

sense of calm

Carefully curated pieces and a palette of muted tones give interior designer Rui Ribeiro's west London flat a composed air that feels contemporary yet timeless

TEXT CHRISTOPHER STOCKS | PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES MCDONALD

HALL A Forties black leather **armchair** by Frits Henningsen and an ox-blood lacquer **table** by Rui Ribeiro Studio sits on a custom-made **rug** from The Dixon Carpet Company. The 'Adelphi' **lantern** by Jamb creates a striking focal point in the kitchen

SITTING ROOM A bespoke **curtain** in suede by Edelman and **walls** in 'Mouse's Back' by Farrow & Ball blend with Adam Magyar's *Squares* **photograph**. The curves of the Forties Danish **armchair** by Frits Henningsen are echoed by a Rui Ribeiro Studio custom **sofa** and a McCollin Bryan 'Coffee Bean' **table**, cast in scagliola in mole. A **cabinet** with parchment doors by Julian Chichester displays a cast-bronze **table lamp** by Paul Mathieu for Willer

Decorators and architects often stress how their designs respect and reflect their local context, whether this happens to be the steamy streets of midtown Manhattan or the leafy lanes of rural England. So it is an oddly refreshing experience to visit an apartment that – while exhibiting a strong, particular and coherent aesthetic – is stylistically so difficult to place. Its design, contents and colour palette offer no clue at all as to its location, and it is only the sitting room's view of a terrace of tall, narrow houses in dazzling white stucco that reveals you are, unmistakably, in one of the smarter parts of west London.

This is the London home of the decorator and designer Rui Ribeiro, who over the past decade or so has quietly established himself as a truly individual talent, featuring regularly in *The House & Garden* Top 100 Interior Designers list. Though he was born in Angola, his parents fled the country during the civil war that followed independence and he was brought up in Portugal. Rui moved to London in 1992 and found himself studying interior design, he says, 'almost completely by chance. A cousin of mine was doing a design course here and invited me to an open day. I went along and thought, "I could do this"'. After three years at Guildhall University he was lucky enough to land a job in the London office of Gensler. Despite the corporate environment, Rui says, 'I learnt many of the skills I still use today, especially time planning and project management.'

Four years later he moved from this workplace with 400 staff to one with a team of 15 when he joined Studio Reed, the company founded by the interior designer Jonathan Reed. Since setting up on his own in 2007, Rui has worked on projects in the UK, Middle East and the US. Though he admires the work of British designers, such as Chester Jones, who work with master craftsmen, his look is completely his own. 'I tend to respond to textural surfaces and geometric patterns,' he says. You can see this in his one-bedroom flat, where a restrained palette of greys and browns is modulated by rough-textured fabrics, ceramics and woods. 'We've been through a long period where everything has been very smooth, but that does not reflect my design aesthetic now.'

Rui's flat is just a short walk from Kensington Gardens, on a quiet residential street. 'At night, the only thing we can hear is foxes barking,' he says. He and his partner had lived in larger flats in Chelsea and Knightsbridge, but downsized

five years ago to buy this one. They also have a much bigger apartment in Lisbon, where Rui now spends about a third of his time and where he is soon to open a studio and gallery, with plans to launch his first furniture collection.

The designer treated the new London flat as a blank canvas, jettisoning virtually all the furniture from his previous homes and starting again from scratch. The layout is simple, with the bedroom, bathroom and sitting room all opening off the entrance hall and forming a modest enfilade with the kitchen at the far end. Rui has removed the door between the sitting room and the hall and widened the resulting gap, so the two now flow seamlessly, cleverly transforming a standard Victorian room into a calm, contemporary space. The distinctive furniture is mainly British, French and Danish, and ranges from an early 20th-century dresser in the kitchen, designed by Ambrose Heal, to McCollin Bryan's pill-shaped scagliola coffee table in the sitting room. So is this interior his final word on design? Rui laughs. 'My taste is constantly evolving,' he explains. 'If I were to decorate this apartment again, I would probably do it in a totally different way' □

Rui Ribeiro Studio: 020-7243 4209;
ruiiribeirostudio.com

A RESTRAINED PALETTE OF GREYS AND BROWNS IS MODULATED BY ROUGH-TEXTURED FABRICS, CERAMICS AND WOODS

OPPOSITE TOP ROW FROM LEFT Ceramic pieces are displayed on a Sixties oak 'Bovine' cabinet by Guillaume et Chambron, next to which is an oak easel from Green & Stone with a taxidermy snowy owl by Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren. 'Opera' chairs by Soane sit well with the 'Erasmus' dining table by Promemoria. The Plain English kitchen, finished in Farrow & Ball's 'Mouse's Back' paint to match the walls, has an antique copper sink set into a granite worktop. BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT In the bedroom, Edward Burtynsky's *Dryland Farming #8* colour print hangs above a bespoke headboard by Rui Ribeiro Studio in Zimmer + Rohde linen, with bronze lights by Galerie Smith. Geometric tiles set off a Czech & Speake basin, a mirror by Rui Ribeiro Studio and a Restoration Hardware wall light

