



LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

# Posh and Pampered Indoor Greenhouse

Famous for her glamorously minimalist interiors, London designer Rose Uniacke rescued an unloved indoor gallery in her nineteenth-century mansion, creating a light-filled conservatory that evokes an era when Victorian plant hunters roamed the globe in search of the exotic.

OPPOSITE: As you enter the house, Uniacke's glass-roofed conservatory is the first room you see, visible through four pairs of arched glass doors. (Although the doors look steel-framed, they actually are finely constructed in wood by English artisans.) The house's original owner, Scottish high-society portrait painter James Rannie Swinton (1816–1888), would usher clients into the high-ceilinged room to view his work. If they were suitably impressed and commissioned a painting, they would sit for a portrait in his adjoining studio.



The Georgian Revival-style villa that London interior designer and antiques dealer Rose Uniacke and her husband, film producer David Heyman, bought in 2007 had fallen on unfortunate times. Divided into apartments, it had an ugly staircase, fire-door partitions—and an odd domed gallery in the center of the main floor. But Uniacke (who trained as a furniture restorer, gilder, and specialist in paint and lacquer finishes before opening her eponymous shop on London's premiere antiques row on Pimlico Road) was up for the challenge. Known for the serenely restrained interiors she creates for clients including Victoria and David Beckham and perfumier Jo Malone, Uniacke hired Belgian minimalist architect Vincent Van Duysen to reimagine the space.

And thus was born the luxuriously rustic conservatory that Uniacke calls the Winter Garden. The first step in transforming the gallery was to remove an inferior 1970s glass roof from the classical domed ceiling. "Suddenly the ceiling seemed vastly higher," says Uniacke. "It radically changed the feel of the space. The proportions of the room became fabulous."

Discovering that the original wooden rafters were still in place, she had them wire-brushed clean and left them exposed. Layers of plaster were stripped from the walls, revealing beautiful bare brick that Uniacke left raw. She furnished the space with a mix of antiques from her shop.

To choose plants for the indoor garden, Uniacke brought in Tom Stuart-Smith, London's landscape designer of the moment. Stuart-Smith (who also designed an outdoor garden space on a walled terrace along one side of the house) was "in charge of shape and planting and the mechanics," says Uniacke.

Stuart-Smith wanted to make the space as relaxed and informal as possible, given its grand scale. "All the planting was scattered around with apparent abandon in a variety of containers," he says. A mix of orchids, tropical plants, and climbing vines creates a room that Uniacke calls "totally unexpected."



#### **The Heart of the Matter**

The garden conservatory is where Uniacke and her family entertain, eat together, read, and arrange flowers. The glass in the doors was specially made to copy the wavy, imperfect panes found in old Georgian houses. "It's essential to make all the details interesting," says Uniacke.



### Elements of Style

Most of the furnishings came from Uniacke's shop or were discovered in her travels (she found the terra-cotta floor tiles in a reclamation yard in France). Stuart-Smith supplemented the collection with terra-cotta from Italian Terrace, a British company whose designs are handmade in Italy. A Carrara marble fountain is inscribed "The Gift of CC Walker Esq. 1885." Says Uniacke, "The sound of water makes all the difference." For a less formal look, the fountain was deliberately set off-center.





