

# The girl just wants to have fun

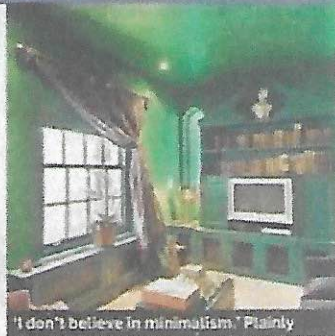
When Amanda Eliasch's husband moved out, how did she cope? By redecorating, of course, says Anna Mikhailova



The living/dining room is now a dramatic blue



A portrait of Eliasch by the artist Theo Platt



'I don't believe in minimalism.' Plainly

**A**manda Eliasch hates interior designers. And bankers, and sunlight, and babies. But especially interior designers. "They kill off any chance of someone having a personality in their home," she says. What she loves is colour. And there's so much of it in her house in Belgravia that you find yourself reaching for your sunglasses as you step inside. After her divorce in 2007 from Johan Eliasch, 47, a Swedish tycoon and former deputy treasurer of the Conservative party, the glamorous photographer and socialite began a complete overhaul of the seven-bedroom stucco-fronted home on Chester Square they had shared for 18 years. "I had the need to redecorate," she says. "After you've been together such a long time, your old marital home becomes fiercely depressing. I felt that if I didn't make changes, I would be lost in the past, and even though there are

things you want to preserve and keep, to carry on living in them feels empty. So I changed everything." Eliasch, 48, insists that the split from her husband, whose fortune was estimated last year at £400m by The Sunday Times Rich List, was amicable. Though they have two sons, Charlie, 17, and Jack, 13, theirs was an open marriage—she was linked with Jean-Louis Sebaste, a cosmetic surgeon, and he with a Brazilian beauty. The latest renovation, she says, was all about asserting her personality. "It wasn't to get rid of my husband's things — he's Swedish and typically minimalist — but because this house was ours. We had decorated it ourselves and lived our lives together in it." I wonder how a minimalist Swede could have stood a day in Eliasch's intentionally over-the-top home, never mind 20 years. "He's colour-blind," she says. Even so, Johan was as enthusiastic that she give the house a makeover as she was. He came over after the divorce to

tell her to change the bedroom, in particular, to make it easier for her to share it with another man. "But I still couldn't have a boyfriend over here," she insists. "It would be too weird." That bedroom is now a heady mix of black walls, bedclothes and cupboards, with gold and pink wallpaper by Sera Hersham Loftus, a favourite with the Notting Hill set. Distinctly gothic in flavour, it is her favourite room, where she spends most of her time: "All I need is a bedroom. In my next house, I may have one big bedroom and nothing else." As she perches on a red velvet couch in the living room, her Marilyn Monroe-style blonde curls are in sharp contrast to her black dress, much as the colours clash in the rooms. It is something she learnt from Ken Turner, the leading celebrity florist, for whom she worked in her twenties. "If you clash colours in a bouquet, it will look as if you have more roses," she explains. "I applied the same idea in my house. I don't believe in minimalism."

You can see where she gets it from. Eliasch was born in Beirut to British parents, an opera-singer mother and a journalist father. Her parents divorced after 18 months; she was raised mostly by her grandfather, Sidney Gilliat, the director of the St Trinian's films. "We are a weird mixture," she says. Eliasch's setting days are another influence on her flamboyant style. "I was at drama school when I first did up the house, and I themed it accordingly," she says. There was a *Lady Macbeth* dining room and a Titus Andronicus living room — all bright red and leopard-print. "It was a bit much," she confesses. I nod along, drawn into her world, where neon-pink chairs and Marie Antoinette busts are the norm. The dining room is now a deep blue. The day I visit, she is packing to go to LA, where she will be throwing a party, with the burlesque star Dita Von Teese dancing for the guests. Her assistant keeps coming up to finalise last-minute details, asking, "What should we e-mail

Nigella?" (presumably Mrs Charles Saatchi, whose husband called Eliasch the "new Cartier-Bresson"). Her soirées are famous for their outlandish themes — astrology parties with palm-readers and yoga parties with gurus. Her "good friend" Tracey Emin is a regular guest. Does Emin like the decor? "She's never said anything. But she's different — her own place is cosy and homely, very neat." She doesn't reveal whether the artist makes her bed before leaving. Not that Emin's opinion would matter to Eliasch. The house is stamped with her character and she says she enjoys the reaction on visitors' faces. "I especially like it if someone says they hate it," she says in her deep, theatrical voice. The couple bought the six-floor, 5,500 sq ft house in 1988 for £600,000 — the price was low because it was on a short lease. (They are now freeholders.) By then, Johan, born into a wealthy industrialist family, had founded the Tulton group, which bought, restructured and

## Don't get mad — redecorate (or how to move on without moving out)

With six out of 10 British couples admitting to arguing over the way they decorate their home, a certain amount of compromise is required. A bathroom strewn with girly products, for example, is bound to aggravate him; and so for a state-of-the-art plasma-screen television that dominates the entire living room... "Making choices about decor is always a source of conflict," says Simon Buhl Davis, in-house interior designer. "Couples will argue about anything and everything. Often one of them wants a simple, natural look, while the other wants bold colours. Ultimately, it is usually the women in the relationship that makes the decisions. Men tend to capitulate — they want an easy life." It's not always the girls who demand their own way, though. One

thirtysomething metrosexual, who was living alone in his south London flat until his girlfriend moved in last month, says: "One bone of contention is the mugs. My beloved likes her tea and has more mugs than a Whittard clearance sale. My mug stand has space for only six at a time." The solution? "A purge of the novelty items and a mug-of-the-week rotation system." All very mature. If you split up, however, the person left in the former love nest has the painful reminders of a broken relationship — and those bright-orange walls they never liked. So the problem becomes how to move on without moving out. The motto is don't get mad — redecorate. Ask Jo Wood. Seven months after her husband, Ronnie, the Rolling Stones guitarist, fled the marital home in Kingston upon Thames for his Russian

girlfriend, she is redecorating. "I've taken down all these annoying things Ronnie used to stick on the walls, and I'm putting up wallpaper," she said last week. "I'm much happier." Jane, a recruitment consultant in her early forties who split from her husband 18 months ago, is finding similar solace in shaking things up. When her husband moved out, after a decade of marriage, she was left reeling. "But you do start to emerge from the shock and horror of the break-up," she says. "Now I'm thinking about what changes I want to make. I have got rid of lots of stuff — his rugby boots and sports videos — which was quite cathartic. I now want to make it completely my own, as opposed to living in a museum of what was our life together. I'm going to start with some luxury linen."

Christine Webber, a psychotherapist, writer and broadcaster, says that women are generally much better than men at dusting themselves off and starting over. "Don't do anything drastic at first," she advises. "Box up all evidence of your ex, but don't

**"USUALLY, THE WOMAN MAKES THE DECISIONS. MEN TEND TO CAPITULATE — THEY WANT AN EASY LIFE"**

destroy all the photos. Let things settle before you make any big changes, and get a friend to help you with ideas. It is always good to start with the bedroom — but don't stuff it with pudgy toys, as women tend to do. At some point, there will be a new man in there." You can always use the break-up as a learning curve. Several years ago, Fiona McLean, 42, a public relations manager split with her long-term boyfriend, whom she affectionately refers to as Ted Dundy. "I still haven't redecorated," she says, "but I did go straight out and buy the same Porsche kettle, Nespresso coffee machine and touch-bin bin as my ex. I realized it was his expensive gadgets I found attractive — not him."

Emma Wells