

From left A painting by Sue Williams A'Court, *Hope III*, stands in the sitting-room; a view through to the kitchen, with a Matthew Hilton L-shaped sofa in front; the artist in her studio, with a wall of collected objects, and pots she made herself



Photographs by James Merrell

The north London home of the painter Sue Williams A'Court is a study in pastels – and in how to live a creative life without the mess. By Ros Byam Shaw

## A (very neat) artist in residence

Next weekend the artist Sue Williams A'Court is opening her house to the public as part of Crouch End Open Studios. Imagine the angst! First the tidying – the throwing of shoes into the backs of cupboards, the emptying of bowls of foreign coins stuck to hairy lumps of Blu-Tack. Then the worry either that no one will come or that you might find hundreds of strangers queueing down the path eager to jostle their way in, knocking things

over and complaining about not being able to see anything.

The moment you step over her threshold, you realise that mess is not an issue for Sue Williams A'Court. Behind the front door of this late-Victorian terraced house, its brash red brick and frilly woodwork tamed under a uniform coat of Farrow & Ball Light Blue, there are no shoes, or coins, or bits of Blu-Tack. Instead there is an empty hall, and an instant hit of space, light and serenity.

Where others might have coat hooks bulging with anoraks, there hangs a huge mirror with a painted plaster frame of branches topped by a plume of oak leaves.

Opposite the mirror a wide, door-free opening faces a simple, modern chimney-piece. Furnishings are sparse and intimidatingly stylish: two chairs, two coffee tables, and a round rug on painted floorboards. You might expect the rest of the house to be a little less



picture-perfect, especially when you learn that Sue and her husband, Andy A'Court, both work from home, and have an 11-year-old son, Finlay. Not a bit of it. A short flight of stairs leads down from the hall into an equally zen, open-plan, high-ceilinged kitchen and living-room, with a wall of French doors opening on to an immaculate garden with a curve of clipped lawn.

The floor is white, the kitchen cupboards are virginal white lacquer, the kitchen table is a Saarinen with a grey marble top, and the L-shaped Matthew

**It is as if the rooms had been specially designed to frame the artworks. In a way they have**

Hilton sofa is upholstered in soft grey and dotted with cushions in dusty pink

Every decorative object, whether a white plaster Medusa's head by Oriol Harwood or a fluted lamp by Jonathan Adler, seems considered, displayed rather than plonked. A snowy expanse of wall next to the table frames some of the artworks Sue will be showing, a series of drawings of romantic landscapes that look as though they have been roughly cut out from 18th-century engravings and mounted on backgrounds rich with the texture of paint and gesso.

While highly decorative, they are also intriguing, pulling you in to peer closely, inviting you to touch their surface to find out what it consists of, and how it has been done. More hang opposite the sofa on a wall painted the same misty pink as the cushions. They look just right in these poised, pristine spaces, as if the rooms had been specially designed to frame them. Which in a way they have.

Upstairs there are more mirrors and white-painted floors reflecting and maximising light, and more considered arrangements. Even Finlay's bedroom features carefully hung artworks, including a print by Craigie Aitchison.



*Clockwise from above* A pair of CTO Lighting wall lights hang in the sitting-room, which is painted in Farrow & Ball Calamine; the A'Courts designed the kitchen themselves, but found the Pols Potten stools at Abigail Ahern's shop; an Oriol Harwood head





Clockwise from above Found objects in the studio; Finlay's room with a light he made with his mother from disposable plastic beakers, using a glue gun; a Vitra Utensilo storage unit from Aram in the studio

Only at the top of the house where Sue has her studio and where Andy works on his animations, most recently to accompany readings of Russian literature by Stephen Fry, does the perfection slip a tiny bit. It is still preternaturally tidy up here under the roof, but the floorboards are spotted with paint, and the mild chaos of work-in-progress – brushes and pots and tubes of paint – spills out. As for Sue herself, with her blonde hair in plaits, sparkly silver plimsolls and paint-

spattered jeans, she has the look of a schoolgirl, and the energy and enthusiasm to go with it.

On the subject of tidiness, she admits she is a 'natural organiser'. 'We had to do up this house bit by bit, as we could afford it, and I included loads of built-in storage so everything messy can be hidden away. My father was in the RAF and maybe a childhood of having to move every three years has made me less inclined to accumulate things.' She admits that the front room is a space

they tend to look at rather than live in, and says that painted floors, and her new discovery of Dulux Diamond White paint, make the house very easy to clean. 'In the evening we tend to gather in the basement, which is where Finlay, who sings for the Royal Opera, practises his flute and piano, and where we watch films together.'

No need for tidying, then, before next weekend. But I wouldn't be at all surprised if there are queues. ● [suewilliamsacourt.co.uk](http://suewilliamsacourt.co.uk)