

Beauty spot

Claudia Schiffer's modernist country home is a breathtaking work of art, finds Kate Finnigan. Photographs by Derek Henderson



It's one of those still, green midsummer days in the heart of England. The hedgerows are thick with hawthorn and bindweed, Queen Anne's lace is nodding, hot red poppies bobbing, and halfway along a pot-holed lane, fields give way to a dramatic modern house.

This stone and glass building, on the borders of Oxfordshire and Northampton, has been the home of supermodel Claudia Schiffer and her husband, the film producer and director Matthew Vaughn, for almost two years. Hugging three sides of a paved courtyard, floor-to-ceiling windows dominate. From the inside, they frame verdant farmland and pale grey sky like a series of Rothko canvases. "It's the calmness and being surrounded by nature and animals that I love," says Schiffer, who grew up in the German countryside. "Even when it's raining, just the clouds alone, their formations, are amazing to watch."

The family also own an Elizabethan mansion in Suffolk, where they live during school holidays, but this modern lair – the kind of house in which James Bond might raise a family, if he ever gave up being James Bond and took a

sudden interest in midcentury furnishings, contemporary art and creating a scene of loving domesticity for his kids and pets – is their term-time abode. It's close enough to the three children's schools (Caspar, Clementine and Cosima are aged 16, 14 and nine) that they don't have to board, and big and slick enough to be the perfect base for the business empire of a 1990s icon and a high-voltage movie mogul.

Outside, even "the playground" – a giant trampoline and a swing set in matt black – is ridiculously chic. Inside, there's a kind of market-square bustle. While the children are at school, the *Vogue* team directs photography and various staff members run errands between the house, converted barns and glass-fronted garage, where three fiery sports cars from Vaughn's *Kick-Ass* film and the *Kingsman* spy comedy franchise sit. In the kitchen, micro-greens grow in containers on the counter, while a black working cocker spaniel lies on the floor, legs in the air, waiting for tickles.

The woman who has reputedly posed for more magazine covers than anyone else in the world – breaking through in the 1980s as the head-turning, sexy Bardot-alike in the >

Opposite: Claudia Schiffer in her dining room – she sits beneath Tracey Emin's *I Promise To Love You*. This page: in the living room, a Damien Hirst Kaleidoscope painting hangs near a Paimono table and chairs. Fashion editor: Kate Phelan. Hair: Seb Bascle. Make-up: Kirstin Piggott. Nails: Katy Tims. Digital artwork: Beau Puspurs





Guess denim adverts, before beginning a long-term career with Chanel and dominating advertising campaigns and editorial for many years – still looks a bazillion dollars. She’s dressed in pale blue skinny jeans, an Etre Cécile sweatshirt with a rainbow slogan and sandals embellished with colourful tassels. Her bombshell-blonde ponytail swings high. “Let’s sit in here,” she says, leading me into the living room, where a grand piano, two curved Tacchini Julep bouclé sofas and some impressive artworks dominate: I spy a pair of Hockneys, including a self-portrait, a Damien Hirst Kaleidoscope painting and a gigantic oil by Dexter Dalwood, immortalising OJ Simpson’s 1994 car chase down that empty LA highway.

Schiffer has been updating the house slowly for a year. “I’ve added more each month – unlike other people who maybe do it in one go,” she says with an apologetic shrug. “I know there are some ways of working – with an interior designer, especially – where everything is decided and laid out. But I like working exactly the opposite way. I like finding one chair and thinking, ‘OK, what goes with that?’ I love building things up, because then it is about who you are as a family.”

The building’s strict architectural lines have led her to create an interior that softens. “Our other home is completely different; lots of little rooms with fireplaces and cosiness. Here, you have a lot of glass and open space. The challenge is to make it feel like a family home. There’s that fine line that I’ve seen often – houses that look wonderful, but you’re worried to sit down anywhere. Where can you sit and relax?”

That is not a problem here, where guests probably need to be hauled away from the inviting sofas. “I’ve always loved midcentury style,” says Schiffer. “I love the wood and leather combined with sheepskin and Moroccan rugs and modern art; natural surfaces and tones with splashes of colour.”

