

A woman with blonde hair is lying on her back on a sandy beach. She is wearing a one-piece swimsuit with vertical stripes in shades of orange and red. Her arms are raised above her head, and her legs are bent at the knees. The background shows the ocean and a small, dark, rocky island in the distance under a bright sky.

# THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE

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Mark Hix  
picks a peck of peppers  
John Lichfield  
digs the dirt on truffle thieves

Anna Pavord  
on bullies in the border

PLUS  
suits for sirens:  
swimwear with allure

A seaside  
short story  
'Sand' by  
Susan Hill



NOW THAT every other British clothing store has acquired the stripped-back serenity of a Buddhist temple and tatty old boozers are shedding their olde-worlde clutter and reinventing themselves as glass, steel and concrete canteens in the modernist style, you may, like me, have begun to find all the simplicity a shade me-tooish. So it's refreshing to uncover an interior – the London home of the Greek-Cypriot product and furniture designer Michael Anastassiades – which proves that minimal doesn't have to mean monotonous.

Anastassiades's house is an ingenious conversion of a poky Victorian terrace built above, behind and below a shop in an ungentrified corner of London's South Bank. Gutted and rebuilt from scratch in 18 months, the new interior was one of the first projects designed by the Belgian architect Wim De Mul, a friend of Anastassiades since the days, a decade ago, when the designer was studying

engineering and product design at the Royal College of Art and De Mul was completing his training at the Architectural Association. "I never really told Wim what I wanted," says Anastassiades. "He knows me well and he knew how I like to live. It's his design, not mine, but he has built it around my needs."

I had expected the Cypriot's domestic tastes to be a bit idiosyncratic. Anastassiades is a softly spoken and serious man who has worked hard at building a successful relationship with design-conscious manufacturers. His mass-produced output features sleek silverised lights, glasses and vases for the London-based design retailer Babylon and a silver service for the chic German table-ware manufacturer Rosenthal.

But the 35-year-old has a mysterious, conceptual side too. His most striking designs are his experimental one-offs: chairs and tables, lights and table-top items whose strange

behaviour responds to the actions of the viewer and belies their unassuming looks. These include the Message Cup, a minimal wooden beaker with a vivid laminated interior in which you can leave a short recorded message, and the Alarm Table, a jumpy side table that wakes you in the morning with vibrations that rattle the keys or coins you have left on it overnight. Last year he introduced the Sociable Light, a simple-looking fixture which only comes on if there is talking going on nearby and the Unsociable Light which does the opposite. "I like the idea that objects are companions which respond to our behaviour and which have a distinct life and personality of their own," he says.

As we climb the elegant, open-tread mahogany staircase to the top of his four-storey home, it's becoming clear what catering for Anastassiades's needs involved. From the generous workshop and studio on the ground floor to the deluxe master bedroom at the top of the building, this is a

## Upwardly mobile

Collaborating with an architect on his own home has been an eye-opener for conceptual designer Michael Anastassiades.

By **David Redhead**  
Photographs by **Philip Sinden**





house designed for one. There are few interior doors and no wall to divide the sunny and airy living room and kitchen on the first floor from the deluxe top-floor master bedroom and bathroom on the mezzanine in the double-height space above it. "One advantage of living alone is that you really can make the place open-plan," says Anastassiades, sprawling on his favourite Charles Eames lounge as we admire the spectacular view over the first-floor roof terrace and the Millennium Wheel to the north. "It would be very different if I shared the place."

