

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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RECIPES  
LIGHT,  
PRETTY  
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DELICIOUS



BACK TO LIFE  
A HEROIC  
RESTORATION  
IN OXFORDSHIRE

## INSPIRING STYLE

A CHIC, LUXURIOUS THAMES HOUSEBOAT  
AN ARCHITECT-DESIGNED ESCAPE ON A CORNISH CREEK  
A CLASSIC PIED-A-TERRE IN LONDON  
AN ARTIST'S STUDIO IN PARIS



PHOTOGRAPHS  
CHRIS TUBBS

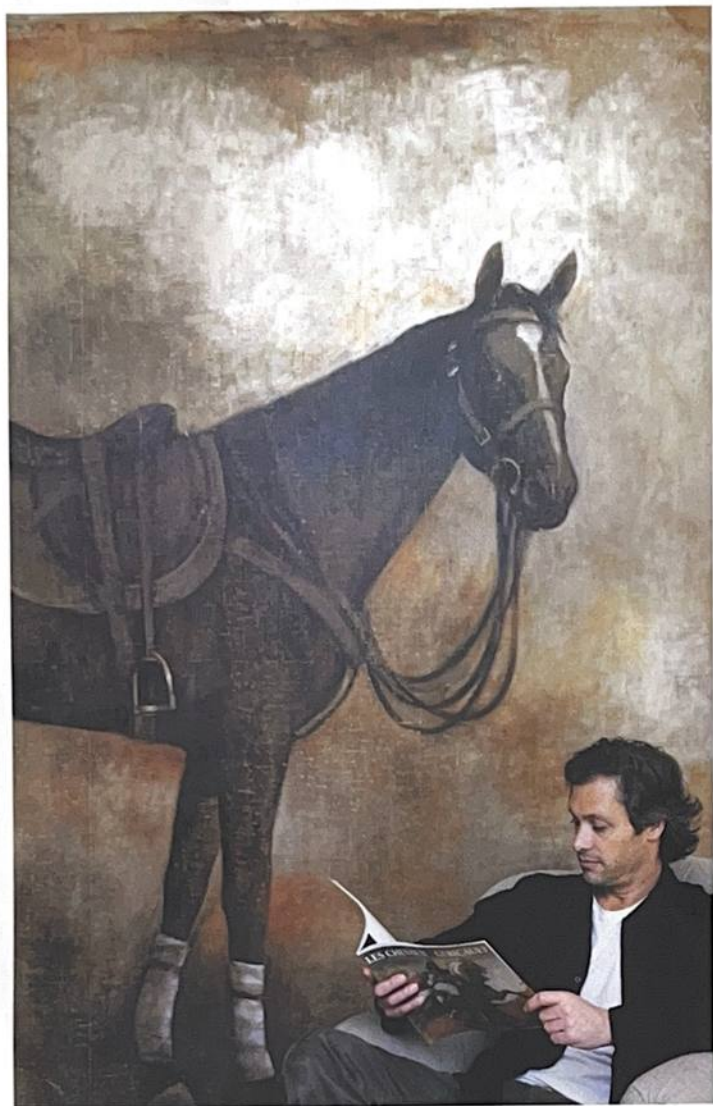
# FROM THE MIND'S EYE

Jorge Estevez claims he is a decorator, not an artist; his work, the expression of inner feelings, not representations of the physical world. Hatta Byng visits him at his home and his studio in Paris, where his painting provides a beguiling, dream-like backdrop



*'People love the fact that they are getting something special and I love watching them respond with emotion'*

In the big living area, three large, rough boards, painted with delicate flowers inspired by details in Botticelli's *Primavera*, rest behind the dining table. The room is cool and relaxed, and not typically Parisian; the wide bare floorboards, which run throughout the apartment, are complemented by muted, natural tones and stich, sometimes quirky pieces of furniture, such as the gymnasium bench, used here as a coffee table.



Banish any thoughts of quaint trompe-l'oeil landscapes or garish faux-paint finishes: Jorge Estevez's painted decorations are beautiful, sensitive and refreshingly understated. Despite a portfolio stuffed with commissions that are often spine-tingling in their subtlety, Jorge is the first to say he is 'unknown', and is beguilingly unpretentious about his creations. 'I'm not afraid of decoration,' he says. 'Ultimately it is better to decorate and find it is art, than to try to create art and find it is only decoration. This is not art, but neither is it decorating, and I like this ambiguity.' He doesn't want to have to explain his art – he is not striving to be intellectual, nor is he trying to be avant-garde. Though he studied fine art in Chile – his native country – and worked for several years as an artist, he never felt the need to be innovative and daring. 'It just isn't my way,' he explains. 'I like to surprise with silence, not parody or violence. I need to be able to lose myself in my work.' For Jorge, his work is more about capturing 'a feeling', and it is this intimacy that makes his creations so alluring.

