

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

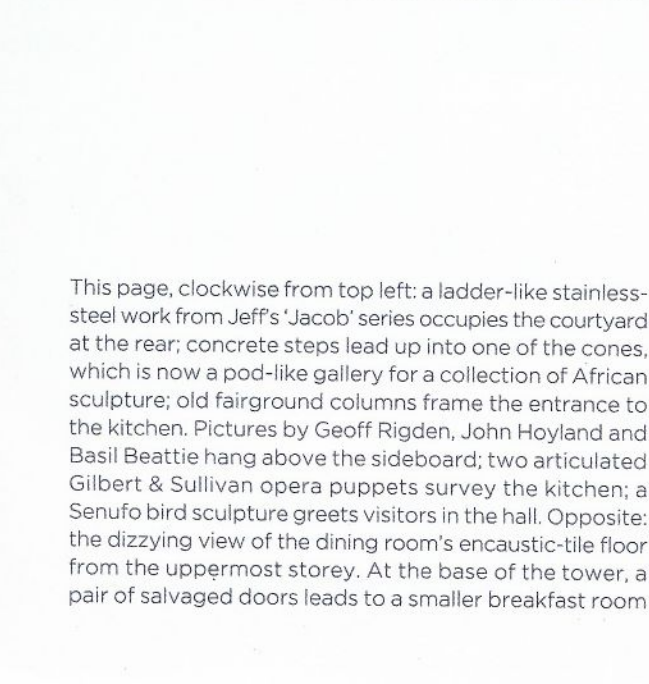
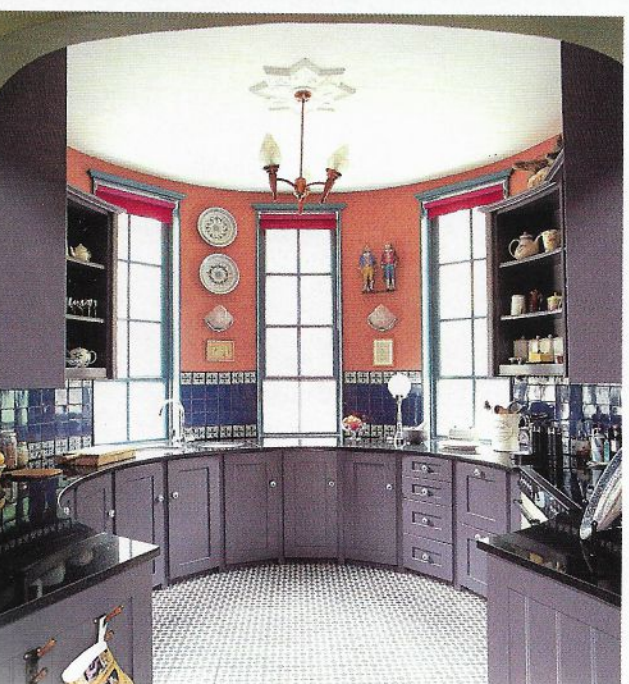
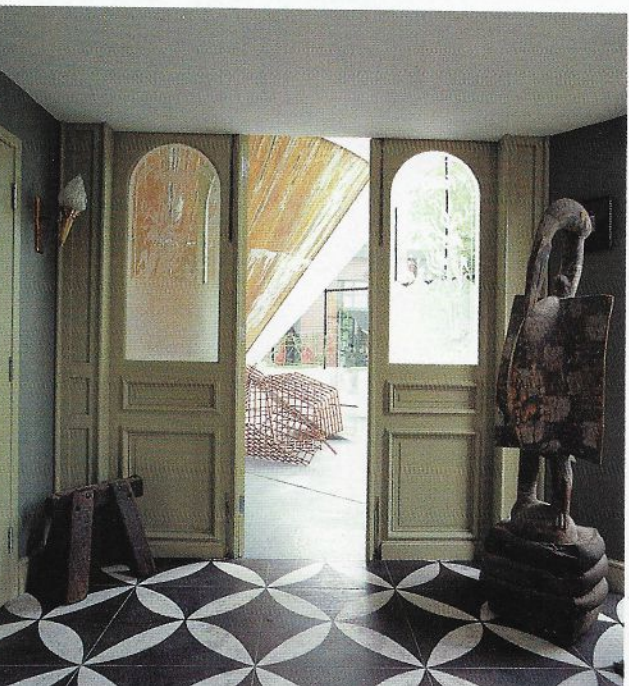
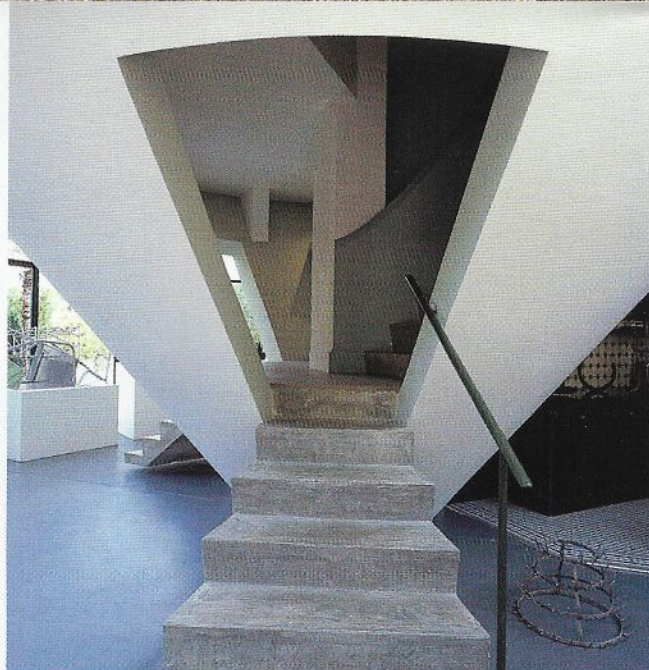


