

BAZAAR

LIVING

EDITED BY CHARLOTTE BROOK

A SCULPTOR'S SANCTUARY

Step inside Nicole Farhi's atmospheric Hampstead home.
Plus: the renaissance of craft; and design-led delicacies

PHOTOGRAPH BY KENSINGTON LEVERNE

The house of fortune

Curiosities and lucky finds abound in the designer-turned-sculptor Nicole Farhi's artistically decorated Hampstead home

BY CHARLOTTE BROOK PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENSINGTON LEVERNE



The living-room of Nicole Farhi's house in Hampstead. Opposite: Farhi on her staircase. She wears her own clothes throughout



COCKTAIL HOUR AT NICOLE Farhi's house is a transportive event. Although the French fashion designer-turned-sculptor and her husband, the playwright David Hare, have lived in their Hampstead home for more than 40 years, the Georgian villa retains a beguilingly Parisian atmosphere. When friends come

round of an evening, they perch on high stools while their hostess fixes aperitifs from behind a raised, horseshoe-shaped counter. 'Of course! I am the barmaid,' Farhi says, demonstrating how she uses the equipment, which she rescued from a favourite café in Paris' Les Halles food market when it closed in the 1970s.



One of Farhi's sculptures. Right: the studio. Bottom right: the entrance to the dining-room

'When we first moved into this house, I didn't know what to do with this second sitting-room – it felt very grand, and quite unnecessary, to have two,' she says. 'I soon learnt that the bar had been put in storage after my friend, the owner, sold the place, and I thought that buying it and bringing it here would be the perfect solution.' As well as being fabulously chic and an unexpectedly metropolitan touch for a traditional English 'front room', the bar is highly functioning – plumbed into the water supply, with its former 'shop shelves' now storing glasses and the odd bottle of champagne.

A similar history of happenstance lies behind the 'Nicole Farhi' sign that now adorns the dining table on her terrace – she was driving past one of her shops as it was being refurbished and asked the builder if she could



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have the signage, instead of it going in the skip. 'It's quite good fun, the way things come into your life and house,' she says.

Farhi's very first encounter with the house was a *coup de foudre*. 'I arrived to look around, saw the chequerboard marble floor in the entrance hall and fell slightly in love immediately,' she remembers. 'I held my breath as we went round the rest of the house, but I loved how the whole place both looked and was laid out.' With its floor-to-ceiling sash windows, shutters, cornicing, sweeping staircase and expansive rooms, there was little to do in the way of structural work, other than simplification. 'I haven't changed anything except to take things out – I removed the curtains, the carpets and the paint on some walls to expose the paneling,' she explains. 'I wanted to go back to what it used to be.'

