

## Last-minute shopping

Don't panic: we find who delivers – even on Christmas Eve

**Page 10**



Wednesday 9 December 2009

# Homes & Property

LIVE CENTRAL: WEST END HOMES **P4** KICK-OFF AT THE ORIENT **P7** DELICIOUS MAURITIUS **P8** DECK THE HALLS: GARDENING **P18**



## MUM WITH THE GOLDEN TOUCH

A gilded Christmas in Little Venice **Page 12**

FOR PROPERTY NEWS, DESIGN & OFFERS: [HOMESANDPROPERTY.CO.UK](http://HOMESANDPROPERTY.CO.UK)



Emma Foale and sons Jamie and Archie are a family concern



A gilded triptych creates an ecclesiastical effect above the bed



The main sitting room reflects Emma Foale's artistic background, with paintings by her

As a young mum, short on cash, painter Emma Foale learned to gild, practising on her own home. Now she has set up in business with her two sons, discovers **Katie Law**

## MUM HAS

# THE GOLDEN TO



The eye-catching four-poster bed has intricate glass-inlaid gold pillars and rambling tulips painted on the gilded headboard

**E**MMA FOALE taught herself to gild in the early Eighties, when she was young, cash-strapped and newly married, living in America on a budget. "I grew up in an arty family and all my parents' friends were writers, potter or painters," she explains.

Her mother was the potter Anne Gordon, otherwise known as the Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, while her father was the painter Alastair Gordon. Emma went to art school and set up her own one-off dress business Emma And Friends, before a career in advertising and her marriage to Rodney Foale.

"The gilding started as a way of making things at home look pretty for next to nothing. I gilded screens and mirrors and then, after I'd gilded a four-poster bedstead, some friends suggested I do it professionally," she says. When Rodney and Emma returned to England she continued as an amateur gilder while making a living as a portrait painter and raising her sons, Archie and Jamie, both now in their twenties.

Following her divorce a few years ago, Emma, who is now 56, moved into a three-bedroom flat in Little Venice, overlooking the Regent's Canal, where

**I see no reason why a kitchen should look less decorative or pleasing than any other room'**

she now lives with her boyfriend, the painter Johnny Dewe Mathews. Doing the house up from scratch meant she had the opportunity once again to make the most of her gilding talents. Almost every surface glitters, from the verre eglomise walls in the kitchen and bathroom to the star-spangled bedroom.

Doing verre eglomise work, she explains, is slow and painstaking, since each part of the process requires a long drying time. First you apply a thin layer of transparent coloured paint to glass or Perspex, then a layer of gold size, which gives a luminescent effect, and finally a layer of adhesive film is applied to fix it.

Emma has used this technique for the bathroom splashbacks and on the cupboard doors and work surfaces in the kitchen. The idea was to blend the kitchen into a seamless extension of the elegant sitting room – with all kitchen implements out of sight.

"I see no reason why a kitchen should look less decorative and pleasing than any other room, and I was keen to make it as cosy and glamorous as I could," she explains. The walls are painted in warm pinks and greens, colours that are picked up in one of her abstract canvases above the sink. Crochery and glassware are hidden away in shallow cupboards

behind floor-to-ceiling doors rendered almost invisible by Emma's substantial collection of drawings.

To stop the pictures falling off the cupboards when she opens the doors, they have been fixed along the back with Velcro. She has even hung a couple of canvases on the side of the fridge.

Emma has managed to maximise the light coming into the flat by putting mirrored glass into each of the four panels in the doors, and clear glass above the doors. A row of coloured glass vases on a ledge above the sitting-room door throws luminous coloured rays of light out into the corridor.

In one corner of the bedroom, Emma has displayed her mother's colourful collection of ceramics, while elsewhere in the flat there are paintings by her father, and other studio pottery bowls made by her great-aunt, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, and Alan Caijer-Smith.

For another splash of colour she has suspended half a dozen coloured glass and bronze souk globe lanterns from the ceiling and painted gold stars on the walls. But the real star of the show is the four-poster bed, with its glass-inlaid gold pillars and wildly rambling tulips painted on the gilded wooden headboard.

Last year her creativity took a new

Photographs by **Grant Smith**



...r father, Alastair Gordon, and pieces by her mother, the potter Anne Gordon



In the smart, arty kitchen, girlfriend Louise, Archie, Emma, James and Johnny Dewe Mathews – and not a cooking utensil in sight

# TOUCH



Emma has used abstract canvases to make the kitchen cosy and glamorous

turn. Her elder son Archie, now 25, was made redundant from the New York Stock Exchange and her younger son, James, now 23, had graduated from Leeds University but could not find a job, so Emma decided to set up as a professional gilding business. "Foale & Sons is really the boys' business. It was their idea and they run it. I just help with the designs," she says modestly.

"I had always liked the idea of setting up my own business," adds Jamie, "and working as a family seemed like the most natural thing we could have done. Mum's taught me everything I know about gilding and does the designs, while Archie handles the management side."

They will be celebrating their newly launched firm with their first Christmas in the flat. "It's usually an open-house affair and I cook an absolutely traditional Christmas lunch," says Emma. "It's the time of year when I really come into my own, given how much I love all things luminous and gilded. I put glittering baubles everywhere and even tape them under the mantelpiece – they look especially pretty when we light the fire and the candles at night."

Foale & Sons: (020 3181 0072; www.foaleandsons.co.uk)

**'Christmas is the time of year when my love of all things luminous comes into its own'**



For more property updates, visit: [homesandproperty.co.uk](http://homesandproperty.co.uk)



Emma's talent for gilding comes in handy when it's time to decorate the Little Venice house for Christmas