Schiffer found most of her pieces online. “That’s been fun, because it arrives and you unpack and get the chance to try it in different ways and play around.” Her top four favourite websites for vintage gems are 1stdibs, Pamono, Vinteriors and The Modern Warehouse. Rugs from Guinevere Antiques on the King’s Road pervade the house. She’s still working on the finishing touches: “I’ve bought lots of frames from Habitat and I’m going to print out more pictures of the kids and the animals to hang on the walls,” she says. >

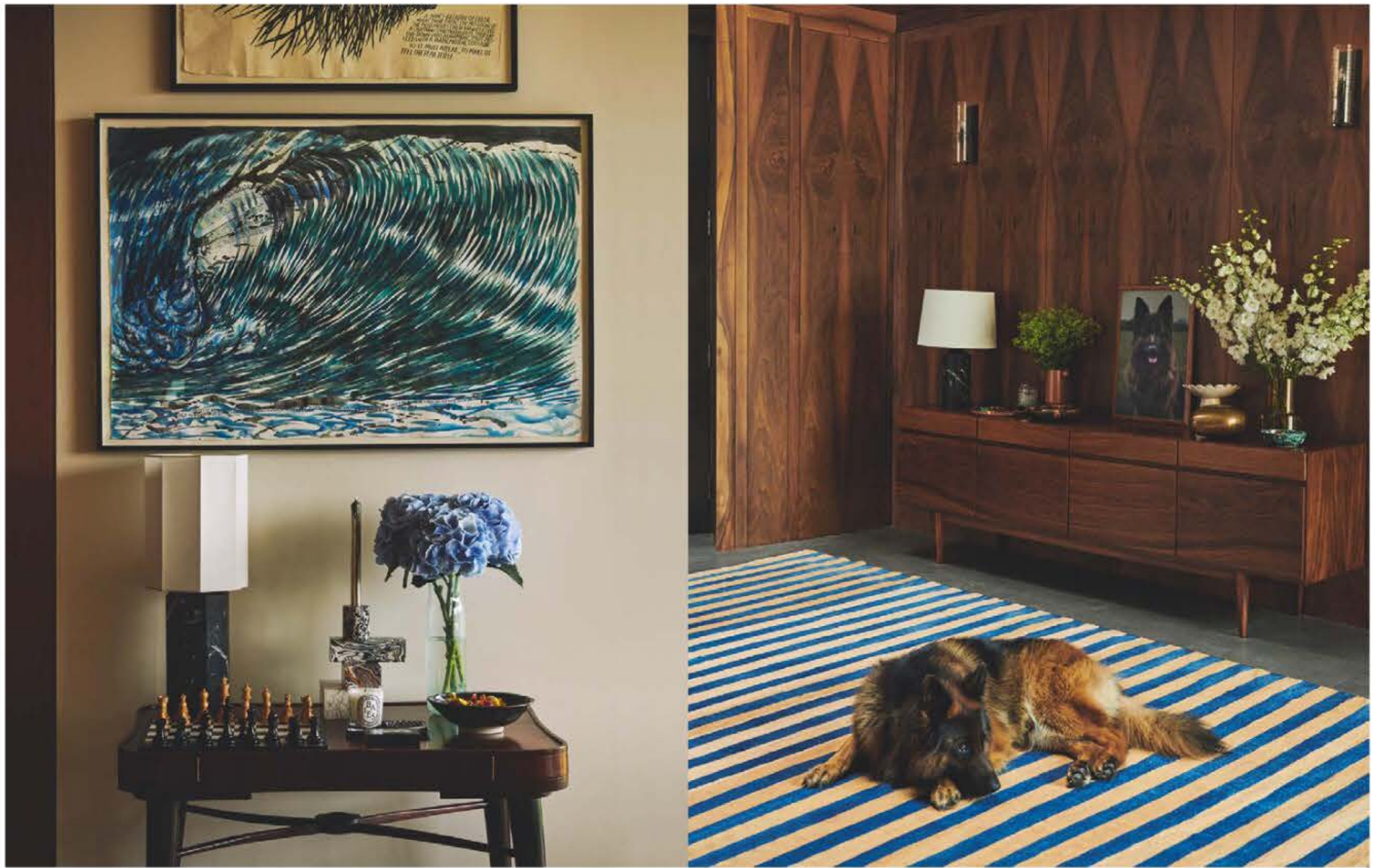




Opposite: Nancy Cadogan's Sun Maid - a 2017 oil painting from the artist's Still Reading exhibition - stands on a sideboard. This page: the living room's expansive views