### 01 Flooded with Light

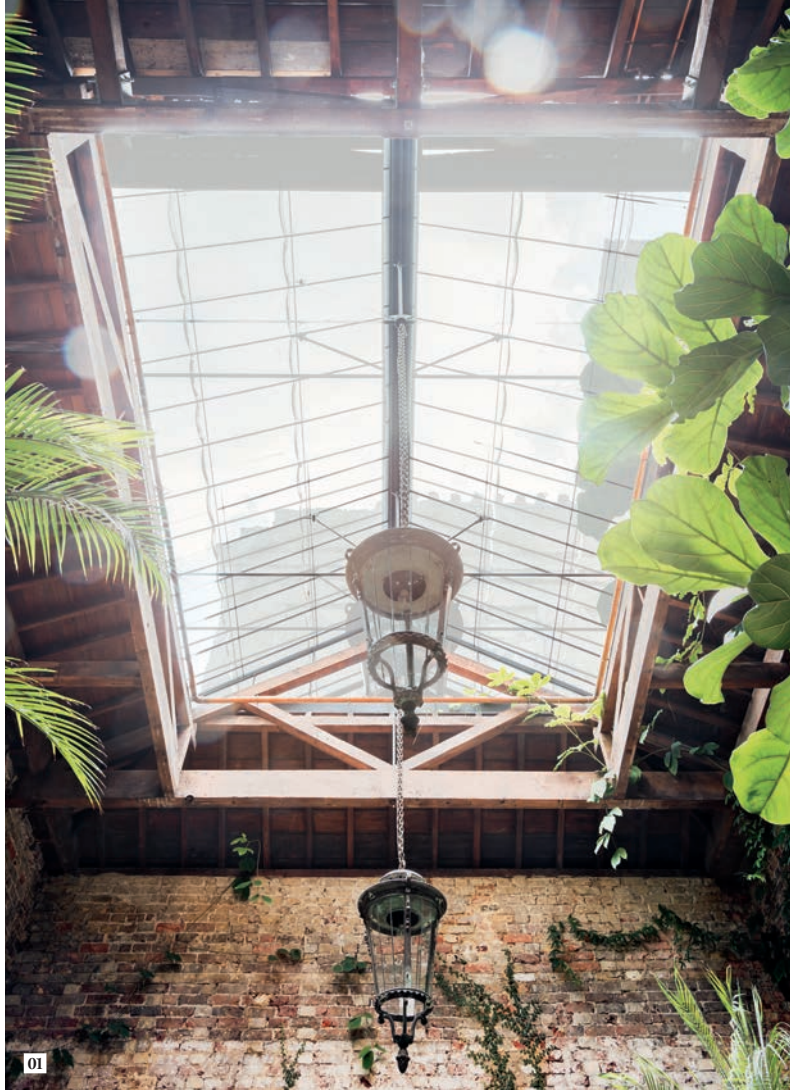
Uniacke worked with Van Duysen to design a skylight that looks as if it could have been lifted from a Victorian greenhouse. The only window in the room, it was designed to be a visual focal point and has overlapping wavy glass tiles (laid the same way as slate tiles on a roof). Even the exposed heating pipes at the base of the skylight are beautiful; they're copper and glow in sunlight.

### 02 A Repurposed Fountain

Uniacke's favorite planter was originally a fountain, most likely made in England. Set on a massive stone base, it's copper with a patina of verdigris, the greenish tinge that appears when some metals are exposed to the air as they age. A pure example of Japonism, it hails from the late nineteenth century, when English taste was powerfully influenced by Japanese arts and crafts.

### 03 Brick and Metal

Most of the furnishings in the Winter Garden—the table, chairs, light fixtures, and candelabra—are made of forged and beaten metal, a material that lends an outdoor air to an indoor room. Exposed brick walls have a similar effect. The climbing plant on the wall to the right is *Cissus rhombifolia*, or oak-leaf ivy, which thrives in low light.



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### Dining Out, Indoors

A vintage French steel conservatory table is the site of frequent family meals. Uniacke calls the table, with its patina of green paint, a "wonderful workhorse." Patinated bronze chairs, designed by a Swiss sculptor and furniture designer, date from the 1950s. A dwarf palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*) lends a tropical air, as does the small-leaved *Ficus pumila* (creeping fig) climbing the wall between the doors.







#### 04 The Statement Plant

One of Stuart-Smith's signature design techniques is to focus attention on a single dramatic plant, in this case a *Ficus lyrata*, or fiddle-leaf fig, with bold foliage.

#### 05 Hothouse Flowers

Uniacke, who chooses all the room's orchids, likes a mix of varieties (almost always green and white). Shown here is a phalaenopsis (also known as a moth orchid); its long-lasting blooms can persevere for up to four months. All orchids require excellent drainage and adequate humidity (Stuart-Smith had a misting system installed in the roof after realizing that the air in the conservatory was too dry).



