



By Grace Cain

A minimalist sensibility makes *Nick Wakeman's* Hackney apartment the perfect creative hideaway – and the embodiment of her pared-down fashion brand, Studio Nicholson

Breathing space

Left: Nick Wakeman's light-filled apartment, occupying a former Victorian schoolhouse in Hackney

"I don't have any art in my home," says Nick Wakeman, founder of Studio Nicholson, the British brand loved by fashion insiders for its exquisite craftsmanship and elegant functionality. "I don't like having things on the wall. I just like the walls." Instead, she collects vintage jugs. "It's a bit weird," she says insouciantly, before offering up a wry smile. "People always refer to them as Nick Wakeman's jugs."

Wakeman lives in an apartment in what was once a Victorian school building in Hackney, east London. "I'm a terrible voyeur," she says. "I absolutely need interesting folk around me, and this part of the city really feeds into that." She pauses, then adds, "Although I do feel like the oldest person in Hackney."

Living alone suits Wakeman, who relishes the opportunity to mull over creative influences and ideas. However, even for her, last year was a bit much. "Lockdown taught me that people are very important," she says. "I spent two months on Zoom calls from morning until night, and then it was just me again in the evenings. It was really hard, and I learned a lot about myself and my relationships." She shrugs. "But that said, I still like to have my own space."

She describes her home as "essentially a classroom", which really doesn't do justice to the bright, modern apartment populated by a raft of houseplants. "It's full of light thanks to the big windows, and the double-height ceilings create this amazing sense of space," she says. The traditional fixtures (including the original floors) are seamlessly integrated into the modern layout. "It's very clever," Wakeman says. "The kitchen and bathroom are like cubes that have been slotted together, and then the bedrooms are upstairs."

If there's a danger that unadorned white walls and high ceilings could feel cold or impersonal, Wakeman skirts it by using natural materials – including plenty of wooden furniture – to introduce an organic element. "Wood has a warm quality that breaks up the space," she explains. "I love natural materials. My father worked in the wood industry... I often wonder if that had an effect on me."

As well as the jugs, Wakeman has also amassed an assortment of Japanese ceramics – some more unusual than others. "I have a very good friend in Tokyo who makes sake cups shaped like little penises. I have a set on display, but they're slightly dusty because my cleaner refuses to clean them!"

A deep affinity with Japanese culture is the thread that runs through everything in Wakeman's life. Pre-Studio Nicholson, she was the co-owner of a brand that operated predominantly in Japan, and her designs are still heavily influenced by the styles and tastes of that market. It would appear that the love is mutual: Studio Nicholson has a huge Japanese following. "When I went to Tokyo for the first time, it absolutely blew my mind," Wakeman recalls. "I'd come from a really grimy '90s London to this pristine city where everything felt so ordered. It just sang to me."

This gravitation towards orderliness is another common theme for Wakeman. Studio Nicholson is built on the idea of a modular wardrobe comprising practical, beautifully made pieces that can be combined in endless ways. "Last week, someone asked me if I plan my outfits in advance," says Wakeman, visibly horrified. "I said, 'Absolutely not! I don't want to think about what I wear. I just want it to work perfectly together.'"

By now, it should come as no surprise to learn that Wakeman's home is devoid of clutter. "There's not a lot in here," she admits. "But while I'm definitely a minimalist, I'm not a purist. I like to mess things up a bit." And the minimalist approach does allow room for an impressive array of books on architecture and interior design, two interests that have always informed her collections for Studio Nicholson.

"I'm particularly inspired by post-modern Japanese architecture," she says. "My favourite architect is Tadao Ando. He places a great deal of importance on creating and preserving space, and he believes that a building should >

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make you feel protected – a little like clothing does. These are elements I try to weave into my own pieces... I want people to feel free and powerful when they wear a Studio Nicholson garment. I also want the focus to be on the materials, which is why I keep everything very simple and unadorned. I think the best architects do the same."

Indeed, Wakeman's approach to design – fashion and interior – is perfectly encapsulated by her belief that space is the most important element of all. And in the context of her own home, she believes it's a breeding ground for creativity (hence the lack of art on the walls). "I think it's important to give yourself time and a place to daydream, to allow your mind to go on its own journeys. That's when the best ideas come. They don't come in the office."

So, I ask, does Wakeman see her home as a sort of creative cocoon? "I just like to relax," she says. "But I'm not meant to say that. I'm meant to say I work really hard – and I do! But when I get home, the do-not-disturb sign goes straight on the door." □



This page, clockwise from left: Studio Nicholson coat from a selection, shirt £220 and trousers £350; Wakeman's home, clutter-free, but full of books on architecture and interior design; the Tadao Ando-designed Chichu Art Museum. Opposite page Original Victorian features – not least the wood floors – work beautifully with the designer's modern furniture

Menswear, Second Floor; and harrods.com

10 QUESTIONS FOR NICK WAKEMAN...

How do you start your day?

With some intense stretching to iron out all the kinks. Then I'll have a strong coffee and a cool shower.

Which is your favourite room in the apartment?

I love spending time in my bathroom. I'm one of those people who really likes to feel clean, so when I get home I'll often have a bath. There are plenty of plants in there, so it just feels like a lovely place to relax. I'm also a real skincare nut, so each night I like to sit in the bathroom and fiddle with my face.

What's in your beauty cabinet?

All things Clé de Peau.

What does luxury mean to you?

Having time to please myself.

Do you use social media?

I use Instagram like a mood board. I love it. I don't follow friends, I just look for things that will inspire me.

Where else do you go when you're looking for inspiration?

Tokyo. Failing that, my book collection.

Who are your design icons?

Tadao Ando (of course!). And also Italian furniture designer Cini Boeri.

Which brands do you wear (aside from your own)?

A lot of old Celine and Jil Sander. But I also like to pick up really random pieces when I'm in Japan. I always visit these shops where you can have something printed on a stock T-shirt... they're just amazing.

How did you first become interested in designing clothes?

When my brother and I were young, my mum made all our clothes. I had an uncle who lived in Hong Kong, and he would send her denim to make us jeans and dungarees. As I got older, we would sew together... a true labour of love. Those experiences have really informed what I do, because I still just love the process of making clothes. I always say that fashion is my second love, but fabric is my first.

What would you be doing if you weren't designing clothes?

I think I'd probably be designing fabric. But if I wasn't in the industry at all, I'd like to be a lawyer because I'm very curious about people. I think the human mind is quite exceptional.

Jessica MacCombie/Getty Images; courtesy of Studio Nicholson

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