

# METRO Property

**Eclectic:** The interior style of the house is quirky and colourful



PHOTOS: LONDONLOCATIONHOUSE.COM



**Vintage:** Natasha's rocking horse. Right: An original wrought-iron fireplace

## The family home we share with the stars

Oliver Stallwood meets a west London family whose quirky home has found fame as a sought-after location space

**T**HE time is 7am, and a large lorry is arriving outside an Edwardian terrace house in Kensal Rise. When the children are packed off to school, a dozen people file in, the floor is covered with plastic sheets and boxes of equipment are unloaded.

Then another family arrives – the husband, wife, teenage son, grandparents and visiting friends – while giant daylight lamps are rigged up in the garden and over the kitchen skylights to give the impression of a sunny day, despite the rain outside.

This is the world of the location house, an otherwise ordinary family home that today will be the setting for a cream commercial. The property is owned by Natasha Courtenay-Smith, a web designer and digital and publicity strategist who works with celebrities and high-profile individuals.

'I couldn't believe so many people were up and ready to start work so early,' she recalls. 'It was really exciting and also a bit odd, because you are sort of sidelined. The house is no longer yours, it is flooded with people putting up lights, taking down pictures, putting up their own pictures – they replaced all our dining room table chairs with their own chairs in about 10 minutes. The crew just take over the house. But everyone was really friendly.'

Natasha's house has played host to numerous commercials, editorial and website photoshoots. The income varies depending on the use of the house, but it can make a serious dent in the mortgage. Editorial shoots pay between £250 and £500 a day, but commercials are where the money

is – they pay between £750 and £2,000 per day. 'How much you make really depends on your contacts,' says Natasha. 'Although it's good to be with location agencies, it's also really good to have lots of contacts with production companies.'

Ex-journalist Natasha first learned about location houses when she started going to other homes for shoots. She realised it was a great way to earn money – she just needed a suitable house.

'I always loved shoots and thought it was a brilliant thing for a homeowner to do. It means a bit of extra income, but also you get to meet lots of creative and interesting people.'

Natasha and her partner Alastair bought the property last September. It hadn't been modernised for 40 years and needed a lot of work. 'It had also been empty for around a year so was freezing cold and very stale,' she explains.

'There was damp, everything was falling apart, the door to the garden was completely stuck and you had to kick it open. Enormous fat spiders had strung up webs across the garden and were sitting in the middle, meaning you couldn't even walk down there.'

A lot had to be replaced, including the plumbing, electrics and gas, but some of the original features were saved. The floor in the hallway was recovered, having been concreted and then tiled over. It was missing many of its original tiles but tiler Paul Johnston ([victoriantiling.com](http://victoriantiling.com)), who specialises in repairing old floors, replicated them to fill in the missing patches.

The wrought-iron fireplaces and decorative balustrades were also recovered. Despite efforts to save



**Brand new:** Natasha had the ultra-modern kitchen fitted when she moved in

them, some parts, such as the skirting boards, turned out to be rotten and had to go.

The rear of the house was removed and extended and the house is now open-plan from front to back, so light floods in at both ends, helped by three large kitchen skylights.

The loft was also converted to create more space. In the end, a total 1400 sq ft (130sqm) is now 1800sq ft (167sqm).

The interior style of the house is eclectic. Having stuck to a white palette with property renovations in the past, Natasha wanted something quirky and colourful this time around. 'My favourite pieces are my vintage circus arrow (pictured above) – it is original and was sourced from Massachusetts by Charlie Gladstone, the owner of vintage shop Pedlars in



**NATASHA'S** top tips for getting your home noticed in the location business:

- The better connected you are with production companies the more you can make your house work.
- Make sure your house is up to the job. It's really to do with the size: it needs to be fairly wide, with a big front door and

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wide hallway, and also long so that they can get longer shots. For food shoots, they need to be able to stand back from the kitchen. Ceiling height also matters as there may need to be space to put up a white backdrop.

- If your house is unique, like a stately home, a windmill or a barge, then it is taken on its own

merit and will have less competition.

- It doesn't need to be completely modern. Some people register really old-fashioned houses, as there is always a chance of a drama or advert being shot.
- Off-street parking helps, as a crew can bring a lot of vehicles, including lorries containing lights and equipment.



**In the picture:** A kitchen shoot