

BREATH OF LIFE

Design duo Nicemakers have turned this classic but worn Dutch townhouse on Amsterdam's Amstel River into a vibrant family home.
By MARC HELDENS Photographed by ALAN JENSEN

In the living area, sofa from KEIJSER & CO custom-upholstered by NICEMAKERS; Cupid coffee tables from ZUIVER; vintage Beni-Ouarain rug from PAUL LELIEVELD INTERIORS; heirloom 18th-century antique Louis XVI-style mahogany table (left) from Pierson's grandfather; various antique objects found by Nicemakers; Ringo Starr (left) and Paul McCartney prints by RICHARD AVEDON.



When Nina Pierson and Jop van de Graaf returned home from their three-week honeymoon earlier this year, they were in for a thrilling surprise. The couple — who launched the supremely successful Netherlands-based SLA organic salad bar chain — had left the renovation of their recently acquired 19th-century Amsterdam townhouse in the capable hands of Joyce Urbanus and Dax Roll, co-founders of design studio Nicemakers.

“I was totally overwhelmed,” says Pierson. “It looked as if we had lived here for years. All our precious family heirlooms, the pieces from my grandfather and my father, got a special place in our new home, together with our artworks and photos and the custom-designed elements by Nicemakers. But what touched me most was

realising that this house finally had become our first family home.” Situated on the banks of the Amstel River in the fashionably diverse Weesperzijde district in east Amsterdam — once the province of the society elite — the classic Dutch townhouse was previously owned by an elderly woman whose family had resided there since 1901. What it needed most of all was warmth and new energy; as Jop van de Graaf says, it was “dark and very stuffy... creaky, old and worn”. Urbanus and Roll knew exactly how to cast off the cobwebs while also adapting the space to their clients’ needs — they had »

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT: in the lounge area, owners Jop van de Graaf (left) and Nina Pierson sit on the sofa upholstered with DESIGNERS GUILD Glenville fabric; library custom-designed by NICEMAKERS. In the hallway, light and artwork found by Nicemakers. In the dining area, detail of a brass artwork from Portugal, a wedding gift from Urbanus and Roll.



In another view of the living area, vintage sofa chair (near window) by GERARD VAN DEN BERG from Label, found by Nicemakers; George Harrison (left) and John Lennon prints by RICHARD AVEDON.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *in the DJ corner, wall lamp by SERGE MOUILLE from Studio Erik Gutter. In another view of the lounge room, antique Deco leaves found by NICEMAKERS; African necklace. In the main bathroom, mirror custom-designed by Nicemakers; TAPWELL taps; ALAPE sinks; wall tiles from COTTOCERAMIX; floor tiles from WINCKELMANS. The Amstel River, which the house faces. In the dining area, vintage-style desk bought by Pierson; heirloom 18th-century globe from Pierson's grandfather; brass artwork from Portugal. OPPOSITE PAGE: in the kitchen designed by Nicemakers and manufactured by EGINSTILL; column lamps from WEVER & DUCRÉ; vintage bar stools found by Nicemakers.*



“ALL OUR FAMILY HEIRLOOMS, THE PIECES FROM MY GRANDFATHER AND MY FATHER, GOT A SPECIAL PLACE IN OUR NEW HOME” – NINA PIERSON

« already struck up a friendship with the couple after designing the very first SLA location on the Ceintuurbaan in Amsterdam.

Since founding the Nicemakers studio in 2011, the designers have built an impressively diverse portfolio with projects spanning the residential, retail, restaurant, office and hotel sectors, including The Hoxton, Amsterdam hotel and Jacobsz restaurant. The duo has established a reputation for creating a homey aesthetic by mixing quirky vintage chic with a vibrant modern sensibility and a tactile, personal touch. “If we start with an interior design, we not only see the space but also the user/owner,” says Urbanus. “The ultimate atmosphere is actually tangible and palpable.”

Thanks to Nicemakers’ vibrant touches and whimsical detailing, there’s nothing dark and stuffy about the Weesperzijde mansion now. Original oak ceiling beams and parquet floors have been lovingly restored, creating a warm setting. The long, narrow entrance hall was knocked out to create a fresh white colonnade, offering a bright, open space that encompasses the living, kitchen and dining area. The custom kitchen has become the heart of the home. “Nina and Jop love to cook and regularly invite family and friends over for dinners,” says Roll, “so the kitchen had to be the centre of the house.”

From behind the kitchen counter — designed to resemble an office desk, in a warm walnut with accents of petrol green — all

corners of the living room are visible, including the sunken *leefkuil* (conversation pit), with its custom velvet sofas and dramatic ceiling-high bookcases. “A 1970s setting like this has been on our wish list for a long time,” says Urbanus. “It works perfectly with this house.”

The designers were also inspired by Pierson and van de Graaf’s vast collection of heirlooms, mementoes and photographs, preserved for generations before being passed down to the couple. (Pierson, who grew up in Thailand, comes from a family of avid collectors.) Among their treasures are famous photos of The Beatles, precious wedding gifts and objects and artwork from around the world. “You could say that Nicemakers have made a kind of foundation for our family life,” says Pierson. “Our daily life has been given a special platform where past, present and future all come together.” *VL*

Visit nicemakers.com.

THIS PAGE: in the main bedroom, antique bedside tables, vintage lamps, antique iron Deco panels, brass wall lamps, Deco leaf and vase all found by NICEMAKERS; heirloom antique 19th-century mahogany cabinet from Pierson’s grandfather; rug from THE RUG REPUBLIC; Aboriginal artwork (left) by MAGGIE WATSON NAPANGARDI. OPPOSITE PAGE: in another view of the main bedroom, a photo of John Lennon and Yoko Ono at their ‘Bed-in’ for peace demonstration at the Hilton hotel in Amsterdam, a wedding gift from the mothers of the couple.