The Lime Works retains the structure of the 1937 water treatment plant - a central tower flanked by two filter cones. Jeff's studio, right, was converted from a workshop. The palms recall the couple's home in Portugal - Jeff was keen to plant a tropical rather than English-style garden

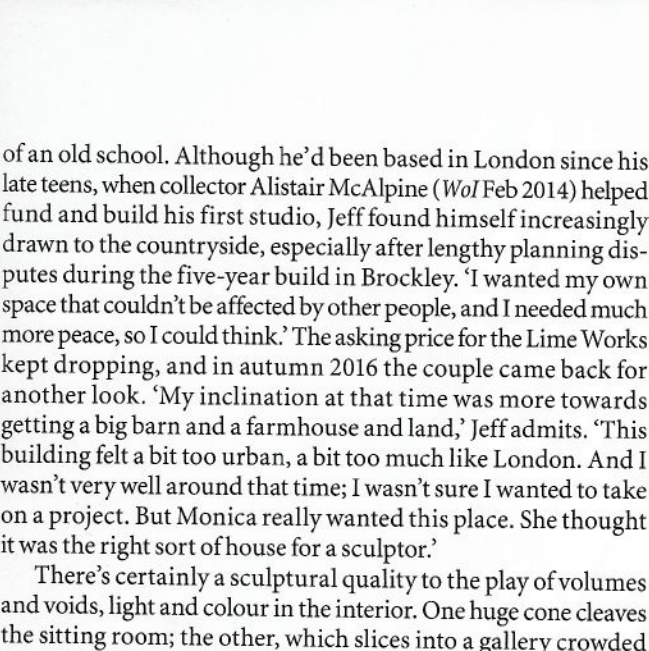
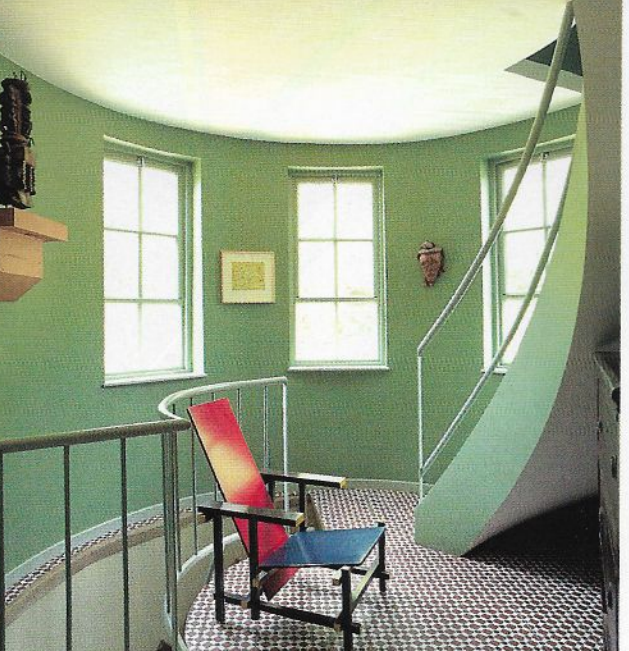


