

REAL ESTATE | MY FAVORITE ROOM

## The Most Modern 18th-Century Room You've Ever Seen

Furniture historian and designer Tim Gosling draws decorating inspiration from Sir John Soane's startlingly modern, Regency-era drawing room



LEMON ZEST | The yellow of Sir John Soane's London drawing room was intended to recreate the glow of Mediterranean light. PHOTO: ALAMY

By **ELIZABETH ANNE HARTMAN**

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**BESPOKE-FURNITURE MAKER** and interior designer Tim Gosling has decked out some grand spaces: the London flagship boutique of Jaeger-Coultré, watchmaker to the British monarchy, and the interior of that city's Goring Hotel, the only hotel in the world to receive a Royal Warrant, bestowed by the English crown. But stiff-upper-lipped he is not. When we meet, he launches into an animated discourse of how things are made.

"My entire upbringing was about looking at detail and how things happen," said Mr. Gosling of growing up in London the son of scientist Raymond Gosling, who in 1952 took the first picture of the double helix of DNA. In the younger Mr. Gosling's newly published book, "Classic Contemporary: The DNA of Furniture Design" (Thames & Hudson), the designer delves into the art, science and context of furniture and style. "If we understand the history of design, we are in a better position to break the rules," he said.

For Mr. Gosling, there is no greater rule-breaker than Sir John Soane (1753-1837), the highly influential architect best known for London's Bank of England building, the neoclassical masterpiece of lighting and scale created over a period of 45 years. But it is Soane's home (now a museum), in particular the remarkably modern Drawing Room, that elicits wonder in Mr. Gosling.

The walls bear one of the first yellow paints that didn't oxidize and turn black. Pigments of the time that produced the lemony hue contained leads and salts that reacted to sunlight and sulfur in the air. "The spectacle of walking into a room that glows yellow must have been extraordinary," said Mr. Gosling of the color, now called Soanian yellow.

Between 1792 and 1824, Soane acquired three adjacent townhouses that he rebuilt with the goal of recreating the experience of the Grand Tour of Paris, Venice, Florence and Rome, a posh rite of passage denied Soane by the Napoleonic Wars. Much of the rest of the house is filled literally to the rafters with art and antiquities from Europe and the Middle East, and Soane designed lanterns with yellow stain-glassed sections, so that the sculptures would be bathed in what he called Mediterranean glow, explained Mr. Gosling. "The drawing room was intended to make guests feel like they were walking

into the sunniness of Rome or Pompeii,” he said.

The brash yellow alone would not have shocked in the Regency period, an age of gilded furniture, ornamentations and dizzying color combinations. Soane’s cheekiness is in simplification. “By doing the walls, the upholstery and the curtains in one color, without fringed and complicated passementerie, it became very contemporary,” said Mr. Gosling.

### Contemporize a Classic



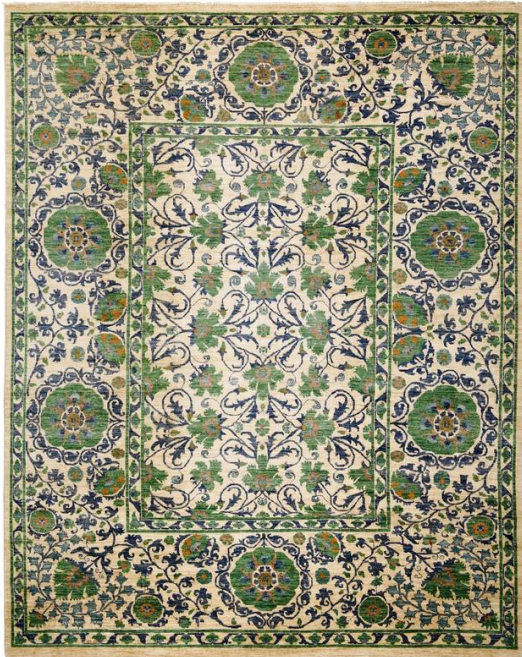
Duncan Phyfe Style Empire Sofa from Harveys on Beverly, \$9,700, 1stdibs.com

“What made Soane’s drawing room so edgy yet completely harmonious,” said Mr. Gosling, “was using his own period’s pieces and contemporizing them. He modernized a Roman-inspired Regency mahogany chaise—with scroll arms and reeded front fascia—by covering it in the color he used for the rest of the room.”

