

THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Colours, crystals, patterns and paintings all collide in the eclectic London home of the founder of Mad Cow Interiors. Brilliant or barking, asks *Emma Wells*



Sue Miller is no stranger to drama. Last year, her beloved pooberger, Herbie (a cross between a leonberger and a standard poodle: he's the size of a Shetland pony) jumped up to lick her so enthusiastically he tore her carotid artery. Soon after her seven-month recuperation, her husband, Peter, 54, had a heart attack. Determined to go on an adventure to celebrate their recovery, they took their children, Max, 16, and Yaeli, 14, both actors, on a three-



month trip around South America, arriving in Quito only

to get tear-gassed in anti-government demonstrations. An

emergency evacuation landed them in the Galapagos Islands.



The house has been completely remodelled and restyled inside
PRIME PERSPECTIVES

Still suntanned from the trip, Miller, 52, the founder of Mad Cow Interiors, is unfazed. “It was pretty hairy,” she admits, “but I do think that kind of experience is confirmation that life needs to be lived fully, authentically and trustingly. Fear-based decisions don’t get you anywhere.”

It’s a mantra Miller — who left London as a teenager to pursue her first career, as a singer-songwriter in Manhattan — has tried to apply to all areas of her life, though nowhere to more dramatic effect



Sue with her husband, Peter, children, Yaeli and Max, and Herbie the pooberger

than at her north London home. Behind the traditional red-brick Edwardian facade of the double-fronted house, next to Highgate Wood and a

stroll from villagey Muswell Hill, classic English elegance meets 1980s New York industrial chic — taking in just about every other design

influence on the way.

“These old houses have seen so many styles pass through them, in my book absolutely anything goes,” says Miller, her petite frame wrapped in a figure-hugging Sandro print dress. “I love textures, details, layers, and to have visual treats in every corner. My home is probably what the inside of my brain looks like, with incredibly calm and hectic parts.”

She’s certainly fearless when it comes to mixing things up: materials used throughout the four-

storey property range from sombre industrial bare brick and polished plaster walls to corrugated iron, velvet, lace and

roughly hewn wooden boards, with eye-popping paint colours, crystal and bead chandeliers and globally sourced

collages, sculptures, ceramics and rugs.

Behind any successful, artfully thrown together look, of course, lies months

and months of hard graft — 18 of them, in Miller's case. She bought the house in 2011 for about £1.6m, and immediately set

GET THE LOOK

● Bespoke handmade kitchens by Roundhouse start at £35,000
roundhousedesign.com

● On the hallway and dining room walls, Fired Earth's stormy blue-grey Tempest paint creates a dramatic atmosphere. The matt emulsion costs

£42 for 2.5 litres
firedearth.com

● Grey polished plaster is the perfect backdrop for colourful abstract paintings and vividly upholstered furniture. Art on Walls charges from about £75 per sq metre, and offers 30 different textures
a-o-w.co.uk

● For more boho versions of traditional chandeliers, visit outthereinteriors.com or abigailahern.com. Ahern's iridescent metal and resin beaded Todi chandelier costs £780. For period sconces, try vintageunit.com, rubyinthedust.co.uk and roomscape.net

● In the master bathroom, above right, the sinuous Kurv Cian tub, by BC Designs, is available in polished and silk matt finish, for £3,600
bcdesigns.co.uk. Add mirrored cabinets and a hot pink footstool

● MILLER'S TOP TIP

about redesigning the living spaces, getting rid of boxy rooms to devise a proper flow, ultimately creating 4,000 sq ft of living space with five bedrooms.

“If homes are to be beautiful, they have to be functional first,” Miller says. With Peter — until recently the chief operating officer of Westfield Europe — on hand to help design the new layout, they extended to the rear, dug out a basement for a gym and cinema room and went up a storey to create a master bedroom suite, with a



The family is now selling up to move to Australia

cosy snug opening onto a deckhouse-style roof terrace. At one point, there were just three external walls standing, and no roof — a stage she found not daunting, but thrilling.