## FUNNEL VISION

It takes a sculptor of single-minded purpose to look at two huge concrete cones and see a home. Excited by the potential of this former water-purification plant in Kent, Jeff Lowe and his wife, Monica, set about distilling it into a live/work space awash with art and antiques. And to think not so long ago it was brimful of solidified lime. Charlotte Edwards soaks up the atmosphere. Photography: Fritz von der Schulenburg



This page, clockwise from top left: a ladder-like stainless-steel work from Jeff's 'Jacob' series occupies the courtyard at the rear; concrete steps lead up into one of the cones, which is now a pod-like gallery for a collection of African sculpture; old fairground columns frame the entrance to the kitchen; Pictures by Geoff Rigden, John Hoyland and Basil Beattie hang above the sideboard; two articulated Gilbert & Sullivan opera puppets survey the kitchen; a Senulo bird sculpture greets visitors in the hall. Opposite: the dizzying view of the dining room's encaustic-tile floor from the uppermost storey. At the base of the tower, a pair of salvaged doors leads to a smaller breakfast room



of an old school. Although he'd been based in London since his late teens, when collector Alistair McAlpine (Wol Feb 2014) helped fund and build his first studio, Jeff found himself increasingly drawn to the countryside, especially after lengthy planning disputes during the five-year build in Brockley. 'I wanted my own space that couldn't be affected by other people, and I needed much more peace, so I could think.' The asking price for the Lime Works kept dropping, and in autumn 2016 the couple came back for another look. 'My inclination at that time was more towards getting a big barn and a farmhouse and land,' Jeff admits. 'This building felt a bit too urban, a bit too much like London. And I wasn't very well around that time; I wasn't sure I wanted to take on a project. But Monica really wanted this place. She thought it was the right sort of house for a sculptor.'

There's certainly a sculptural quality to the play of volumes and voids, light and colour in the interior. One huge cone cleaves the sitting room; the other, which slices into a gallery crowded with plinths, has itself been hollowed out to create a staircase studded with concrete pedestals for African figures and reliefs. Apart from the vertiginous central tower, which is criss-crossed by the original industrial staircase and punctuated by vast windows, balconies and doorways at different levels, the Lime Works has few large, high-ceilinged rooms; in fact, as Jeff puts it, many of them are 'not really rooms at all, but spaces you walk through'. The house is a striking setting for his work, which is also installed in the open air and in purpose-built pavilions in the surrounding ten acres; but it has also directly influenced it. Since moving here, Jeff says, he is more preoccupied than ever with the relationship between exterior and interior, making multilayered, strongly architectural sculptures with apertures that can be looked through. After poring over countless colour charts for the house, selecting its deep blues, reds and greens, he found himself deliberately challenging his works on paper by choosing a palette that 'I wouldn't normally get along with... I think the building made me look at it that way'. And thanks to the numerous round rooms, he has even embraced the curve. 'I hated curves, prior to this,' he says. 'In architecture, in sculpture. With my other buildings, if anyone ever asked me if I wanted an archway somewhere, I'd say, oh no! It's got to be 90 degrees!'

Jeff does not consider himself a minimalist, as a builder or as an artist: 'I try to think about how much I can put in; more rather than less.' From the outside, the Lime Works retains its sleekly Modernist appearance, but indoors, the Lowes' fondness for antique furniture, vintage textiles and architectural salvage - wooden panelling, carved columns, a huge stone fireplace from English Heritage - has created an almost Medieval, baronial feel. 'I've always wanted to live in a castle, and it's quite fortress-like,' Jeff says with a smile. 'When I was young, I used to have a recurring dream of a confusing property with lots of staircases and ways to get to the different levels. I remember feeling really excited about it. And I'm pretty sure this is the building I dreamed about' ■

*'Overlap: Jeff Lowe & Eugenie Vronskaya' runs at Linden Hall Studio, 32 St George's Rd, Deal, Kent CT14 6BA (01304 360114; lindenhallstudio.co.uk), 7 May-15 June. For more information about Jeff Lowe, contact Pangolin London (pangolinlondon.com)*

Top: a Rietveld chair offers a resting place between floors linked by steep staircases. Dogon and Congolese masks flank a work by Eileen Cooper. Opposite: Monica adapted one of Jeff's woodblock prints to make the bedspread in this guest-room. The drawing in the hallway is by Matisse

