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**MEN'S
STYLE
SPECIAL**

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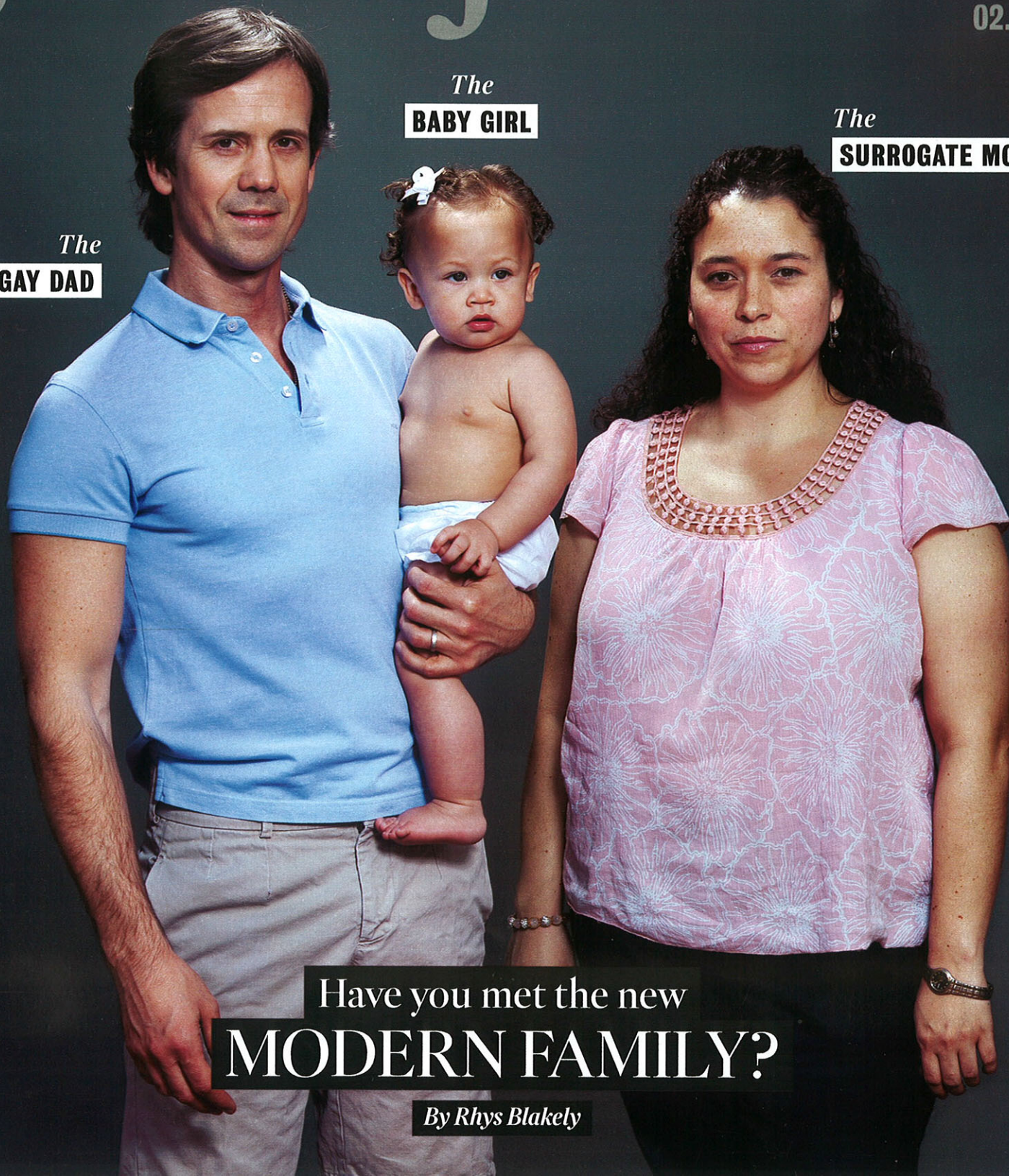
BABY GIRL

The

SURROGATE MOTHER

The

GAY DAD



Have you met the new
MODERN FAMILY?

