she was chosen for the BP Portrait Award for her commission of the Cholmondeley children, which shows the three young sitters in William Kent's sumptuously decorated stone hall at Houghton Hall in Norfolk.

Phoebe's studio at the top of the house is packed to the brim with everything from sensitive still lifes to landscapes painted en plein air and vast oils of the great and the good. 'One aspect I love about my job is the houses I get to visit,' she says. 'I draw inspiration from them, not just for my paintings and the art I see there – they also give me ideas of what to do with rooms in my own house.'

Also very helpful is the fact that Phoebe's sister, Octavia Dickinson, is an interior designer. The pair bought the house together 15 years ago and lived there with their younger brother and a string of friends. 'It was quite studenty to begin with,' says Phoebe. 'The kitchen was tiny and the plastic was peeling off the counters.' It was not until she and Luke got married – and their various friends moved out – that they were able to extend the kitchen and install far-from-studenty DeVol units. They also turned the attic into a studio.

Over the years, Phoebe and Octavia assembled a medley of printed fabrics – many from Penny Morrison – and used them to great effect. Meanwhile, Phoebe and Luke have spent a lot of time happily trawling Ebay, stalls at The Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair at Battersea Park and the antique shops of Tetbury to furnish the house. 'Each year, the house has got better and better,' says Phoebe. They recently called on Octavia in a more official capacity for help with refreshing their bedroom. They commissioned specialist decorator Cornelia Faulkner to paint the walls with a drag effect, then added the pièce de résistance – a bed tester, with a combination of Claremont, Nicole Fabre and Soane textiles.

At the start of this year, Phoebe and Luke took their two daughters to Phoebe's parents' house in Gloucestershire for a short stay, packing just an overnight bag. Soon afterwards, lockdown struck and they found themselves living out the pandemic in the country. Their Battersea home was already on the market and, a few weeks later, they found a house in a nearby village. So with little fanfare and not much chance to say goodbye, they have left London permanently. Thankfully, the paintings that tell the story of their life up until now will shortly arrive at their new home, and its walls will soon be a sea of beautifully curated pictures. With Phoebe's artist's eye and input from her sister, the new house will surely be a finely executed celebration of an entire family's talents □

**KITCHEN (top)** A table from Brownrigg in Tetbury is paired with antique chairs from Westenholz. Above the chimneypiece is a painting by Phoebe flanked by antique sconces and plates by the South African ceramicist Hylton Nel. **DRAWING ROOM (above and opposite)** The etching of a zedonk is by artist friend Hugo Wilson. Above the sofa is Nick Bashall's portrait of Phoebe and Luke. An ottoman in Penny Morrison's 'Killi' linen echoes the warm tones of a Robert Kime trim on the curtains and a terracotta sculpture by Domenica de Ferranti

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**STUDIO** Paintings from Phoebe's travels and her collection of frames fill this space at the top of the house. **SPARE ROOM** A nude by friend Rosalie Watkins hangs beside curtains in Penny Morrison's 'Haveli' linen. **BATHROOM** A pretty floral fabric by Claremont was used to make the gathered curtains and matching bath panels. The artwork above the taps is an antique sailor's love charm. **GARDEN** Phoebe and Luke found the antique metal table in Tetbury. A mirror on the back wall reflects the light and makes the space feel larger

**MAIN BEDROOM** Walls painted with a drag effect are the backdrop for a bed tester in 'South' from Claremont, edged in Soane's 'Old Flax' in azure and lined with 'Chancy' in chaya by Nicole Fabre Designs. The pale pink quilt adds to the layered effect. The stool at the end of the bed is in Le Manach's 'Plumettes' cotton in celeste. A painting by Daisy Perkins hangs above the bedside table sourced in Tetbury

