

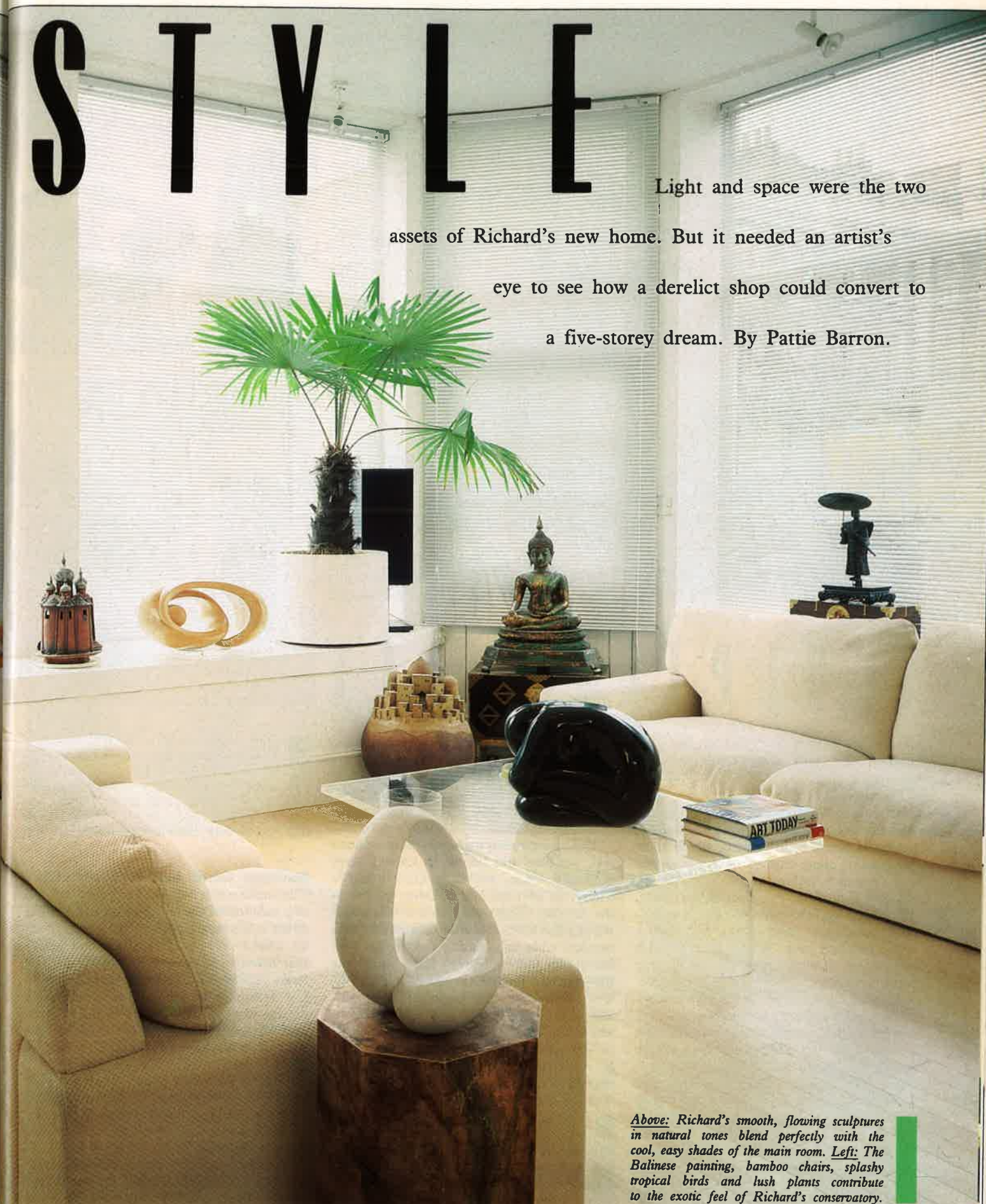
SCULPT

One look at the lavish pictures on these pages and you'd imagine this property—a five-storey town house nestled in one of the prettiest parts of north London—belonged to, say, an international art dealer with a flair for choosing exquisite *objets d'art* and a bank balance that allowed him to buy the best.

In fact, this man of property, Richard (that's him, below, under Flappy the Flamingo's wings), is a dentist specialising in restorative dentistry—and the marvellous, flowing sculptures of wood and marble, (discounting the 'Twenties Chiparus figure, right) are the result of many hours

spent in his studio sited in the basement (see over). And his favourite word for describing when and where he bought things for the home he shares with son Luke, six and a half, and daughter Jodi, five, at weekends, is "bargain" (except for the Chiparus figure). One more point to straighten out: the house started life as an empty shop. But then for someone with a natural, sure sense of style like Richard, who knows just how he wants his home to look, knocking holes in walls and re-siting rooms is the path to perfection: ending up with a place that's *exactly* how you want it. "When I first saw it, it was an empty

