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THE KEY TO FESTIVE DECORATING? FOR BRYAN O'SULLIVAN IT'S ABOUT TAPPING INTO NOSTALGIA

The world-renowned interior designer has dressed his latest project in London's Chelsea Barracks for the festive season – and it's a very personal insight into his design inspirations and personal ruminations of celebrations past and future

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'My brother and I used to love putting up the Christmas tree. I think part of that was that the decorations had been brought out every year for as long as we could remember. Then, one year, my mum got all new decorations and we were appalled. They were nice,' concedes Bryan, 'but you can't mess with tradition.' He has long forgiven his mother for this festive faux pas, but it's a recollection that says a lot about Bryan O'Sullivan Studio's approach to interiors, and to this project in particular. Memories are key to the magic of Christmas, but they can also be what turns a house into a home. For Bryan, when presented with the blank canvas that was The Penthouse at 1 Fields Square in Chelsea Barracks, his impulse was to create a layered scheme that feels instantly welcoming and personal.

In fact, in many ways, this space really is deeply personal. Dressing the penthouse for the festive season was a family affair, with Bryan and his husband James O'Neill (commercial director for Bryan O'Sullivan Studio) transporting their own collection of baubles to Chelsea to adorn the tree. Look closely and you'll spot an unexpected theme. 'There's mermaids, mermen, dolphins, jellyfish, shells... anything from under the water,' explains Bryan. 'James and I forget where we were when we bought the first eight or nine decorations, but since then we've had to stick to it.' For their two children – Cosmo is three and a half and Goldie is five months – these are the decorations that will come to hold so much meaning. There's a bigheartedness in sharing that. ➤

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And it's not just the tree. On the table in the main dining room and the kitchen's breakfast nook there are items from Bryan and James's own home mixed in with pieces by the likes of Ginori 1735, Bonadea and Abask. These items have become part of feasting set-ups that draw again on the idea of nostalgia – there's a 1980s feel to the decadent piles of jellies (from Bompas & Parr), exuberant bows and Colours of Arley striped tablecloth – and a certain filmic quality. Bryan sees a synergy with the styles of Wes Anderson and Tim Burton. 'Cosmo's favourite movie is actually *The Nightmare Before Christmas*,' shares Bryan. 'All year round he watches it on repeat.' The directors' distinctive palettes are just two of the influences that feed into a colour scheme that is atmospheric and purposefully daring.

Having worked on interiors for many luxurious townhouses and grand hospitality projects – notably Dante Mayfair at Claridge's and the Red Room speakeasy bar at The Connaught – this was a possibility, with no homeowner to convince of his plans, for Bryan to bring together the best of both worlds. Measuring 642 square metres, with two balconies and windows that wrap around the property, this is lateral living at its most generous and so, fittingly, Bryan's ➤

The ritual

Sometimes the best traditions are the ones that bring people together – that's certainly the case in Bryan's house...

'Christmas is the only time in the year that we will sit down by the fire as a family and play games. If I'm back home at my parents' house in Ireland, that will mean getting together with the cousins to play poker. If it's just immediate family, though, it will be a board game, like Articulate or Monopoly. It can be hilarious.'

Family room The bespoke sofa in this room was designed by Bryan O'Sullivan Studio to have the perfect dimensions for lounging (a deep seat and a back with the optimum tilt). It wraps around a 1980s-designed Paul Kingma travertine coffee table facing a fireplace that has been clad in Dedar's 'Amoir Libre' fabric in 'Foresta'. The rug is from Christopher Farr, the stools are vintage pieces by Angela Ball and the pendant light is Bryan's own 'Drop' design. The Nordmann fir here is dressed in Bryan and his husband James's own decorations, with presents wrapped in a unique stripe from Colours of Arley

The playlist

Bryan's festive mixtape is, like the interior of The Penthouse, a perfect mix of nostalgic and modern classics

- *Santa Baby*, Madonna
- *I'm Gonna Be Warm This Winter*, Connie Francis
- *Last Christmas*, Wham!
- *Santa's Coming For Us*, Sia
- *My Favourite Things*, Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass
- *Winter Wonderland*, Hannah Kerr
- *Driving Home For Christmas*, Chris Rea
- *Feliz Navidad*, José Feliciano



Family room Bryan O'Sullivan Studio designed a bespoke freestanding walnut bar for this snug. It is ideal for cocktail hour, but also has a plug socket so you can add a kettle for easy tea breaks during movie marathons. Glassware includes pieces by La DoubleJ, Abask, Gather Glass and Cupla



aesthetic approach was equally bountiful. 'In a hospitality space you have more of a license to go a bit wilder with colour, and we have tried to bring some of that energy here, making each room feel experiential. It's something a lot of residential clients may have pushed back on,' admits Bryan, but here he could be bold, experimenting with saturated shades that almost clash. 'Lighter social spaces give way to darker, more cocooning rooms, with crafted thresholds and tonal shifts,' explains the designer of his approach to creating connected spaces that still all feel 'quite different'. The results are theatrical, he admits, 'but it works – they are colours that feel soothing but still adventurous.'

