

## The muralist Freddie Wimsett: from farm boy to the stars' favourite painter

The American artist, whose boho work is adored by famous fans including Kate Moss and Rita Ora, has come a long way from rural Minnesota



Freddie Wimsett (right) with his husband, Scott, and their son, Jacob (plus Seagull, their Bedlington terrier, and Disco the cat)

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**T**he muralist Freddie Wimsett, 40, is the artist the smart set have on speed dial, should they need a starry sky painted on a barrel-vaulted ceiling or a jungle scene in a downstairs loo. Famous fans include Kate Moss, the fashion designer Alice Temperley and Rita Ora. Best known for his chinoiserie and tropical panoramas, Wimsett uses his own home, near Glastonbury, to develop new compositions. He calls the style of his eccentric interiors “Somerset boho” or “farmhouse meets Auntie Mame”. Minimalists, look away now.

Born in a rural farming community in Minnesota, Wimsett started painting wall art aged 12. “I decided I wanted to paint a mural of all the animals in my National Geographic magazine. Obviously my parents said no. I badgered them. I gathered up all my paints and locked the door for about a month. I opened the door and said, ‘It’s finished.’ It was this jungle scene with a jaguar and macaws and monkeys.”



Wimsett's first mural, a jungle scene he painted aged 12

Growing up, he had no expectation of a creative career. “My trajectory was potentially to work in a factory. That’s what much of my family did — and here I am choosing between shades of blue or green for a living.” Wimsett went to Macalester College in St Paul to be an actor and moved from the Midwest to the west coast after he graduated. “It was an utter failure. I was in two magazines [as a model] and got paid about five dollars. Meantime, my next door neighbour needed a fence built. Then I said, ‘Do you know your garage could look a bit like a Mexican pueblo?’ She commissioned me to paint it with murals, the neighbours saw the murals ... several painting jobs and no acting gigs later, I somehow found myself at a producer’s party in West Hollywood.”

He describes how he accidentally became a PA to Christopher Ciccone, Madonna's brother. "I went up to him [at the party] and said, 'Hi, my name is Freddie, I'm a muralist, I'd like to do a mural for you.' And he said, 'I'm a producer. I don't need a mural but I would like you to be in my show.'" Wimsett was cast to play Ciccone's assistant for *The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency* TV series. "Then Christopher actually hired me after that, to be his real assistant." About a year later, Ciccone was out of town and Wimsett was sent to the airport to pick up his boss's British ex-boyfriend Scott. He and Scott hit it off immediately and the pair began a secret affair. Long story short, they moved to London together, set up home in a flat in Camden Square in 2010 and became civil partners in 2011.

"Just as I was ready to move to London, an architect in LA approached me and said, 'Can you paint chinoiserie?' I'd never heard of it before — I had to look it up! I said, 'I'm sure I can.' He looked at my website and said, 'I don't think you've got the talent.' That bit of criticism changed the course of my career. The gift he gave me is immeasurable. The second my feet hit the ground in London, I painted my first chinoiserie mural in our flat to prove him wrong."

Temperley, a great friend of Scott's, saw the decoration and said, "I'd love you to paint something for me," and Wimsett was soon a word-of-mouth success among her social circle. The next milestone for the couple was a move to the country, a decision made at another glamorous party. "It was [Alice's sister] Mary Temperley's wedding that made me say I wanted to live in Somerset. The wedding was in the orchards at the Burrow Hill cider farm and the next day all of the gorgeous women were floating around in Temperley gowns. I found it all so colourful and amazing. I said to Scott, 'I want to live here.'"



The family's 300-year-old farmhouse near Glastonbury in Somerset  
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Now the couple live in a 300-year-old farmhouse with their 12-year-old adopted son, Jacob, five “crafty and ruthless” hens and two Bedlington terriers, Seagull and Humphrey. “Humphrey is a star. He was on *For the Love of Dogs*. Paul [O’Grady] called us up and said, ‘I know you’ve already got Seagull, do you want Humphrey?’” They bought the property two and a half years ago. “It was that crunch time when there was a stamp duty holiday, and we had inadvertently sold our house and the one we wanted to buy fell through, and we were desperate. So when we found this place we made an offer on the spot. Scott gave me the thumbs-up when we saw the studio space.