This page: the first-floor library contains Schiffer's collection of fashion, art and photography books. She and her husband are also keen backgammon players, and there are boards in many of the rooms. Opposite: from left, an artwork by Raymond Pettibon hangs above a side table; one of the family's dogs lies beneath his lenticular portrait





Schiffer has triumphed in creating enticing nooks and sanctuaries in the mostly open-plan space. Everything has a story – such as the Tracey Emin *I Promise To Love You* neon in the dining room (“It’s our motto,” says Schiffer sweetly); the ceramic and wooden tortoises that she’s collected from her travels; the commissioned artworks of the pets (the spaniel, a German shepherd, plus a Scottish Fold cat named Smartie that looks like an owl with flat ears).

All this is impressive in its own right, but it’s when things get subterranean that you see why this house is so uniquely right for the Schiffer-Vaughns. A staircase takes you down to a vast underground workspace, with tall white walls on which the couple scrawl the status of their combined current projects – including the films, for which Schiffer is usually an executive producer (most recently *Rocketman*), the luxury menswear line they’ve spun off from the *Kingsman* series, her campaigns for Ba&sh and Chanel’s J12 watches, and her own ceramics line, which will launch next year. On the opposite wall, the next *Kingsman* film – a prequel starring Ralph Fiennes – is storyboarded, and official props lie on a 1950s cabinet, next to some kind of hot-rod motorbike. A score is being finalised in an editing suite connected to the screening room, which is the size of a small independent cinema and, Schiffer laughs, is usually “covered with crisps” left over from when the kids have brought their friends down to watch movies.

Along a corridor, we pass a series of glass-fronted wine cellars, a laundry room, massage room, and a Pilates and barre studio that Schiffer confesses she doesn’t spend much time in, preferring long walks, as well as a “grown-up gym”. At the far end of the house, a slate-walled swimming pool, with three neon inflatables chilling on the surface, looks tempting.

“It’s quite extraordinary,” says Schiffer of the house. “It’s great for the combination of work and family. We have most of our meetings here now. If I have a photo shoot, I drop

off the kids at school, go into London and come back in the evening. Matthew always films in England, so he might take a helicopter from here to set and come back, so he can sleep in his own house.” They share an office on the ground floor, with desks opposite each other. “A lot of our friends say, ‘I could never work with my husband or wife,’ but our relationship has always been about brainstorming. He’s always made decisions with me about my career, and vice versa.”

Upstairs, a bedroom overlooks that exceptional view – and connects to a suite of wood-paneled dressing rooms, where a yellow-print silk Versace robe hangs. Open shelving holds multiple handbags, one of which is a favourite Chanel archive piece, hand-painted by the late Karl Lagerfeld in Schiffer’s presence. She worked closely with the designer for almost 30 years and is still recovering from his loss. When she was in Paris to attend his memorial service, she popped into his studio. “Everything was as it always was, as if he’d just opened his book and left it in the corner for a moment.”

Schiffer has her own collection of photography, art and fashion books in the library, including an archive of Guess memorabilia from her earliest modelling days. She shows me a brochure with those famous black-and-white images in which she looks like a movie star. “That was about ’89, the time when I was in New York and I walked out of my elevator randomly one Sunday morning, not washed and in my jogging outfit, and somebody stopped me and said, ‘You’re the Guess girl!’ I suddenly realised my career was about to change...”

The clothing she’s amassed since then is stored in an archive off-site, but she’s constantly dipping into it for inspiration. Both her daughters are now also keen on discovering the delights within. “Especially my 14-year-old,” she laughs. “She loves oversized everything; sweatshirts and big chains. She’s always saying, ‘What have you got from the ’90s, Mum?’” Claudia Schiffer? The ’90s? Where does one begin? ■

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