By Rhys Blakely



IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT

Son of Terence, brother of Jasper: it's no surprise that Sebastian Conran's home is crammed with objects both elegant and functional

REPORT Vinny Lee PHOTOGRAPHS Darren Chung



Left: the dining room with punk posters and Le Corbusier recliner. Above: bust of Sebastian's wife, Gertrude Thoma, and Heatherwick's Spun chair



Sebastian Conran has not been in the limelight as much as other members of the Conran clan, but he is most definitely a chip off the old block. Just as his father, Sir Terence, revolutionised the British high street in the Sixties by stocking French accessories such as cafetières and orange Le Creuset pans in his Habitat stores,

so Sebastian, aged 56, is set to tackle the kitchen of the 21st century with his Universal Expert range of stylish and functional products.

The name is a play on James Bond's cover, the fictitious import-export company Universal Exports, but also refers to Sebastian's 30 years' experience of designing products for other brands. "It's my tenth set of kitchen knives," he says. That count includes ranges that bear the names of Nigella Lawson and Ken Hom.

Along with his design credentials, the other thing that makes Sir Terence's eldest son good with kitchen equipment is his passion for cooking. "When I was young my mum [Shirley Conran] worked in Fleet Street, so I stayed at home with my stepmum [cookery writer

Caroline], who was testing recipes. I was tasting from an early age."

He was also a regular visitor to food markets in France, where they often went on holiday, and soon started picking things up in *brocantes* and flea markets. This is where his love of collecting was nurtured, the results of which can be seen in the three-storey West London house where he lives with his second wife, the German actress Gertrude Thoma.

They bought the house nine years ago and immediately knocked through the ground-floor rooms. "At one stage, the floor was bare earth and the front room was supported by a steel cage. For four months we lived with the builders, retreating further and further upstairs," he says. But that is a distant memory and the house is well settled as a family home.

"This house is about a lifetime of collecting things. You can't just go out and buy them all at once"





As well as collections of plaster architectural sculptures and Chairman Mao badges, there are shelves of drinking glasses, some of them antique, some of his own design, and still others from collections that his younger brother Jasper made with Waterford. "This house is about a lifetime of collecting things. You can't just go out and buy them all at once," Sebastian says.

In the sitting room is a Spun chair by Thomas Heatherwick, of Olympic cauldron fame. The designer was a pupil of Sebastian's, whose 17-year-old son, Max, recently did an internship at Heatherwick's studio. Sebastian's other son, Sam, 23, is studying at the London College of Communication.

The mantelpiece was a wedding present from the designer André Dubreuil. Beside it sits a bust of Gertrude, done by a Russian artist who sketched her unknown in a café. There are several Universal Expert Radius tables: small discs on bicycle-seat posts, which rise and tip to achieve the most comfortable level for a laptop.

The walls are covered with artworks and photographs. By Sebastian's desk there is a work by his late mentor, Eduardo Paolozzi; outside the bedroom are photographs of

Clockwise from far left: Sebastian Conran; the kitchen with Universal Expert china; Radius

table in the sitting room; the main bedroom; the bathroom, with basin designed by Sebastian

Sebastian as a toddler by his aunt, Priscilla Carluccio. In the dining room, posters designed by Sebastian when he was a roadie with the punk band the Clash are a reminder of his wilder years, and the time when, as union treasurer at St Martins School of Art, he gave the Sex Pistols their first booking.

Sebastian picks up the prototype of the Universal Expert cheese grater. "It folds flat so you can store it easily in a drawer," he demonstrates. "So QVC," he adds with a laugh.

Then, taking out a packet of Bath Oliver biscuits to demonstrate a cheeseboard with a well to stop biscuits rolling off, Sebastian pauses to look at the packaging. "My father designed that 50 years ago," he says with a smile. There's obviously staying power in Conran design. ■

Sebastian Conran's collection is available at johnlewis.com