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# atHome

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Abigail Lane's home and studio lies on the perimeter of London's East End, in an industrial wasteland – but then her taste for the unusual is part of her strength as an artist

# On the edge

**A**BIGAIL LANE'S home and studio are not quite what you might expect from an artist's loft, although that is precisely what it is. The 6,000 sq ft top-floor apartment is in the easternmost part of London, but a long way from the trendy galleries that have recently sprung up in that part of the capital. It's on an industrial estate, in the back of beyond, where mountains of disused fridges are as common a sight as Starbucks in the West End, and burnt-out cars line the streets.

But for 38-year-old Abigail it's the perfect location for her latest project, an interiors company called Showroom Dummies, named after the song by German electronica pioneers Kraftwerk.

Abigail is a celebrated installation artist, who comes from the same stable as the Britart sensations Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin. A graduate of Goldsmiths College, her work has been exhibited all over the world, and has been collected by many well-known museums and galleries.

In fact, it was through Tracey Emin that she met one of her business partners, Brigitte Stepputtis, whose day job is head of couture for Vivienne Westwood. Along with print specialist Bob Pain, the pair set up the interiors company, which specialises in bespoke furnishings, unusual wallpapers, blankets and screens.

Abigail uses the flat as her studio, office and home and has two sections rented out to other design companies, one of which belongs to Damien Hirst's wife Maia, who runs a fashion company, Mother of Pearl.

Her flat overlooks a canal and a very unusual urban

wasteland of discarded sofas, cars and assorted junk and city debris. But Abigail takes it all in her stride. "It's completely bonkers round here. A while ago you couldn't even dream of getting a pint of milk, now there's this Turkish emporium that just appeared overnight. They've got all manner of crazy things, even an organic section, but I can't stress enough how barmy it is," she says, over coffee and organic lemon biscuits in the kitchen. "It's really beautiful, and that's what I love about it."

"This building is kind of like the Chelsea Hotel gone ape. There's people coming and going all the time. It's kind of like a halfway house but that is my favourite thing about it."

Indeed, at that moment there is a group of young people with a dog sitting on one of the disused sofas that litter the car park outside drinking a bottle of champagne.

Abigail herself is quite a character, with short gamine cropped hair in a rainbow of colours, dressed in one of her own black and silver T-shirts. She goes everywhere with her little brown Staffordshire terrier, Ethel, who just appeared in her life one day eight years ago.

Abigail found the place two years later, when she was forced by financial restraints to move from her fashionable Shoreditch apartment further east.

But now she is growing increasingly weary of London, and wants to move again. "There is a point where you can have so much of the city and unless you really need to be here you just get sick of it. I think, why flog yourself, why get up at five in the morning to do a nine-to-five job, if you don't need to?"

"London really is a nightmare, unless you've got lots of money. I've had enough of it. I can't really be bothered

Abigail's living space incorporates many of her own designs, including her skeleton, bug and dog motifs

staying out all day and night eating at the right places and then getting a cab home. I much prefer knocking about with my dog by the canal," she says.

Abigail is thinking of moving to the country soon, but hasn't decided where this next move will take her. However, she is confident that she would be able to carry on as normal if she does leave the capital.

"Now with e-mail, you can work pretty much from anywhere, whereas before I never would have thought it possible, that I would lose all my business."

The apartment is more like a modern art museum than a flat. On one side is her kitchen, stainless steel yet with a rustic feel – a huge oak table sits beside the cooker and sink, with a bowl of luscious vine tomatoes on display.

"I get just as much pleasure from looking at those tomatoes as a bunch of flowers," she says. "I used to think it would be lovely when I had more money to have flowers delivered every week, but now I love picking them wild from out and about," she adds.

Behind the kitchen is the bathroom, with a beautiful free-standing bath, painted dark red, which Abigail reveals she got out of the paper for £60.

On the other side of the flat from the kitchen is the sitting area. A huge cream sofa and a coffee table sit alongside a screen with a photograph of two mules nuzzling – this is one of Abigail's most famous pieces, entitled *Kissing Asses*.

In the hallway connecting the two rooms to Abigail's studio, there is, of all things, a chic light walnut grand piano.

Her bedroom faces the front, as she likes to hear the noise of the birds and canal when she wakes up. Behind



AT HOME WITH ... ABIGAIL LANE



'It's completely bonkers round here. A while ago you couldn't even get a pint of milk, then this Turkish emporium appeared overnight'

her bed, the wall is covered in Showroom Dummies' own lightning wallpaper, and to one side there is a beautiful silver Venetian unit, which was a gift from another artist many years ago.

She has her own little dressing-room off the bedroom, where hundreds upon hundreds of pairs of silver shoes spill out amid boxes of T-shirts and dresses. "Because I live in a big place, I never have to throw anything out," she says.

Abigail has always been inspired by interiors. As a child growing up in Bristol, her mother and stepfather's house was chock-full of fascinating things, she says. "We had no money and it was a completely average house, but there were always such beautiful interesting pieces they had made dotted around.

"There was a prison grey room with a pale pink carpet, a bright blue room with a Madonna in it. We had loads of

kitsch stuff, before kitsch was even kitsch."

She has, she says, always been motivated by the same set of interests. "I love circus, I love magic, I love dioramas, just like my mum did. These are things that go way back way, long before Showroom Dummies," she smiles.

Whichever artistic path she endeavours to follow, it's easy to believe that Abigail's next home will be just as spellbinding as this one. □

For more information on Showroom Dummies, visit [www.showroomdummies.com](http://www.showroomdummies.com); also see Abigail's work at Charing X Gallery, 121-125 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2R 0EA until August 15



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