



FLIGHTS OF IMAGINATION

The west London home-cum-studio of artist Bouke de Vries makes for the perfect gallery for his creative refashionings of antique ceramics and vintage objects. By **Chloe Grimshaw**. Photographs by **Mark Luscombe-Whyte**

Bouke de Vries in his studio. He bought some wooden bird cages several years ago and had not found a way to use them. The idea of adding bird wings came to him one afternoon. 'It's about setting free.'

The garden The sculpture of Chairman Mao is an eBay purchase, which arrived in crates from Shanghai.

The living room The sofas were custom-made to Miles Chapman's and de Vries's own design by Leather Chairs of England (020-8740 0700), in Acton – one of London's best-kept secrets, in their opinion. Displayed on a plinth is a 19th-century plaster copy of the Farnese Hercules, found in a charity shop. De Vries's collection of cream and white 17th- and 18th-century delftware – discovered by archaeologists in Holland – is displayed in a translucent unit on one wall. Facing it is a map of Holland, made by de Vries from fragments of delftware





The living room gallery wall includes work by contemporary Dutch artists, antique Spanish religious artefacts such as a crown of thorns, a Grayson Perry vase, drawings from the Victoria Miro gallery, Chapman brothers prints, a Gavin Turk edition and a Louise Bourgeois multiple for Tate Modern.

The studio The couple regularly visit Golborne Road in west London, where they found the antique chest of drawers. Recent works and favourite pieces are displayed on it, including a pair of cobalt peacocks made from fragments of Chinese porcelain, with gold-plated beaks; a Han dynasty cocoon jar with Christ and butterflies; a Tang dynasty figure with a rose growing from it; and a broken figure of Guan Yin with porcelain flowers made from Chinese tea bowls.

The kitchen, handmade to the couple's specification by their builder, has a marinese granite work surface. The metal cake stand is from Portobello Road

When the Dutch ceramic artist Bouke de Vries first came across the 1920s end-of-terrace he now calls home it looked rather unpromising – particularly as cars hurtle down the west London road it sits on – but from the moment de Vries stepped inside, he ‘just knew it was the one’. Double-height spaces and huge windows meant that it was saturated with light, while walls had been knocked through and ceiling heights raised to create large open-plan rooms, with the expansive feel of a loft.

Considering that he only began working as a ceramic artist six years ago, following on from a career in pottery restoration and early beginnings in fashion working with the likes of John Galliano, Zandra Rhodes and Stephen Jones, de Vries cheerfully admits that he's ‘not doing too badly’. Recent collaborations with Grayson Perry and rave reviews

in *The New York Times* mean that de Vries's work is now coveted by private collectors and museums around the world; his epic table piece *War & Pieces*, made from fragments of 19th-century porcelain, plastic, sugar, gilded brass and mixed media, has been compared to the Chapman brothers' elaborate tableaux.

The pace at which he decorated the apartment he shares with his partner, the British jewellery designer Miles Chapman, into a gallery-like space was similarly swift: within three weeks of moving into their new home in November 2012, the couple had unpacked their collection of ceramics, arranged their mainly vintage furniture and hung all their pictures. But they had renovated extensively prior to that, replacing the exposed metal staircase that linked the two floors, revamping the kitchen units, adding a laundry area in the capacious bathroom

and carving out four bedrooms where previously there had been only two. The huge garden was filled with overgrown sycamore trees, but as it was over 120ft long, de Vries felt confident that there would be space to build his new ceramics studio.

'I love that I go outside and there are physical barriers between work and home,' he says, as we stroll towards his studio. 'It's the perfect set-up; if I want a tea break, I just come back into the house.' His first collaboration with Perry was *The Westfield Vase* in 2009, to celebrate the opening of the vast shopping centre around the corner from de Vries's home in Shepherd's Bush. Perry arrived at de Vries's previous studio with a vase embellished with a map of the site, which he gleefully smashed up before de Vries put it back together using gold lacquer - echoing an ancient Japanese tradition of highlighting cracks in gold leaf. More recently they worked together on *The (Chris) Huhne Vase* for Grayson Perry's *Icons series* at the National Portrait Gallery.

De Vries is currently creating an installation for the National Trust, which will be unveiled at Croome Court, the former home of the 6th Earl of Coventry, next month. Croome was the first landscape design and major architectural project by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, whose 300th anniversary celebrations take place in the summer.



The bedroom Originally a fireplace surround, the bedhead is used to display ancient Chinese ceramics rescued from a shipwreck in the South China Sea, many of them encrusted with barnacles. 'The salt has etched the glaze away, so the pots have a lovely satin quality,' says de Vries. The Victorian Durham quilt is from The Cloth Shop (theclothshop.net).

The bathroom Chapman and de Vries removed their bath and replaced it with a glass walk-in shower. Walls of storage double up as a gallery space for Duggie Fields's pop art-inspired prints and posters.

The garden The terracotta bust with horns was customised by de Vries on a spare Saturday afternoon

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De Vries's studio is full of damaged treasures, from discarded Korean celadon ceramics to a collection of Portuguese painted porcelain from the 17th and 18th centuries – acquired, through an intermediary, from a convent. He carefully removes the glue holding the broken fragments together, then muses on how to transform them. 'I usually buy things that are beautiful and then I leave them to tell me what they should be,' he explains. Many of these ceramics and sculptures are regarded as valueless if they are chipped or damaged, despite being hundreds of years old; de Vries believes he can give them 'a new life and a new narrative' by transforming them.

Outside his studio de Vries has created an homage to the late French-American artist Louise Bourgeois, based on a bedroom installation she built with walls of heavy wooden doors that seemed to hint at menace beyond or even within the room. In contrast, walking past a row of 20 or so white doors to reach the garden seems to hint at endless possibilities and also serves as a high-concept garden fence.

'It was really cheap to put together as none of the doors cost more than £2,' says de Vries. 'We've found a use for the original front door too, although it's at the side of the house now.' Typical of the artist's approach to recycling and reinvention. boukedevries.com

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Stannah Stairlifts