#### Secret Garden

Uniacke also has an outdoor garden, a walled terrace along one side of the house. Because it was very low and disconnected from the house, Stuart-Smith lifted the level by 3 feet. He paved the floor with old York stone (sandstone quarried in Yorkshire) and flanked the doorway with two euphorbia shrubs. *Euphorbia x pasteurii* is a "new-ish variety," with yellow, honey-scented flowers in late spring.







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## 06 A Layered Look

A mix of different planters and types of foliage gives this space an informal air. A mature olive tree thrives in a deep terra-cotta pot. Against the brick wall, Stuart-Smith planted camellias, southern magnolia, and evergreen *Eriobotrya* shrubs to create solid texture and enclose the space with greenery.

## 07 Ingredients at Hand

When Uniacke bought the property, it already had an ivy-covered facade, where vines of wisteria and Virginia creeper intertwined. The carved stone pedestal urn is another vintage find, and many of the smaller pots hold herbs that Uniacke uses when she cooks.



# Steal This Look

## RUSTIC GLAMOUR



### 01 Hidden Door

Uniacke loved the exposed brick walls and didn't want the look spoiled by a door. But there was a door; how else would one get into the octagonal room beyond (the original owner's painting studio)? To make the door disappear, Uniacke hired movie-set builders to create a trompe l'oeil version. They took an imprint from a section of wall, converted it into fiberglass, and attached it to the existing door.



### 02 A Touch of Venice

The two hanging lanterns are Venetian and date from the late nineteenth century. (Two similar lanterns hang in the hallway just outside the conservatory.) Uniacke had them wired for electricity.



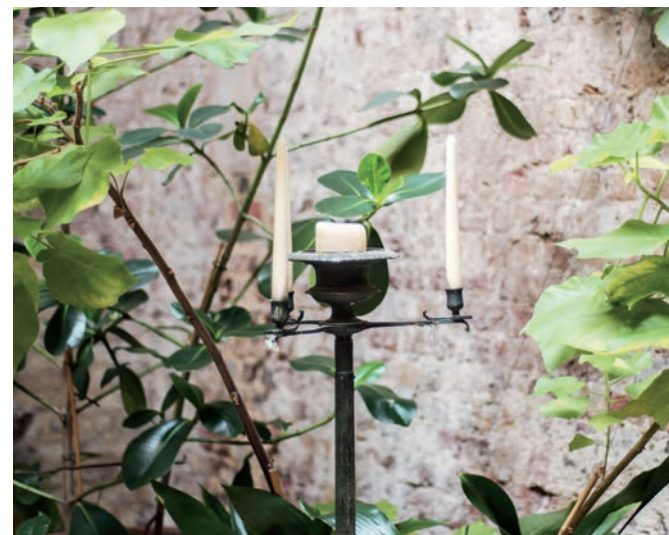
### 03 Antique Sphinxes

This cast-iron planter was made in the late nineteenth century by Paris's renowned Antoine Durenne Foundry. Uniacke sourced the provenance: "We have the original drawings, and we believe these are copies taken from the originals at Versailles." Winged sphinxes form handles—but lifting this solid metal piece is no mean feat. The delicate fronds of a maidenhair fern are a visual counterbalance to the planter's heft.



### 04 Power Seating

The backless design of these cast-iron curule chairs originated in ancient Rome, where the chair was considered the "magistrate's seat," or seat of power. (Napoléon also was partial to the style.) Uniacke's chairs are French, with mesh seats and a green painted finish improved by age.



### 05 Flattering Candlelight

A bronze candelabra, one of a pair, is modeled after ancient Roman versions found at Pompeii. Uniacke thinks hers were cast by the legendary Chiurazzi Foundry in Naples, which was launched in 1870 and still specializes in fine reproductions of classic works. She does know that the pair were made for Yvette Guilbert (1865–1944), a French cabaret singer who headlined at the Moulin Rouge and was a favored subject of Toulouse-Lautrec's.