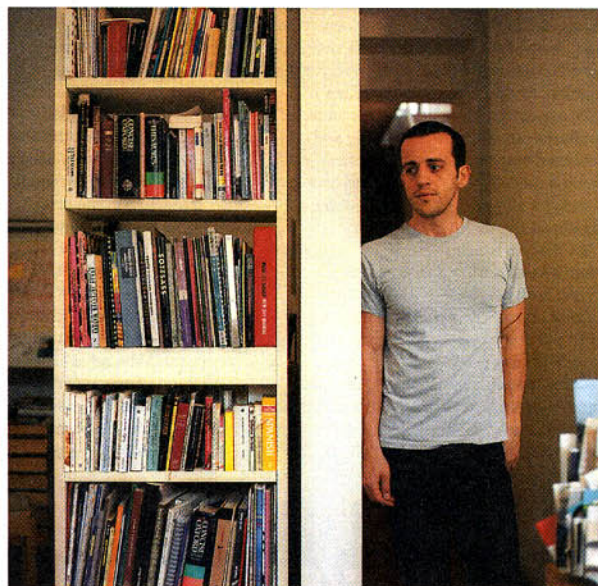
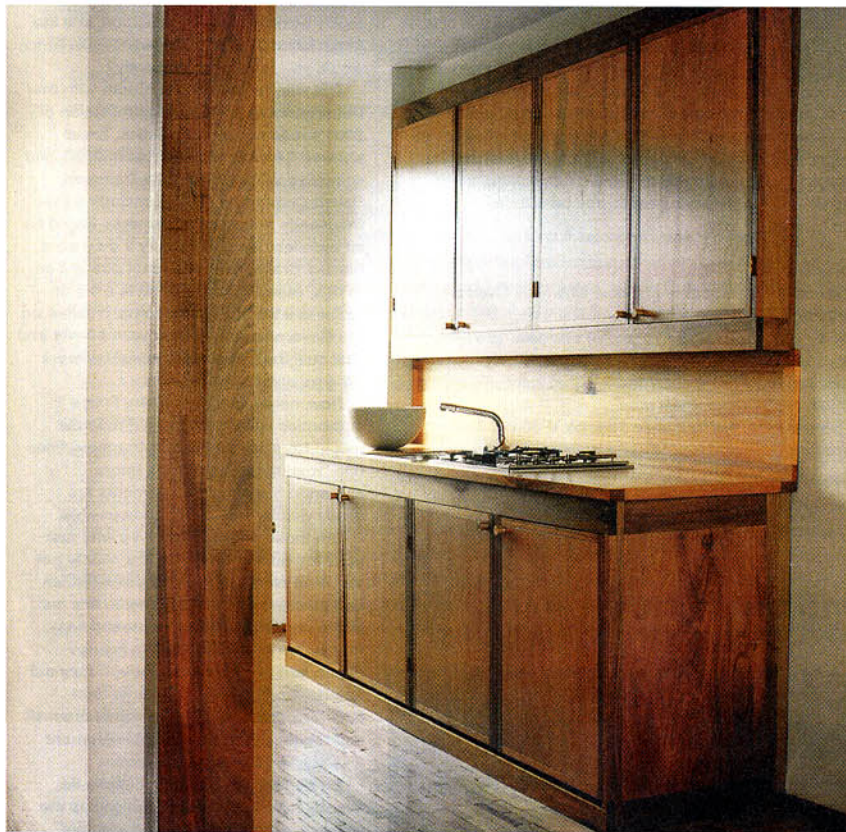
Anastassiades and De Mul have indulged a refreshingly quirky taste in building materials, choosing grey marble for the entrance hall ("Perhaps it reflects my Greek side," says Anastassiades) and rich red mahogany for just about everywhere else: floors, the wall panels of the ocean-liner-meets-Japanese-tea-pavilion spare bedroom in the basement and even for the lush, fitted kitchen. "Just when

we were starting on the project, a man knocked on the front door and offered me a lorry-load of parquet on the cheap which had been stripped out of County Hall," Anastassiades explains. "It seemed like too good a bargain to miss but once we had laid the floors we decided we had to spend more money on purpose-made furniture that matched it."

The house also forms the testbed for Anastassiades's latest product experiments. His recent light for Babylon, an acrylic box with an exposed silvered bulb, glows in the corner, while half-way up the stairs is a new and disconcerting companion, a wall mirror whose reflection tricks the eye by performing an abrupt right-angled turn out into the room. "I like living with my objects," says Anastassiades. "It changes the way I think about them."

But if Anastassiades's relationship with his objects is forever in a state of flux, his professional relationship with

his architect is growing stronger by the day. Late in 2001 he was asked to come up with a concept for Testing Ground, a research and development award scheme for five designers jointly funded by London Arts, The Crafts Council, The RSA Art for Architecture scheme and The Architecture Foundation. Together he and De Mul drew up plans for a complete house filled with 14 of Anastassiades's mysterious objects, among them a Listening Carpet and a Room-Sized Puzzle. Anastassiades and De Mul are hoping they might find further funding to build some of the rooms. But if the cash fails to materialise, the pair are planning to include a few of the installations in a house conversion on which they are collaborating just along the South Bank. "I used to think of my objects as one-offs that related to their individual users," says Anastassiades, "but since I started working with Wim I'm thinking of them as complete families that respond to the whole building." \*



#### POOLING THEIR TALENTS

Clockwise from opposite page: the open-tread mahogany staircase, with right-angled wall mirror (one of Anastassiades's designs) beneath it; the fitted kitchen finished in red mahogany; Anastassiades; architect Wim De Mul; the Table light; and the Box Light for Babylon