Mr. Gosling recommended upholstering a period couch

with silk “or one of the spectacular fabrics on the market that simulate silk. But keep it one color.” Similar chaises often come up at auction. *Duncan Phyfe Style Empire Sofa from Harveys on Beverly, \$9,700, 1stdibs.com*

### Lay Your Colors Down



Iznik Garden Vintage Rug, about 9 feet by 12 feet, \$9,180, The Rug Company, 212-274-0444

The wool rug may have been a concession to Soane’s spouse, who funded his spending, speculated Mr. Gosling: “Compared to everything else, it’s fussy—though typical of the time. But I adore the puce pinks and arsenic greens.” A colorful period rug can energize a contemporary room, he said, lending just the right amount of contrast. *Iznik Garden Vintage Rug, about 9 feet by 12 feet, \$9,180, The Rug Company, 212-274-0444*

### Glimmer with Cut Glass

The elaborate Regency chandelier may also show the influence of Soane’s wife, said Mr. Gosling. Its fanciness aside, the designer approves of the piece’s material. “Cut glass always gives a wonderful refraction of light,” he said, “especially candle light, as this chandelier was intended to carry. For a stunning effect,



18th-Century Continental Cut Glass Chandelier, \$300,000, Fileman Antiques, 44-19-0381-3229

place a cut-glass chandelier so that the light is reflected in a mirror.” *18th-Century Continental Cut Glass Chandelier, \$300,000, Fileman Antiques, 44-19-0381-3229*

### Gild Simply

“Of the five mirrors in the drawing room, I particularly like the one over the fireplace,” said Mr. Gosling. “The Regency world would have been more used to abundant carved decoration and

classical motifs in a frame.” But this gilded mounting is as

straightforward as the simple interior frame of the fireplace. Also unusually modern: The mirror sits directly on the fireplace mantel. Not surprisingly, a 20th-century piece can serve well. *Italian Brass Frame Mid-Century Wall Hanging Mirror from Dasberg Antiques, \$1,200, 1stdibs.com*



Italian Brass Frame Mid-Century Wall Hanging Mirror from Dasberg Antiques, \$1,200, 1stdibs.com

### Underdraw the Drapes

“The curtains were extraordinary

because they are so simple, in one color dyed to match the walls,” said Mr. Gosling. Even the tassels are dyed to blend, he

pointed out. “Typical of the period would have been much more embellishment, with huge swaths of contrasting colors within the silks. Just keeping a simple palette of the yellow, with a single contrasting band of bright red, really makes the design and impact of the drapes much stronger.” *Ninon Silk Taffeta BR-81081, price upon request, Brunschwig et Fils, 800-538-1880*

### Minimize the Mantel

“The fireplace, made of statuary marble, is a masterpiece of streamlined elegance,” said



Ninon Silk Taffeta BR-81081, price upon request, Brunswick et Fils, 800-538-1880 PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

Mr. Gosling. “Regency fireplaces normally incorporated carved decoration, such as palmettes entwined with stylized



Soane Pattern VI Mantel, \$12,500, 646-840-0609

honeysuckle. These uprights show only three inset flutes and go straight into the slate hearth. They don’t sit on plinths—highly unusual for the time. Chesney’s showroom has a range of Soanian fireplaces, the closest of which is Pattern VI.” *Soane Pattern VI Mantel, \$12,500, 646-840-0609*

### Throw It Against the Wall

Because sunlight will impact a paint’s color, Mr. Gosling

recommended testing the yellow you’re planning on using on



From about \$14 for 250mL, Papers and Paints, 44-20-7352-8626 PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

one of the walls you’re covering before you do an entire room. “The paint will have a different luminosity in Europe than in the States—even change from East to West Coast. Benjamin Moore’s Lightning Bug is very close, but Papers and Paints carries the exact color, Soane Yellow SC429.” *From about \$14 for 250mL, Papers and Paints, 44-20-7352-8626*



Tim Gosling

**His résumé:** Tim Gosling developed his affection for visual drama at London's Central School of Art and Design, where he received a degree in Theater Design, in 1987. In 2005, after 18 years as a Director at Linley, a London-based luxury accessories and design company, he established his eponymous bespoke-furniture and interior-design firm. Mr. Gosling lectures regularly and has produced a short film focusing on the Regency period.

**His clients:** Lords and ladies, such as Lord Browne of Mattingly (or the management of places they patronize, like London's Goring Hotel) are drawn to his deep respect for the history of furniture and design. Among his current projects is a

45,000-square-foot private residence in Greenwich, Conn.

**His goods:** Equal parts designer, artist and historian, Mr. Gosling authored two books before his current release. They are "Classic Design for Contemporary Interiors" (Prestel Publishing) and "London's Secrets: A Draughtsman's Guide" (Endeavour London), a collection of his pencil sketches of such off-limits spaces as Buckingham Palace's private rooms.

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