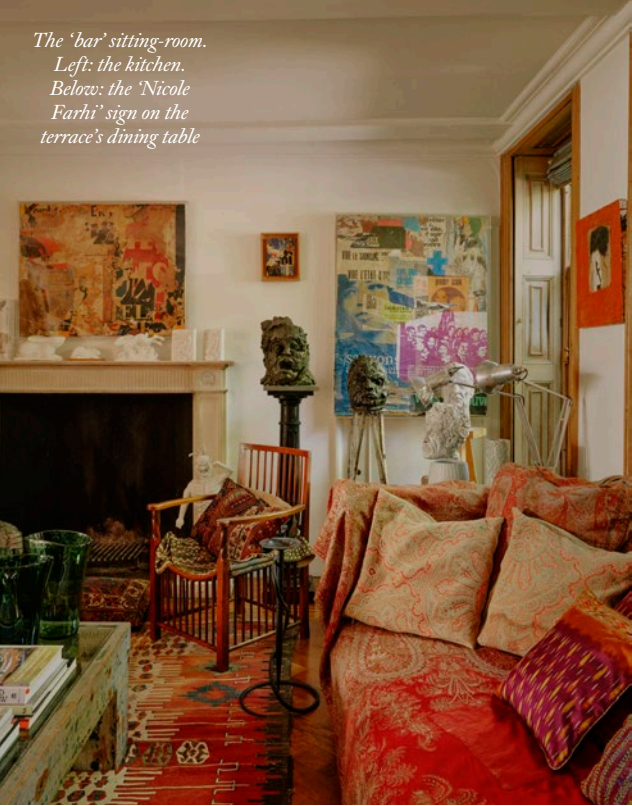
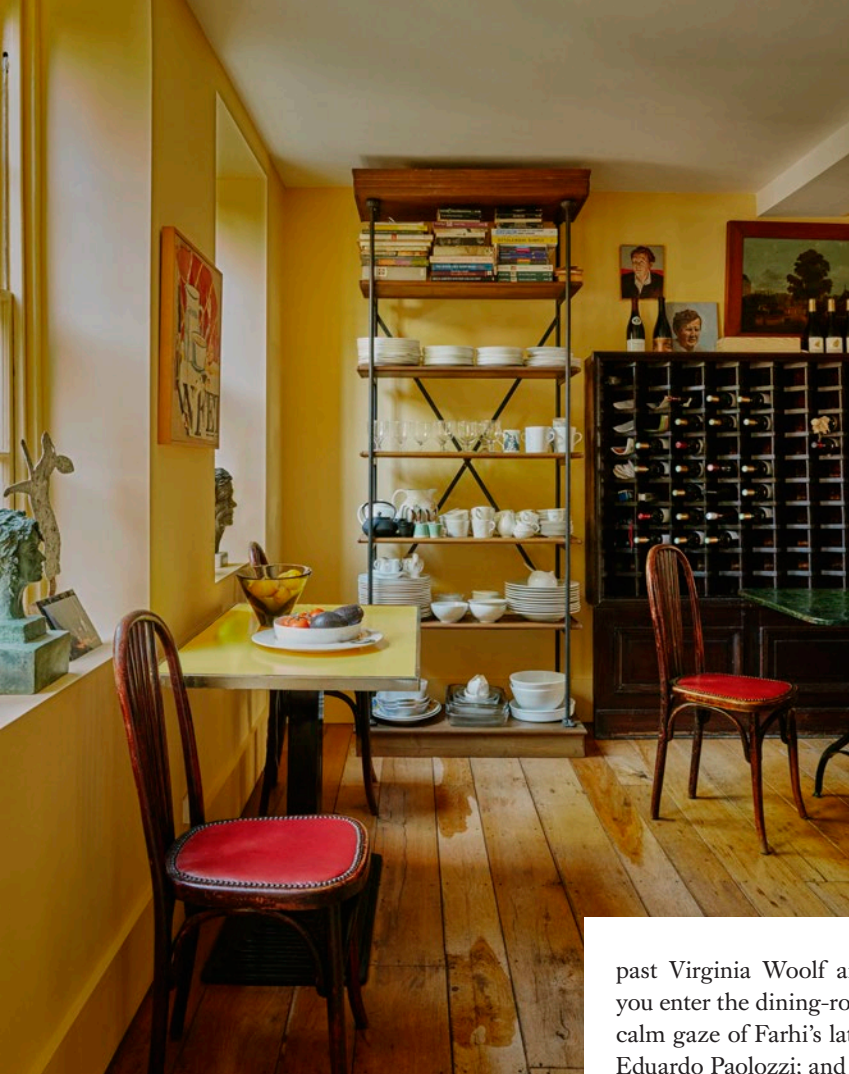
When the couple bought the house in 1979, Farhi's worldly belongings filled just one room but, fortunately, she was already a furniture-sourcing connoisseur, thanks to years of commuting to Paris every fortnight to trawl the flea markets for pieces to

sell in her Nicole Farhi Home shop in Soho. Slowly, the house was populated with beautiful antiques and vintage trinkets – some recognisable, including a Charles Rennie Mackintosh wooden chair; others anonymous, such as the coffee-table's candlesticks or the cane sofas on which we settle down to chat. 'We've never bothered to change the original upholstery on these – they are full of holes!' she says. 'I like them that way – I like old stuff. It makes me feel at home when everything reminds me of something.'

That said, a modern sensibility also pervades the house, due in part to the ever-changing selection of Farhi's sculptures, which are displayed throughout – among them her exquisite jesmonite portrayals of female bodies. There are also her expressive figurative busts, whose presence gives each room a curiously companionable feeling. Walking up the stairs takes you



Above: Farhi in her studio. Left: one of her figurative works



The 'bar' sitting-room. Left: the kitchen. Below: the 'Nicole Farhi' sign on the terrace's dining table

The bar is fabulously chic and brings an unexpectedly metropolitan touch to a traditional English 'front room'



PHOTOGRAPHS: KENSINGTON LEVERNE

past Virginia Woolf and Joan Didion; as you enter the dining-room you can feel the calm gaze of Farhi's late mentor, the artist Eduardo Paolozzi; and pairs of trailblazing women, from Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas to Nina Simone and the writer Lorraine Hansberry, sit patiently in Farhi's studio – a vast, airy former greenhouse that runs along an entire wall of the garden. It is a bright, minimalist blank canvas in comparison with the main house, which is replete with earthy, reddish hues, books, artworks and bibelots.

These juxtapositions are perhaps at the heart of what defines Farhi's style. 'I can like something richly ornate, and then the simplicity of something else,' she says. 'My house in France is the opposite of here – it's an open-plan glass building. I used a lot of clean lines in my clothes designs, and my most recent sculptures are quite geometric.'

Yet I also like history, old places and things with a story, and some of the works I make now are tactile and organic.'

She says she practically lives in her studio, spending every day there from breakfast until she clocks off for a small glass of whisky at 6pm. You can see why – quite apart from how passionate she clearly is about her work, this is a sublime space, full of light, with a fig-tree on one side and doors leading onto the lawn on the other. 'This has become my home, really,' she says, as we wander back through to the house, encountering Hare, with whom she is about to set off to see a play at the Donmar Warehouse.

No wonder the couple have no plans ever to sell up. 'This is not like a house in London,' says Farhi, mentioning in passing that she used to keep hens in the garden. 'It's different.'

Nicole Farhi (www.nicolefarhisculpture.com). □

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