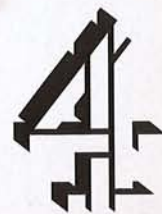


GRAND DESIGNS



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SEBASTIAN CONRAN

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PLUS KEVIN McCLOUD'S TOP TIPS * EXPERT ADVICE FROM TV'S GEORGE CLARKE

Chip off the



Sebastian has several Achille Castiglioni's pieces, such as the Arco floor lamp (£1,400, conranshop.co.uk), which sits in the living room with other iconic pieces, like Le Corbusier's LC4 chaise longue (from £1,640, aram.co.uk) and Barber Osgerby's Loop coffee table (from £1,077, twentytwentyone.com)

old block



Born into British design royalty, Sebastian Conran was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. But he has made his own mark with functional, stylish designs for everything from baby products to cars to kitchen utensils - and his home is the perfect backdrop for his own crop of design classics

Words **Tom Dyckhoff** Photography **Mel Yates**

'Yes, I do like my food.' How could he not? This is Sebastian Conran. The clue's in the surname. How could the eldest son of Sir Terence Conran – who, before Gordon, Jamie and Nigella had lifted their first whisk, practically invented the modern foodie's kitchen with Habitat and an endless run of designer restaurants – not like his food? His uncle is Antonio Carluccio! He was probably weaned on drizzles of organic olive oil. Just imagine if he preferred Pot Noodles and Angel Delight to foccacia and truffles! 'I'd be drummed out of the family,' he chuckles.

So, yes, Sebastian knows his way around a kitchen. 'When I first met my wife, Gertie, she was most impressed by my kitchen. It was black, yes, black, quite dark – very different from kitchens of today which have to be light filled and so on – with an Iroko wood worktop.' It sounds terrifically Eighties. Fast forward 30 years and his current kitchen at his Notting Hill home (yes, it's one of those gorgeous stuccoed villas you'd imagine he'd live in) is every inch that old cliché, the heart of the house – 'Precisely where every kitchen should

be,' says Sebastian. One way the dining room and garden, the other the living room; stand in the middle and you can see the entire open-plan ground floor. It looks very 2009. Stainless-steel range? Check. Stone worktop? Check. Recessed halogen lights? Yes. Liberally sprinkled with pots, pans and jars designed by the man himself. This is a very personal – and professional – kitchen.

During more than 30 years as a product designer, designing everything from pushchairs to phones and Nissan's Cube car, Sebastian Conran

'I'm not interested at all in designing fancy stuff for spoilt people. I'm interested in the ordinary stuff'

has created more than his fair share of saucepans, taps and whisks, too. Sebastian's the man behind Nigella Lawson's best-selling kitchenware range, Living Kitchen, with its muted colours and nod to Fifties nostalgia. But it's his latest range, Universal Expert, for John Lewis, that's on display here at home. And with good reason. He uses what he designs. This man knows his stuff. There's little about the correct functioning of a utensil holder that he does not know. 'What drives me mad,' he says, 'is not knowing instantly where all the things are and how they work. I want to be able to reach for a pepper grinder and grind, not have to fumble around, then have to work out how I get pepper out.' His designs, like him, are elegantly no-nonsense – they look nice, all smooth edges and understated charm, but they work, too; an obvious point, but often a luxury with product design.

'I'm what you might call an old-fashioned designer,' says Sebastian. 'I like things that function. I like to pull things apart. If you'd asked me when I was 11 what I wanted to be it would have been an inventor. I was a bit dyslexic, so__

Fact file

Who Sebastian Conran, managing director, Studio Conran (studioconran.com)

