



“As one of life’s deep thinkers, I often wonder what colour ditchwater is”

72 **CAROL MIDGLEY**



“The shoes fitted like Lycra and delivered a revelatory kiss”

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“It’s wild inside a designer’s brain this winter”

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# THE ITALIAN JOB

Fashion label Ermenegildo Zegna is famed for its streamlined look, and Anna Zegna's Milan flat shows the same unfussy approach

REPORT VINNY LEE PHOTOGRAPHS RAY MAIN





**'WORKING WITH  
MENSWEAR, DISCIPLINE  
IS IMPORTANT. IT'S THE  
SAME WITH FURNITURE'**

Two years ago, Anna Zegna, granddaughter of Ermenegildo Zegna and communications director of the Italian fashion group, decided to make her life simpler. The company's textile mills and her family home are in the Biella Alps of northern Italy, but the head office of the business is in Milan – a four-hour round trip away.

"I got bored with living in hotels," says Anna. "I am usually in Milan one night a week and then more during the fashion shows, and sometimes for a dinner or event. I got to the stage where I wanted a place of my own, with my own pillow."

The "place of her own" is a duplex, the top two floors of a house in the Garibaldi district, one of the oldest parts of Milan. She chose the area because it is close to Zegna's head office and the motorway, making trips to and from home easier. The district also has character. "It's like a village, with small bakeries and artisans' shops," Anna enthuses. The duplex is part of a tall, narrow building from the early 1900s. To help organise the jumble of small rooms inside, she turned to the notable Italian architect and designer Antonio Citterio, who, together with his colleague Patricia Viel, embraced the challenge to create a *des res*.

The brief was to create something more than a pied-à-terre. The apartment needed to be adaptable, somewhere Anna would be comfortable on her own, but accommodating when her husband Franco Ferraris and their children came to stay. The other factor >>

Previous page, from left: the "secret" staircase to the roof garden; Anna Zegna at her extendable dining table. This page, clockwise from right: top of the staircase that leads to

the rooftop garden and pavilion; Anna Zegna; detail of the kitchen storage; the Arc Linea kitchen; the rooftop pavilion, with mural of cherry trees and birds behind the day bed





**'WHEN I SIT ON A CHAIR OR A SOFA, I LIKE TO FEEL AS THOUGH IT FITS ME LIKE A JACKET'**

<< needing to be taken into account was that if, in time, Julia, aged 14, and Vittorio, 12, wanted to complete their education in the city, the duplex would be able to house them on a more permanent basis.

Anna had long admired Citterio's work and knew he was the man for the job. "Antonio blends modern style with comfort; his designs are not cold or contrived. He is married with children, so has a real life, and he knows where the limits are."

Anna's background in fashion also provided guidelines. "I have learnt from working with menswear that discipline is important and it is the same with furniture: the basic elements stay the same but you can update and add to them, and when I sit on a chair or a sofa, I like to feel as though it fits me like a jacket. It should be so comfortable that you hardly notice it's there." So adaptability and comfort were key considerations when the Citterio team put pen to paper.

Above: Vittorio's bedroom, with Anna's own student desk

The narrow entrance hall is painted with an African-inspired mural by Michela Curetti. "There are three doorways of different sizes in this wall and I thought that a bold design would help to disguise them," says Anna, as she leads through to the living room. Here there is a table designed by Citterio. Its sides can be raised to seat eight diners or to give Anna ample desk space, but when not in use, the sides fold down and it becomes a console table, with four stools that slot neatly underneath.

Above the table are four lunar photographs by Luca Missoni. "I decided to have only photographs in the apartment, no paintings," says Anna. Opposite the table is a long sofa upholstered in linen, and adjacent is an antique oriental cabinet that she bought in Sardinia. In front of the windows are two battered leather armchairs from a Parisian market, and true to her word their deep arms envelope you as you sit back.

To the far side of the entrance hall is the kitchen, with a wall of cupboards faced in elm. German elm is used throughout the apartment, in broad timbers on the floor and in bead-blasted panels on cupboards. Bead-blasting raises the profile of the grain and gives a soft, textured finish. "I chose elm because it has a warm colour," Anna explains.

The kitchen cupboards follow an eccentric curve in the wall. "They are cut on the bias, like a dress," says Anna. These cupboards conceal food storage, fridge, freezer, glasses and china. The table and hob section in the centre were designed by Citterio for Arc Linea, but adapted to suit the smaller scale of this room and are teamed with smart folding chairs by De Lucchi.

Behind the table is a deep alcove that contains the sinks, dishwasher and other appliances, which can be closed off by two sliding elm doors. The handles of these doors, and all the others, are recessed. "That's one of Citterio's trademarks," says Anna. "They are wonderful because you never catch yourself or your clothes on them." The only unadorned wall in the room is painted vibrant Pompeii Red.

Back in the hall, one of the African mural-painted doors opens on to a small staircase, which leads to the upper floor. At this level and to the back of the house is Anna's bedroom. The space was too small to accommodate a wholly separate en suite bathroom, so a pair of raffia-fronted, glass-panelled folding doors was installed. The raffia obscures the view but not the light, and the glass keeps the steam and sound at bay. A small vestibule between the bedroom and the corridor is lined with cupboards for clothes and shoes.

The children's rooms are under the slope of the roof at the front of the house; both have murals by Michela Curetti and enough room for a study area. In Julia's room there is a Vitra desk and Cassina chair, and in Vittorio's the desk that his mother used as a student. Their beds are inspired by Japanese futons, but adapted and raised on a plinth, with built-in headboard storage units.

The corridor between the bedrooms is lined with elm-fronted doors. One leads to a bathroom and others to cupboards, but one opens to reveal a "secret" staircase that leads to a rooftop garden and pavilion. The glass and metal pavilion was in situ when Anna bought the property, but she had the ceilings painted with a bitumen and paint mix that gives a weather-worn appearance. The wall above the day bed, which is built on a raised platform, has been decorated with a mural of cherry trees and birds, the petals and tail feathers of which are randomly overlaid with appliqué fabric. When a breeze rustles the linen curtains, the painted birds and flowers seem to move as well – you could almost be in the garden of Anna's mountainside home in Biella. ■

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