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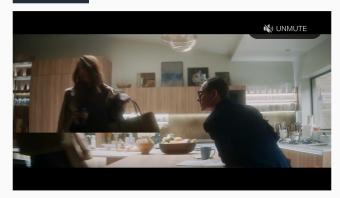
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The London Home in Black Bag Is the Perfect Spy House

The residence is "gorgeously anonymous."

BY KELLY ALLEN | PUBLISHED: MAR 14, 2025

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n Steven Soderbergh's new spy drama *Black Bag*, Michael
Fassbender and <u>Cate Blanchett</u> play eternally devoted spouses who are also staunch British intelligence agents. A good portion of the film takes place at the <u>London</u> residence of their characters, George Woodhouse and Kathryn St. Jean. The Georgian home—where <u>dinner parties</u> become liar traps—is the perfect, sophisticated spy house.





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"I really loved the idea that the front would be stylish but unassuming...
gorgeously anonymous in our case," says production designer Philip
Messina of the home's exterior, which was shot on location in London's
Islington neighborhood. "We actually coincidentally found out that
previously Keira Knightley lived in the adjoining unit."

Messina added a portico to the facade to make the entrance more intimate—all of which was replicated on stage at Pinewood Studios, where every interior set was built. "Once you get inside, the front room is very sort of traditional Georgian, with that traditional fireplace [and] staircase," Messina says. "But as you move through the house, it breaks away and becomes a modern house in the back."

The mixed interior styles create a spy facade that differs from what lies behind the curtain. Messina, who worked with set decorator Anna Lynch-Robinson, first approached the interiors through the dining room—perhaps the most important room to the storyline. "I really started from the dining table out in four directions," Messina says. "I've never designed a set that way."



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Messina also custom designed the table. "Very early on, [the director] Steven said, 'I want to have a dining table that has light emanating from it," he says. "And I've done all the *Ocean's* movies with him. I've done the sort of slick version of that, and I didn't want to do the slick lit table."

Inspired by a photo Soderbergh showed Messina of a coffee table with glass pendant balls on it in the director's New York home, Messina devised a version with hand-blown glass to create a light source that feels almost like an upside down lamp. "The dining table is actually kind of like a Rubik's cube," Messina says. "It came apart in all different pieces, and the whole centerpiece [with a brass band around it] pulls up." That meant the camera could actually film from inside the table, and the light source could be removed for other scenes.

On one wall, a painted mural of the English countryside nods to George's Zen moments fishing on the lake (filmed at Shardeloes Lake, in Buckinghamshire). "In the left-hand corner, there's a scene of two dogs, hunting dogs, ripping a fox apart," Messina says. "I don't know if you ever register it or not, but that was my ode to like, *Oh, there's an idyllic landscape*, but there's something a little gruesome in the corner if you care to look."





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Nearby, a glass atrium encases a tree. "There's a transparency to it, but there's also a confinement to it," says Messina, noting the same is true of the couple's office. "I just like the idea of this tree, this beautiful tree, growing in this very artificial kind of space."

Other details drive home the vision. A few statues with faces scattered around act as inanimate witnesses to all that takes place in the dining room. Heirloom pieces, like a cabinet filled with blue glassware, add to the couple's office. "I just like the idea of this tree, this beautiful tree, growing in this very artificial kind of space."

Other details drive home the vision. A few statues with faces scattered around act as inanimate witnesses to all that takes place in the dining room. Heirloom pieces, like a cabinet filled with blue glassware, add to the room's elegance and mysterious blue-gray color palette.



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While the home's main level is open and ready to be seen, "the secrets are more upstairs," says Messina. "The bedroom is where the real conversations happen."

Blanchett expressed how she wanted her character's home to be sensuous, and that feeling peaks in the bedroom. Messina shared Blanchett's vision, explaining, "There's a difference between sexy and sensuous, and I think sensuous can run a little deeper."









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As Messina was putting together the bedroom color palette—with a not-too-shiny gold, deep turquoise, and dusty pink—costume designer Ellen Mirojnick told Messina that Blanchett wanted to see what color he was thinking for the bedroom. So he sent over a color swatch in the range of what he envisioned. It turned out to be the same shade Blanchett's bedroom is painted at her own house. The jewel-toned green-blue is "almost like a turquoise color on the wall, but it's dark and muted," Messina says.

Messina calls the synchronicity complete kismet. "Cate has amazing taste," Messina says. "She's just one of those people that it's like you know her place is gonna be amazing."

The movie certainly nails an elevated style—one a work-obsessed couple, who make good money and pour it into their home rather than spend it on vacations or kids, can ceaselessly revel in.

Black Bag is in theaters now.

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