It is also for this reason that he prefers to work on a large scale – whole

*'I like to surprise with silence... I need to be able to lose myself in my work'*

walls or vast canvases. He uses water-based paints, often using rags, sometimes even his fingers, to build up thin layers. His subject matter is the natural world – trees, berries, flowers, animals and birds – but he rarely copies from real life. 'Nothing exists,' he says; 'the things I paint are like ghosts in my imagination.' A tree, for example, is no particular tree, but 'an idea of a tree', 'a universal tree', a vehicle for an expression of 'sensations deep inside me'. He is not afraid of being considered old-fashioned or traditional and readily cites the old masters as inspiration (he studied art history in Florence for several years). But he is not trying to compete with them; it is the backdrops – the misty landscapes and detailed floral studies in many a Botticelli or a Leonardo – that provide the means with which Jorge can immerse himself in his painting.



OPPOSITE The kitchen is a combination of sleek stainless steel and vintage finds; the chairs are from a school. THIS PAGE Jorge in his studio (top). Jorge's paintings are created using water-based paints, which produce a soft glow of colour (far left). The red berries (centre) mirror the soft white berries – entirely of Jorge's imagination – on a panel. In his studio, painted medallions on beaded strings echo those on the walls at his home

He rarely does preliminary sketches – only if asked to by a client. Ideas tend to come to him as he puts the brush to the wall. ‘I’m lucky to have clients who trust in my work and love my pieces,’ he explains. ‘It is a careful balance between adapting to a client and giving myself. People love the fact that they are getting something special and I love watching them respond with emotion.’ That he numbers several art dealers among his clients is a testament to the beauty and sincerity of his creations – it is not uncommon for his works to sit alongside the old masters by which they are inspired.

Having lived in Madrid for several years, Jorge moved to Paris with his Parisian wife, Elsa, and their two young children last year. His studio is a traditional atelier in a street where artists including Picasso once painted, while home, for the time being, is an enviably stylish apartment in St Germain owned by an Argentinian friend. She is also Jorge’s client, and the apartment forms a perfect showcase for his work. ‘She’s both my most supportive and most demanding client,’ he laughs.

‘The style is very her,’ says Elsa of the owner, who is also her best friend. ‘It’s very cool and relaxed, with lots of natural linen. It’s not very urban or typically Parisian.’ Wonderfully wide, bare floorboards run throughout. ‘Every piece is unique – not expensive, but full of personality,’ Elsa continues. The bedhead, for example, was made from a door found in Brussels, while the coffee tables in the vast sitting room are old gymnasium benches. The deeply cool kitchen was by a designer who specialises in one-off designs incorporating vintage finds.

Jorge’s commission started with the bedroom and huge en-suite bathroom. The client’s brief was suitably intangible: she asked to be transported into another world. For Jorge’s part, it was vital his decorations were subtle so that she wouldn’t tire of them, and also that there was ‘a feeling of the walls having been there before her’. The result is blissfully peaceful: in the bedroom, rough, eggshell-grey walls are painted with the



most delicate of details to provide interest, and barely there borders frame doorways. In the bathroom, soft white berries, entirely of Jorge’s invention, decorate earthy-coloured walls. As Elsa points out, ‘Jorge never over-paints a room.’

Once he had finished, his client could not quite bear to let him go. So in the children’s bedroom – in its elegance quite unlike any other child’s bedroom – the walls are adorned with painted medallions hanging on beaded strings. Each medallion contains a motif, religious icon or mythical creature, which ‘watch over’ the children as they sleep. Similar medallions can be found in the cloakroom, where Jorge was asked to be a bit braver – here, Pompeian-red walls perfectly complement an old metal washstand (a flea-market find).

Elsewhere in the flat are a few paintings on

*‘It is a careful balance between adapting to a client and giving myself’*

panels that Jorge and Elsa brought with them from Madrid. Behind the dining table rest three rough boards painted with delicate little flowers, reminiscent of the meadow in which Botticelli’s goddesses gracefully tread in *Primavera*. In his studio he’s in the process of painting a life-size horse for somebody who loves polo. He is adamant that ‘it won’t be anything like the usual clichéd depictions of polo ponies.’ As Elsa points out, not only are Jorge’s creations intensely personal – he admits he couldn’t possibly employ an assistant – they radiate ‘good taste and style’ □  
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