This refusal to make tame choices meant that her builders, craftsmen and decorators worked

with their eyebrows perpetually raised, she says. “The guy who did the pale-grey polished plaster wall in the ground-floor sitting room, for example, thought I had lost the plot — but later admitted I might be a genius after all. You have to trust your own instincts and know what you love.”

Miller’s bold paint palette — ranging from Fired Earth Tempest, a stormy blue-grey, in the hallway and dining room to Farrow & Ball Railings in the book-lined study and the burnt-orange

Beetlenut, by Paint & Paper Library, in the basement games room — sets a 1970s boho tone for the whole scheme. Abigail Ahern was so impressed she featured it in her book *Colour*.

The grey contemporary Roundhouse kitchen is conventional (and north London) enough — Miller also worked in restaurant management in New York, and developed a love for practical, industrial-style kitchens. However, she refused to have built-in cupboards, opting instead for



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open shelving, to showcase her collection of ceramics and glass. “Kitchens are as good a place as any to display artwork,” she says. Against the bare brick wall, a sign with the words “Trust Me” picked out in neon yellow has, she says, kept her on the right path.

In fact, Miller, whose interior-design clients live in London, San Francisco and Sydney, is a true believer in the transformative power of lighting. “I don’t do themed lighting,” she says. “I am happy to have

six or seven different types at various heights in one room — floor and table lamps, wall lights, pendants — as it layers spaces, creates atmosphere and brings out colours and textures.”

Her favourite pieces include the 1970s Vistosi chandelier in the hallway: hung with orange discs, it casts a warm, welcoming light through the Edwardian stained glass of the front door. In the main living space, leading off the kitchen, a lime-green beaded pendant by Louise Bradley hangs

over two 1950s Danish armchairs, warmed in winter by the rough slate fireplace, and an early 1960s Arco floor lamp makes a cosy reading nook of a white hanging basket chair. In the master bedroom, Murano glass wall sconces and a white metal chandelier, by Abigail Ahern, are easy bedfellows. In the ensuite, the sinuous Kurv bathtub is lit by a huge overhead chandelier and crystal-drop wall lights beside the mirror.

Artworks collected by the Millers on their

travels play just as important a role in scene-setting. In the dining room, dominated by a huge oval dining table, surrounded by a dozen mismatched chairs, hangs a monumental abstract piece by Ernesto Villanueva — “I took this piece from the artist’s own wall in Havana,” Miller says. Elsewhere, works by the English artist Debra Franes Bean, South African Lionel Smit and London-based Talia LeHavi, who specialises in Japanese ink painting, are thrown into the

mix.

When Miller couldn't find what she needed to create the right look, she simply had it made. In the games room, for example, with the help of the London art consultancy 55Max and printers Hollywood Monster, the clear resin-covered vinyl floor tiles have been collated from all her favourite album covers, by Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, Pink Floyd and Santana.

But despite such personal touches — and spending

£800,000 on the building works and decorative scheme — Miller is now selling up, for £3m, so the family (including Herbie, who will be air-freighted in a specially designed crate) can start a new life in Australia.

If you love the look, she is happy to take offers from potential buyers for the furniture and lighting, as well as for a three-bedroom flat she is also selling, a 10-minute walk away, for £945,000. It, too, has Miller's signature look, with bare brick walls, wooden beams,

lashings of velvet and eclectic lighting.

As for her new home, a 1980s water-view house in Sydney's chichi Parsley Bay, there was, unsurprisingly, nothing prosaic about the way Miller acquired it. She sealed the deal during a rare moment of internet connection while sailing between the Galapagos Islands.

This one looks set to be another huge renovation project. "I'll admit I feel a bit daunted," she says. "The light will be completely different, and I need to find the

textures, materials and plants that are right for the house. You never know, I might rethink my usual style and go for a softer look this time."

Whatever she does, it's a safe bet she'll be following her own path.

Hamptons (020 3369 4564, hamptons.co.uk); madcowinteriors.com, [@madcowinteriors](https://www.instagram.com/madcowinteriors)

Opening image: Sue Miller with the family's dog, Herbie. Photograph by Francesco Guidicini ■