

BRING YOUR WORK HOME

Kally Ellis is fashionable florist to the stars and decorator of post-Oscar parties. But at her shabby-chic Tufnell Park home she prefers her flowers rustic and relaxed, says **Pattie Barron**

EVERY home should have four kinds of vases, says Kally Ellis, boss of McQueens, London's fashionable florist, and decorator of post-Oscar parties and film festivals. "A fishbowl for hand-tied bouquets, a tall, conical shape for lilies and branches, a tank vase that is handy for hyacinths and tulips, and bud vases, so you can place a single stem in each – they're a very economical way of dressing a long table."

Ellis has all these vessels and more in her living room alone. Egg-shaped vases in a line along one mantelpiece each hold Easter's ruffled, rich yellow flower, the ranunculus, interspersed with McQueens' frangipani and peony-scented candles, while along the mantelpiece of the second marble fireplace, an extravagant cascade of glass

test tubes, dangling from a veritable forest of silver birch branches set in big glass tanks, hold more.

Her window boxes are made of woven wood – she prefers a rustic, relaxed look for home – and currently house white hydrangea heads and scented jasmine. Interestingly, on the inside, facing the windows, they reveal a secret garden of baby daffodils. "You're looking out more than looking in, so why not keep the best view in town for yourself?"

It is Ellis's mix of common sense and creativity that has made McQueens a stand-out florist on both sides of the Atlantic: why else would Vanity Fair demand her skills to decorate its annual post-Oscars party in Hollywood for 14 straight years? Now she's flying to New York to dress the launch party of Robert De Niro's Tribeca Film Festival. "I used



Cut clematis is new to the flower industry, and displayed simply here in a vintage jug

my voluntary redundancy money after four years at a merchant bank to open a small shop in Shoreditch 20 years ago," she says proudly, about to celebrate the occasion at a dinner for 40 at Claridge's. "Now I have 32 members of staff and a client list to die for. And instead of getting up at 2.30am to go to the flower market I can have breakfast with my kids and take them to school."

Not bad going for a girl from Tufnell Park, where she was brought up and now lives in a three-storey Victorian house with children's novelist Damian Kelleher, their son Freddie, 18, daughter Sophia, 16, and cat Lady Gogo. "I was born around the corner, two streets away. I vowed never to come back, as you do when you're a teenager, but we came here 14 years ago for the schools. My children and I all went to the same great

little school around the corner. And my shop in Old Street is just a 10-minute drive away."

Her home is shabby-chic, she says, out of necessity. "There's nothing of great value because the children broke everything when they were younger and the cat rips our furniture to pieces. And I'm a collector: jugs of all shapes and sizes, gilded icons from every Mediterranean holiday on my bedroom wall. I bought a convex mirror a year ago, then I found another, and so I went on until I'd filled the hallway."

She fell in love with floristry when she saw a Parisian flower seller spiral a bunch of tulips into a hand-tied posy, and her signature style is simple and beautiful. "We rarely mix flowers in one container. Whether we're doing an installation that fills one wall, or a couple of vases, we

Stick to one or two colours. When you go into a flower shop buy five bunches of tulips. It will have more impact

colourblock. Stick to one or two colours. When you go into a flower shop, don't ask for a stem of this, and a stem of that. Instead, say, 'I'll have five bunches of tulips.' It will have far more impact."

It is tulip time all year round in her bedroom, courtesy of a tulip-print Designers Guild linen used for the blinds, but especially now, when Ellis delights in repeating the lily-flowered motif for real, with scarlet Aladdin tulips massed around the room. A dressmaker's dummy in the large bay window sports an Alexander McQueen evening gown, which has a resonance for Ellis: the original small shop she bought in Shoreditch, which was a landscaping business, belonged to the late fashion designer's aunt.

"I didn't know at the time because it had since changed hands, but I kept on the name because I didn't want to be known as Kally Ellis Flowers; I prefer the



Vases of bright scarlet Aladdin tulips sit around the main bedroom, echoing a similar pattern printed on the linen window blinds

anonymity. And besides, the shop had a few existing clients in the City and I didn't want to scare them off by changing the name."

The bathroom walls are painted baby blue, and the classic white brick tiles are a favourite feature, possibly because Ellis



Twin vases of fragrant sweet peas give the bathroom basin a shot of colour



Here window boxes contain "hidden" daffodils that are viewed from the living room only



Mirrors in the hall (left) and posies in the living room (right) greet Ellis's guests

of heavy earthenware pots, including one she brought back from her native Greece. "I always have a mixture of flower stems and branches in them; at the moment there are spiraea, a favourite of mine, tightly budded white lilac and sprays of pale green viburnum."

Old church chairs, complete with prayer pockets at the back, are Ellis's choice of dining chairs and the vintage

table is usually covered with a cloth to provide a backdrop for an ever-changing runway of flowers that she adds to for more formal dining. "With a long table, you need to split flowers all the way down rather than have just one big vase in the middle. I landscape so there are three different heights, like the tiers of plants in a garden. It's a great way of bringing the outdoors inside."

Kally relaxes with husband Damian and children Freddie and Sophia (left). Flower-filled wicker baskets on a windowsill (right)



Photographs: Clive Nichols

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can layer every colour on to them – and she does, to great effect. Currently she's taken to violet underscored with turquoise: lilac sweet peas and fat bars of Claus Porto's Lime Basil turquoise soap decorate each of the twin basins, a trio of turquoise glass vases holds purple

anemones, while dusky mauve heads of herbaceous clematis, available for the first time as a florist's flower, are displayed in a plain enamelled pitcher. More than any greenery could, the vibrant colours bring the bathroom to life. "I've no idea why people put green plants in

their bathroom," says Ellis, who clearly waves the flag for cut flowers in every room, from bathroom to workroom. "I can't bear green plants in the house. I think they're for outside, not indoors." The disused fireplace in the kitchen makes the perfect place to hold a cache

Get the look



1 Soap star
Claus Porto soap;
cologneandcotton.com.

2 Flower fun
The next one-day course at
McQueens flower school is hand-
tied bouquets on May 9, £290 (020
7251 5505; mcqueens.co.uk).

3 Market musts
Test tubes and florist supplies;
Whittingtons Floral Sundries, Nine
Elms Flower Market.

4 Blooming blinds
Roman blinds made by Antonia
Jack at Hazelwood
Interiors; hazelwoodint.com.

5 Table talk
Oak coffee table with sliding
compartments and storage. from &
then design; andthendesign.co.uk.

6 Citrus set
Lime-green linen tablecloth
bordered in tobacco brown;
conranshop.co.uk.



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