



A sculpture by artist Bettina Seitz is a statuesque feature in the entrance hall

A STROKE OF FORTUNE

WORDS: Zoe Richards ♦ PHOTOS: Andy Newbold

Belgravia Gallery has brought world class art to the Surrey Hills. Its home, near Cranleigh, is just as spectacular as the pieces it displays

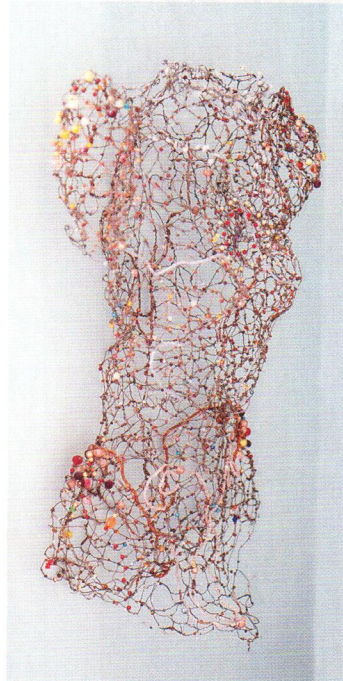
Fortune House is an elegant Victorian family home. Its name could relate to the luck of its breathtaking position. But actually, it is linked to Scottish botanist Robert Fortune, best known for stealing the secrets of China's tea trade and

toppling the country's monopoly on the much-loved drink.

It was Fortune's son who built the house, close to the Downs Link path just beyond Cranleigh and overlooking the magnificent vista of Holmbury Hill. In a lasting legacy to his father, two statuesque

Trachycarpus fortunei or windmill palms, brought to this country by Fortune in the 1800s sit framing that spectacular view.

Today, Fortune House is home to Belgravia Gallery, established by Anna Hunter and now run by her daughter Laura Walford.



FAR ABOVE: Art is even in the children's bedrooms where commissioned portraits take pride of place

ABOVE: This wire mesh and beaded torso by Claire Burbridge is one of many sculptures that can be found around the house, on walls and even in the garden

RIGHT ABOVE: The recently reconfigured dining room is home to some spectacular works of art

Unlike a stuffy traditional art gallery, Fortune House is a warm and relaxed space – a family home that just happens to house some of the world's most prized works of art. Laura explains that it was always her mother's intention to be welcoming, approachable and informal. "When she opened her first gallery in London, Anna put down carpet," Laura explains. "It was a way of giving the space a more cosy feel. But actually her real goal was to strip away any intimidation of visiting a gallery and try to demystify art."

Belgravia Gallery came about almost by chance 30 years ago. Anna was a single mother to three young children, struggling on a teacher's salary and driven by a need to enhance her income. She started a tiny business publishing works of Royal Academy art

and wrote a letter to HRH The Prince of Wales suggesting his watercolour paintings could be made into signed lithographs to raise money for his Charitable Foundation. It's a collaboration that has raised millions for good causes.

Belgravia Gallery – first located in Belgravia before moving to Mayfair – became a thriving platform for emerging and established artists, showcasing various art forms from lithographs to paintings, sculptures to fine art and photography. Laura joined her mother in the business in 2001.

As well as the royal links, Belgravia Gallery boasts another notable association with the artwork of the late Nelson Mandela. Anna and Laura were responsible for launching Mandela's work selling limited

edition signed lithographs and some originals based on his sketches of Robben Island. Not only has his work gone on to raise valuable funds for charitable causes, but just as importantly, Laura points out: "It's art that makes you think and reflect."

In 2017, Belgravia Gallery relocated to Fortune House, which is home to Laura, her husband Adam and their two children. "We knew that we wanted to move out of London and all roads led to Surrey," Laura explains. Anna was already living in nearby Ewhurst, having moved from her former home at Chinthurst Hill in Wonersh so the move made perfect sense.

Falling in love with Fortune House at first sight, Laura describes it as slightly faded but with bags of potential.



configured dining room. Capturing that wonderful view through its imposing windows, it's a light, bright space housing a huge Cattelan Italia ceramic topped table encircled with Love Your Home Madison armchairs upholstered in a lagoon coloured velvet. On one wall is *Petals on the Wind* – a giant acrylic on canvas by American abstract impressionist Monroe Holder, while on another is *Serengeti Migration*, a mixed media piece by Jan Coutts, known for her portrayals of the animals that inhabit the African plains. “We try to exhibit what we really love,” Laura explains. “Different styles can definitely work together if you just consider their tones, textures and scales and somehow find a balance.”

Neither Laura nor Anna describe themselves as artists. Anna admits she would rather take the talent of others and supply the vision required to find a piece its rightful home.