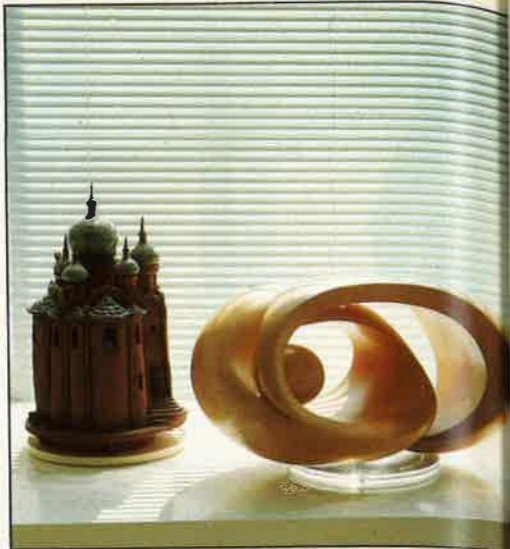
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAN BALDWIN



TEDS STYLE

Light and space were the two assets of Richard's new home. But it needed an artist's eye to see how a derelict shop could convert to a five-storey dream. By Pattie Barron.

Above: Richard's smooth, flowing sculptures in natural tones blend perfectly with the cool, easy shades of the main room. Left: The Balinese painting, bamboo chairs, splashy tropical birds and lush plants contribute to the exotic feel of Richard's conservatory.



SCULPTED STYLE

shop—but the light, I noticed, streamed in from sunrise to sunset.” And that was the selling factor.

So when the builders moved out—four months later—Richard’s first purchase for his new home was good-looking industrial blinds from Ryman, which allow the light to come through and add to the spacious, airy feeling of the front room. And the right floor to reflect all that light, of course: cool blonde wooden boards—only these are good fakes by Amtico with a practical plus: “Marks from the kids scampering around come off easily with white spirit!”

Most of the furniture in his new home—Richard’s been there just over a year—isn’t new, but made a comfortable transfer from Richard’s last flat. He buys well (that sure artist’s eye again) and doesn’t make mistakes. “The things I have are things that I see and I know I just *have* to have. It doesn’t happen very often, so when it does I always try to get them. Like the Buddha—it was in a sale, the shop was closing down—and I bought it years ago. It was a bargain then and an investment now.” The child-proof creamy sofas were made

four years ago in the same style as the sofas in his surgery. (His cool style extends there, too, to blue Japanese screens: a pleasing diversion from the piles of well-leafed magazines you usually find in dentists’ waiting-rooms.)

The dining-room chairs, which are stained a soft, sea-blue and bound in leather, were originally made, via an interior designer friend, to go with lots of sunny yellow in the last flat. This time round it was worth waiting for a suitable match: a beauty of a wooden table in a similar faded blue with marquetry insets of grey, black and white that Richard found in a sale at a large furniture store. Another bargain, that’s right, and the only major new purchase he needed to make.

The classic coffee table, (previous page), is really a plinth for his Belgian black marble sculpture, “Lady in Black”. “It was the cheapest way I could make a support strong enough for the sculpture,” he says. “It’s a standard size sheet of Perspex, with four Perspex tubes.” That appealing clutterless look of the main room, all cool and precision, is easy to maintain: “I keep masses of papers in Dillons’

Above left: Richard’s “Birth” sculpture of Portuguese pink marble, inspired by the births of his two children. Top: The aim of this unusual wood sculpture is to make it look different from every angle. Bottom: An unexpected corner contains Richard’s first ever carving, which he made from a chair leg!

Bookshop plastic bags in a cupboard.” The conservatory (previous page, left), a continuation of the living-room and leading down to Richard’s studio, was a snip to set up with a ready-made skylight and bricks that needed just a coat of whitewash. The large picture that sets the tropical mood was one of a set of Balinese paintings a patient was selling. “I went to the preview and offered a reserve price of £200; that was 12 years ago. And I love it just as much now.”

Two of Richard’s plants have had five homes, but everything—from the papyrus to the coconut palm—obstinately thrives: “I don’t water them very much, they just seem to flourish.”

The elaborate silk kite on the conservatory wall was made originally for the World Trade Fare in Canton; Flappy the



Flamingo, bought from the toy museum in Covent Garden for Luke and Jodi, stares defiantly at two painted, striped wood parrots, from an art gallery. And the inspiration behind the striking centre-piece on the table (previous page)—half a dozen irises and a handful of pebbles submerged in an inch or two of water—was a picture of a Japanese flower arrangement.

Richard’s exceptional sculpting talent—he has had work accepted by the Royal Academy—was sparked while studying restorative dentistry at the University of Southern California. “I became fascinated by the sculptural shapes in dentistry; it was too expensive for me to start sculpting in the States so, 14 years ago, on my return, I took it up at the Camden Arts Centre, and something clicked; now I work from home, sometimes right through

the night till morning.” His favourite medium is marble, which he learnt to carve by watching artisans at Pietrasanta, in Northern Italy, now a frequent work/holiday spot for him.

There’s more than a tenuous connection between Richard’s professional occupation and his personal passion: “With both dentistry and sculpture you’re taught how to use tools, no matter what size they are. And I find it a relief to work on a large scale after the minutiae I work with in the day; it’s a nice contrast.”

Above: Clay maquettes—“sketches” of work possibly to be executed later in marble—line one wall of Richard’s dusty studio. Right: On the second floor, children Luke and Jodi play Monster Mash in the family room that has some more tropical touches.