'The space feels particularly expressive,' continues Bryan. 'Rooms shift confidently between openness and intimacy, drama and softness. It is one of our most atmospheric residential projects to date.' Setting that mood begins the moment you step out of the lift and into the entrance hall, which is drenched in crimson. It's a choice that stems from the fleck of burgundy in the stone of the crisscrossed flooring – just one of the fabulous details that were part of the original luxury build by developers Qatari Diar. The red thread continues throughout the home, from the ceiling above the grand stairwell, which is draped in chartreuse fabric for ➤



Dining room A ceiling mural by artist Beth Rodway (who Bryan worked with previously for Dante Mayfair in Claridge's) adds subtle interest against 'Sugar Cone' pendant lights by Rich Miller from The New Craftmaker and a table dressed in a bespoke Colours of Arley striped tablecloth and flowers by Ferve Studio. The chairs are the 'PePe' by Hamrei and the tapestry on the wall is by Claudy Jongstra



'When working on a new home, you're trying to bring character and I think colour is a really good way to do that'

Breakfast nook Located in the kitchen, this space's banquette and table are bespoke Bryan O'Sullivan Studio pieces, while the chairs are his 'Macaroon' design. The chandelier is from Howe London. On the table, jellies by Bompas & Parr are presented on stands from Bonadea and silverware from Canonbury Antiques
Library Bryan's 'Baloo' armchairs flank his 'Sweetie' side table. The chandelier is a plaster and bronze piece from The Lamp Workshop

The signature drink

As a non-drinker, Bryan makes sure there's a tipple that works for everyone, like this negroni

- 25ml Botivo
- 25ml dry gin or CleanCo Clean G
- 25ml dry vermouth or non-alcoholic bitters
- Ice cubes
- Orange peel to garnish





Christmas, to the lobby above, which Bryan and James have dressed for a party, complete with champagne and balloons.

'When working on a new home, you're trying to bring character and I think colour is a really good way to do that,' Bryan adds. Another is to layer in vintage pieces alongside contemporary design to create the feeling of an interior curated over time. There are bespoke items of furniture by Bryan O'Sullivan Studio (notably the instantly recognisable 'Macaroon' chairs in the kitchen, the 'Baloo' armchairs in the library and the bespoke sofa in the snug, which Bryan claims has the optimum dimensions for relaxation), but also works by craftspeople and artists the designer admires. His friend Hamrei is the talent behind the 'PePe' seats in the dining room, where there's also 'Sugar Cone' pendant lights by Rich Miller for The New Craftmaker and a specially commissioned tapestry by Claudy Jongstra. 'The project responds to a contemporary way of living – one that values elegance without formality and comfort without compromise,' says Bryan. 'We wanted to create spaces that adapt between entertaining, family life and private retreat without effort. Flexibility was key, with rooms that are equally as suited to retreating with a book as they are to hosting and gathering.'

For an interior so much about creating the illusion of shared ➤



memories – an interior assembled over time, a life well lived – it is fitting that scent has also been a very important factor. It brings an incredibly evocative extra layer. Bryan often uses Rachel Vosper's bespoke scents for his projects, favouring her 'No36' with notes of orange blossom, geranium, bergamot, jasmine, choisya and pine, but for Christmas he has selected Diptyque's 'Sapin' for the penthouse. For him, it's the smell of festive excess – heavy with 'cinnamon and mulled wine'. From the trinket-laden tree to the tables overflowing with delicious treats and the aroma that conjures instant cosiness, it is all about tapping into positive associations for Bryan. 'I guess we were just trying to make people feel happy.' What better gift could there be? *bryanosullivan.com* ED

Stairwell An eight-foot Nordmann fir sets the party mood, while draped chartreuse fabric adds drama. Lighting includes a brass pendant by Florian Schulz Sela from 1stDibs and Bryan's 'Hanami Drop' pendant, as well as Danish brass candlesticks from the 1950s

OPPOSITE: FIVE EYES ALL BLIND (2022) BY MAX WADE, OIL ON LINEN, 170CM X 200CM, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SID MOTION GALLERY, LONDON



Upstairs foyer Balloons float beneath a 1960s Murano-glass plafonnier from Fiona McDonald. The artwork on the wall is *Five Eyes All Blind* by Max Wade