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# THE STYLE PAGES

## Rise and shine

*The rebirth of a  
once gloomy North London  
home, page 62*



# The light house

*A therapist who specialises in conflict resolution has transformed her London home with glass and modern art*

REPORT Monique Rivalland  
PHOTOGRAPHS Logan MacDougall-Pope

Ron Arad table and  
Madeleine Boulestex  
chandelier in the dining room





**W**hen Gabrielle Rifkind says there's nothing precious in her ornate and art-filled home, what she really means is she's not precious. "I love the aesthetic, but I try not to get too attached to objects. This is not just a personal house – it's more like an institution. A lot of people come in and out of it, so it needs resilience and robustness."

Over the past 20 years, Rifkind's four-storey, five-bedroom Victorian giant in Belsize Park, North London, has served not only as a home for herself, her husband and their two (now adult) sons, Zander and Jake, but also for her psychotherapy practice and, rather unusually, as a meeting place for Middle Eastern officials working on conflict resolution.

Interested in how psychoanalysis can be used as a tool for peacemaking, in 2000, at the onset of the Second Intifada, Rifkind was invited to train analysts in Israel. It was here that she became involved in Middle Eastern issues.

Her guests have included members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Afghan presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani, who gave her the rug in her living room as a thank-you gift.

In what may seem an incongruous theme, everywhere you look in Rifkind's home there are naked bodies. Women bare all in paintings; torsos adorn mantelpieces. In the kitchen, there's a nude man cast in clay and a life-size wire figurine sitting by the window. The

**Guests have included members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Afghan presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani**



Artwork by Henry Moore (back wall, top left) in a ground-floor reception room. Opposite: Rifkind re-arranging her art collection



Clockwise from this image: first-floor view of the glass wall; the Madeleine Boulesteix chandelier; life-sized wire figurine; living room detail



nudity, however, is mostly concealed before her gatherings take place. She covers the ceramic mannequin, a Christy Brown, by dressing it in an oversized coat. "There may be a sensitivity around that. I want people to feel comfortable."

Rifkind and her husband, businessman Jonathan Levy, bought the house in the early Nineties because it was "impersonal and soulless" and there was lots of scope to put their mark on it. The walls are now covered with her impressive collection of artworks, some of which are her own gouache paintings. In a ground-floor reception room hangs an original Henry Moore. "I had the audacity to put one of my own underneath," she says.

When the family moved in, top of Rifkind's to-do list was to knock down every inner wall she could, plus the load-bearing wall that their architect said they shouldn't touch. "But we did. We put in steel poles," she says. Now when you walk through the front door, you are met with a vast open expanse that contains the kitchen, dining room and a small living room. The centrepiece is a steel table by Israeli

designer Ron Arad, who bought Rifkind's old apartment. It is around this table, beneath the Madeleine Boulesteix chandelier, made from small glass cups and a baking mould, that she hosts her regular discussions. "This table has been completely transformative," she says.

At the back, a 1.5m section of wall, spanning the ground and first floor, has been knocked out and replaced with a pane of glass. A portion of the adjoining ground floor has also been rebuilt in glass, so when you stand on it you can see from the floor of the first floor to the ceiling of the first floor. "You won't find any carpets," Rifkind says. Or textiles. "I don't go for curtains. I don't see the point in them. Light is important."

**In one room hangs an original Henry Moore. 'I had the audacity to put one of my own paintings underneath,' says Rifkind**





Clockwise from this image: Christy Brown's mannequin in the living room; the exterior of the home; the bathroom

It's better that you like your garden and have a relationship between inside and out."

That Rifkind's house would be defined by openness and transparency is unsurprising when you consider her line of work, but she says the design has been a joint venture. "My husband and I have known each other so long, our taste easily synchronises. Or perhaps I'm a little dominant in these matters." The only thing Levy has never understood is the industrial-steel serving trolley in the kitchen, which Rifkind says was once "the thing to wheel bodies around in the hospital."

It's the stark contrast of metal with her wooden floors and corniced walls that appeals to her. "I love steel and dark wood. I love the paradox, the irony, the tension between the two," says Rifkind. "I suppose you could call it a house of paradoxes." An interesting concept for somebody so keen to keep the peace. ■

*Fog of Peace: the Human Face of Conflict Resolution* by Gabrielle Rifkind and Giandomenico Picco (£25) is published by I.B. Tauris