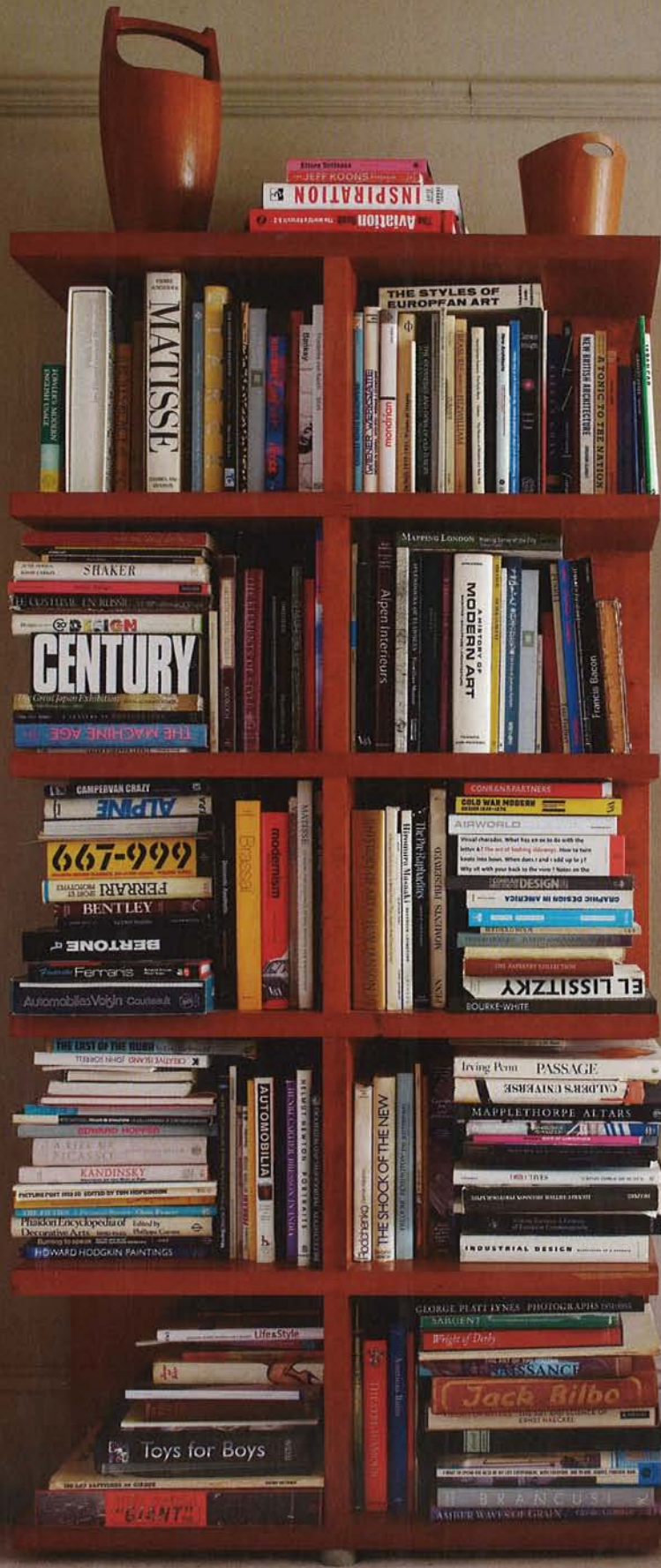
Lives Notting Hill, west London

Background Eldest son of design guru Sir Terence Conran, Sebastian has worked both inside the family business and out. He was head of product design at Mothercare in the Eighties, before establishing Sebastian Conran Associates in 1986, going on to work with designer Tom Dixon. In 1999 he merged with the Conran group to form Conran & Partners

Famous for Via, the mould-breaking pushchair for Mothercare, and Nigella Lawson's Living Kitchen range

right The Beep light in the living room was designed by Sebastian; he rides his classic Moulton bicycle every day
far right This bookcase is a Conran Shop prototype: 'I think it's one of my dad's best designs,' says Sebastian. The Matisse reproduction lithographs were a present from his mum. Sori Yanagi's butterfly stool sits perfectly with them (from £354, thelollipopshoppe.co.uk)





'I'm what you might call an old-fashioned designer. I like things that function. I like to pull things apart. If you'd asked me when I was 11 what I wanted to be it would have been an inventor'



MY FAVOURITE THINGS...

Kitchen gadget I'll have to say John Lewis' Universal Expert steamer! However, before that it was a Japanese mandolin called the Benringer - it's about the most un-designed and Jeep-ugly piece of simple-utility design, but it works better than any other I have tried.

Meal to cook at home Usually we go for duck breast with steamed baby potatoes and green beans. If we're entertaining, courgette risotto is good for non-meat eaters.

Food to eat in a restaurant Devilled kidneys on toast - delicious, but smelly and fiddly to prepare. My wife won't eat them!

Piece of product design An impossible choice to make. Really it should be elegance lying in simplicity, such as the Sori Yanagi serving tongs. But an example from our age might be an Apple iPod Touch with in-ear headphones, or MacBook Air. But I also use my Moulton bicycle every day, and hanker for the AMGT with its stainless-steel space frame. So Moulton is my final choice.