“The bones of it were really strong, but nothing had been changed inside for 30 years. When we moved in, there was a lot of woodchip wallpaper to get rid of and colours we wouldn’t choose. It was almost entirely cosmetic, nothing structural,” Wimsett says. The house is still a work in progress. He is decorating each room in spare hours between professional commissions (his bespoke murals cost £750-£1,200 a sq m) and says, “We don’t need it all to be finished in one go. I like the potential that perhaps some day you find some very bizarre piece of furniture you can build your room around. I can see it is lovely to have a home that’s cohesive, but I like a super-eclectic mix.”

The joyous miscellany of his interiors features furniture bought from Criterion Auctioneers in Islington, north London, including the hallway mirror, two throne chairs in the karaoke lounge and a 20-branch chandelier in his studio, above the old dairy. The wall paintings are, of course, the stars.

The wet room, decorated with flamingos, peacocks and birds of paradise, was the first interior he painted. “It was a greyish beige. I thought it’s the smallest room in the house and certainly the ugliest, so I can play around.” The interior that has had the most changes is the kitchen. “It used to have orange linoleum and really awful nondescript countertops that were in terrible shape. We had someone do the tiles and he put in underfloor heating. We added bamboo countertops and painted the orangey pine cupboards with Frenchic Paint. It is so good — you don’t need to prime it.”



The family in the drawing room, which doubles as a karaoke lounge

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The karaoke lounge is his favourite room. “Scott prefers to call it the drawing room. That’s where we bring our guests after dinner. We might chat or we might do some karaoke. If I’m warmed up and in the mood that means *Bohemian Rhapsody*.” Given the opportunity and audience, Wimsett reveals he is quite the vocalist. “Jacob and I were in the car for eight hours the other week, and I sang for seven of them.”

A mural in the dining room takes inspiration from childhood memories of visiting his mother at work. “My mum used to work at a plant nursery. Not only did I learn about plants, but I also got into plants I couldn’t have. In Minnesota it’s extremely hot and humid in summer and in the winter it gets down to 40 below. We had a very limited amount of plants that could grow outside. I dreamt of wisteria but I never saw one in person until I was 18 years old.” The wall painting is a mash-up of most-desired flora, ordered by the seasons. “In one corner I’ve got a fir tree and hellebores and ivy, all the wintry plants, and as you move around the room there’s a Japanese quince, which is late-winter/early-spring blooming, then daffodils, cherry blossom, magnolia and bluebells. It will go on to wisteria, gladiolus and foxglove – summer plants – and then become autumn. I’m painting each season as it happens, so the project may well take a year.”

Apart from the dining room florilegium, Wimsett is working on a private commission in the New Forest and has created a Tuscan-inspired scene, featuring lemons, olive trees and birds with hats on for the interior of the Summer House, the members’ hospitality suite in the Royal Enclosure at Royal Ascot. “One of my favourite things in the world is transformation,” he says, “whether that’s about murals or DIY.” His own metamorphosis is a constant source of wonder. “Somehow this boy from rural Minnesota is a gay muralist dad in Somerset,” he says. “The sequence of events your life can take are quite amusing.”

[frederickwimsett.com](http://frederickwimsett.com). See his work [@freddiewimsett](https://www.instagram.com/freddiewimsett)



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### **Karaoke lounge (or drawing room)**

The wall colour is Jacaranda from Francesca's Paints. The poppy mural was created by drawing the flower motifs on tracing paper, then using graphite to transfer it onto the wall. The alcoves are painted in a tarnished imitation gold leaf for a decadent glow and high-gloss paint has been applied over the old textured ceiling.