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Nicky Dobree

Interior designer Nicky Dobree explains the evolution of her library as her office, which combines a stimulating vibrancy with the peace and quiet she needs for work. **By Judith Wilson**

Nicky Dobree studied languages at Bristol University, then - after a stint in publishing - she retrained in interior architecture and design at The Interior Design School. She launched her practice in 2003, after seven years as a designer at Taylor Howes Designs. Her style is chic and elegant, and as well as ski chalets, she and her team work on private homes, and in 2005 were shortlisted in the Best Modern Residential category at the Design & Decoration awards and in the BIDA awards. Current commissions include a house in Hampstead, an Alpine farmhouse and an Italian villa. She lives in an early-Victorian house in south London with her husband and two young sons.

'This room was originally our library, but after I launched my business it became my office. It is a peaceful place, yet has the vitality that I need to feel inspired. It's essential to have the mental and physical space for designing; here, I have both.

'The house was built in the 1840s, and we moved here seven years ago. I love the symmetry, scale and proportions of early-nineteenth-century architecture. We knocked together the reception rooms and created a single entrance via my office. This was deliberate - I like the unexpected, that slight hesitation of space on arrival. Although I wanted one big room, the office and drawing room are separated by a central column, which creates a sense of intimacy.

'I've chosen red for the door because it is a powerful colour. I also love it as an accent shade: I was brought up in

Southeast Asia, so it feels familiar. The walls are painted in my old favourite, Sanderson "Oyster White". I often recommend it to clients because it is easy on the eye. I designed the inset bookcases that line two of the walls. The style was inspired by bookshelves at the Hôtel Montalembert, Paris. You can never have too many bookshelves and I have a lot of books: they lend personality to a room.

'My glass desk is from Habitat - I love its transparency. Keeping it uncluttered also promotes clarity of thought. The chair was made to my own design and is upholstered in Nya Nordiska wool. James and I have always collected decorative objects on our travels, and the house is still evolving. The carved horses were bought 15 years ago in a gypsy market in Andalusia. We bring back everything by hand and take the risk of not getting things through customs. The sitting room rug was our groundsheet while travelling in the mountains of Pakistan, and the standard lamp came from South Africa. But I like to mix in new buys, such as the sofa from Interiors *bis*.

'We enjoy collecting art, though many paintings are by friends. The oil in the hall was a present to me from James: he originally saw it in a restaurant. I believe that if you're in a beautiful place it really affects how you feel about life. That's one of the best things about interior design. It's a journey. I love the fact that, by changing my clients' surroundings, I can change their lives, too' □

Nicky Dobree Interior Design (tel: 020-7627 0469; www.nickydobree.com)

Nicky keeps her glass desk uncluttered (above) 'to promote clarity of thought'