Shops The Conran Shop, John Lewis, the Design Museum shop and Ripmax models on Parkway, Camden Town, where I used to drool over model aircraft as a child.

didn't do as well at school with writing, history and all that as I might, but I was good at physics, metalwork and chemistry. Anything in which I could get my hands a bit dirty. Noticing his propensity for tinkering around with things, his father gave him a little workshop. 'Before I could read - which was quite late - I could strip a clock down and reassemble it. I was forever taking things apart.' This practicality has stayed with him ever since. 'Do you know the kind of things that keep me up at night? How to design a better cafetière. I'm not interested at all in designing fancy stuff for spoilt people. I'm interested in the ordinary stuff. I like to put the cheerful into cheap. I'm working on my ninth knife range at the moment, and you think, "How can I reinvent this thing that's been reinvented so many times?" But then you remember form follows failure, form follows fashion, and form follows budget. And you design a better functioning knife, that taps into current fashions, and for different budgets. There are, he thinks, two kinds of design: the starry stuff produced by big names like Ron Arad or Tom Dixon, or the behind the scenes stuff. He's

always been interested in the latter. 'I'm not interested in being a design pop star. When you've worked with real pop stars the allure sort of fades.'

Ah yes. I forgot to say. There can't be many product designers for John Lewis who've been a roadie for The Clash. While studying industrial design engineering at Central College of Art and Design in the mid-Seventies, Sebastian, the 'posh punk', was living in a huge, clapped-out house on the edge of Regent's Park. 'So we had a party and The 101'ers [the band Joe Strummer left to form The Clash] came to play. Next thing you know, 'being the only practical sort in the house, you know the only one who could change a plug', Sebastian was on tour with The Clash. He ended up designing singles covers, such as *White Riot* and *Complete Control*, and posters and T-shirts.

That rebellious streak has never really left him. His house is dotted with punk memorabilia that cuts an acid streak through a lovely, tasteful home. It's stuffed with design classics - Sori Yanagi's Butterfly Stool, Achille Castiglioni's Arco floor lamp, Le Corbusier's chaise longue, Barber Osgerby's Loop coffee table. This is the pad of__

above left Designing a kitchenware range for John Lewis was a dream project for Sebastian, who uses the collection in his own kitchen **above right** Pictures in the dining area symbolise Sebastian's youth, designing record sleeves, T-shirts and posters during his punk years. The face is a self portrait by his eldest son, Sam **right** The sailing boat on the unit belongs to Sebastian's son Max and was a present from his 'Great Aunt Book' (Priscilla Conran). The table is from an old board room; it has been resurfaced with black Formica and teamed with Conran Shop chairs. The rugs are from Marrakech, where Sebastian met his wife, Gertrude



a posh punk who grew up. Like the man, like his designs, the home is elegantly no-nonsense. 'It's a place for living in,' he says. 'But it has to work.'

Which must have made the past five years since moving in particularly gruelling. 'We're about to start really stamping our mark on the place. There have been all these things we've wanted to alter, but somehow the thought of having the builders in... I've been dreading doing this for years.' But the time has come. A man of refined taste can only put up with an ill-fitting towel rail left by the previous owners for so long. Though this redesign is more about function than fanciness. 'I am quite pedantic, yes, but then as a designer you have to be. It drives everyone else potty. You know, "Can you move that two millimetres?". Two millimetres! What's the big deal about two millimetres? But then if you don't do it right, you'll spend a lifetime of regret, believe me.'★

right A Jamie Reid Sex Pistols poster takes pride of place over the bed in the master bedroom



Dish of the day

Our pick of Sebastian Conran's new kitchen range for John Lewis



With easy-to-pour lips, the versatile nesting bowl set, £45, comprises three bowls (1.75L, 2.75L, 4.75L) for mixing, serving or display. The nest design makes them simple to store and the soft ergonomic shape is comfortable to use



The hob-to-table stockpot steamer, £115, is Sebastian's favourite item. You can cook and serve from the same pot, which also doubles as a colander; the lip is shaped for easy pouring and the toughened glass lid can be used as a trivet



Store everything from cooking tools to oil/vinegar bottles and spice jars in the multi-purpose utensil holder, £30. As well as rotating like a lazy Susan, it has been designed to look just as beautiful on the dining table as a kitchen worktop

The full range is available from John Lewis (0845 604 9049; johnlewis.com)