Artist Charlie Mackesy – the talent behind bestselling book *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* – could be described as one of Anna's protégés. Meeting him through her church more than 20 years ago, she started exhibiting his artwork, way before he'd achieved the fame he has today.

Belgravia Gallery is also supportive of the artists based on its doorstep in Surrey Hills.

“The house has a wonderful light feel with high ceilings and plenty of original details. It felt solid and while we wanted to keep all the classic features, we also wanted to add our own contemporary twist.”

The result is fantastically tasteful. A triumphant tribute to the Farrow & Ball colour chart, but of course a space to display the many works of art it houses. There is art wherever you look, something that Laura describes as entirely intentional. “I always try to encourage clients that you can have art everywhere. Whether it's in the bathroom or the kitchen or a forgotten corridor, mixing styles displays personality and adds to the overall feel of a home.”

Perhaps the most impressive place in the house and Laura's favourite of all is the newly



‘I always try to encourage clients that you can have art everywhere’

Laura Walford who is now responsible for the day-to-day running of Belgravia Gallery



The charity rainbow edition found under the stairs at Belgravia Gallery was created by artist Damian Hirst during the COVID-19 crisis

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The pair champion the likes of Cranleigh-based Charlotte Aiken whose pieces centre on the notion of infinity, and multi-media artist Jan Erika, known for her bold play on shape and colour.

Both mother and daughter have a down-to-earth attitude to art. While you are just as likely to find a vintage Matisse (there is a piece from his very last collection hanging in the upstairs hallway) nestling next to a Warhol or a work by Sir Peter Blake, there are absolutely no pretensions at Fortune House. Instead the



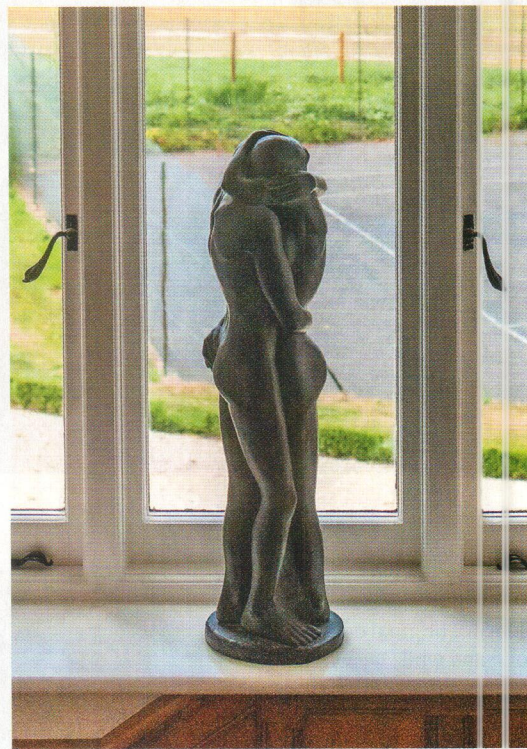
Mother and daughter duo Anna Hunter (right) and Laura Walford run the successful Belgravia Gallery from its new home in the Surrey Hills

pair speak with a knowledge and enthusiasm for the art they exhibit. And while some of the higher price points may seem unreachable, there are other pieces for a more modest budget. Laura encourages her clients to appreciate the art in everyday life: “Enjoy your children’s art by having it framed and get plenty of family photos on the walls.”

The downside of having your home as its own working gallery is the art is naturally transient. Some pieces can come and go in a matter of days. But one piece that Laura would never let go is the Colin Caffell sculpture, *Unity*, given to her by her mother on her 21st birthday.

There is another aspiration that fires this enduring passion. The Sebastian Hunter Memorial Trust was set up in 2002 by Anna in memory of her son, who died when he was just 18 years old. Numerous projects in some of the poorest parts of India have been funded and supported by the foundation, in particular Seb’s School set up in Tamil Nadu. Many young people use the various facilities supported by the trust every day, with donations continuing from Belgravia Gallery almost 20 years on. “Without a doubt, it’s the heart of our business,” Laura confides.

Alongside the artwork, there are many other secrets and treasures to be discovered at Fortune House. Not least the recording studio out the back – now a self-contained apartment. During the 1980s it



ABOVE: The Colin Caffell sculpture, *Unity*, was given to Laura by her mother on her 21st birthday. It is a work she says she’ll never part with

hosted the likes of George Michael, Elton John and Tina Turner. And while you can’t fail to be awestruck by the art around the house, it’s impossible not to be enthralled by the décor and soft furnishings too: William Morris prints on the walls, House of Hackney cushions, hand embroidered curtains. In fact, while it clearly excels in exhibiting outstanding works of art, it’s fair to say that in Fortune House, Laura and Anna have also created their very own masterpiece. ♦