

The

ENGLISH HOME

Celebrating the essence of English style

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LIGHT & SPACE

Clever decor and architectural remodelling to enhance interiors

Colours to make rooms feel bigger

Flooring to add a spacious look

Mirrors & sheers for elegant effects

Kevin McCloud's design insights

Inviting retreats

Beautiful rural homes from romantic manor to coastal hideaway





Reclaimed beams were used in the dining extension to provide an air of authenticity. The bespoke dining table and sideboard are by I & J.L. Brown and the ladder-back chairs were inherited. The Birds fabric by Galbraith & Paul used for the curtains and blinds is echoed by the two Plume wall lights from Objet Insolite. The Titan Pendant lights above the table are from Original BTC.



Family AFFAIR

New life is breathed into an Oxfordshire house to create perfect childhood memories

FEATURE FAITH ECKERSALL PHOTOGRAPHS COLIN POOLE





ABOVE Antonia paired the Knole sofa and green armchair she inherited from her mother with an ironwork table made by I & JL Brown. The Optic Diamond Fresco rug is from Vanderhurd.

RIGHT The classic pink-and-green colour scheme is Antonia's study evolved from her decision to use her late mother's furniture in there.

BELOW The house started off as three cottages, then became a rectory and subsequently a private home. On the right (just seen) is the new extension, with its striped brickwork, and on the left are the gateposts so admired by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner.



ABOVE The Atlas limestone flooring by Stone Age and the units made by Higham Kitchens – painted in Little Greene's Tracery II – provide a light touch in the kitchen.

LEFT Antonia carrying some freshly picked artichokes from the garden.

In the 1970s, when the celebrated architectural scholar Sir Nikolaus Pevsner visited the Oxfordshire house that Antonia Stewart and her family have since moved into, he was particularly impressed by its splendid, pineapple-topped gateposts. However, what Antonia, an interior designer, and her husband Henry, who works in the City of London, were most struck by when they arrived in 2009, was the house's potential for 'great games of hide-and-seek'. They felt it was a place to give their children – Serena, seven, Alexander, five, and Annabel, three – an idyllic upbringing.

"Ever since I first met him, my husband talked about moving to the countryside, even before we were married," Antonia says. "It was always the dream." Their search started in 2007 and by 2009 they had decided to concentrate on the Cotswolds. "I went to school nearby and Henry's mother had grown up in Elsfield, near Oxford, so we both had connections to the area," she continues. ▶





"We loved the fact it was all books and beams, yet still had so much potential"



ABOVE Repositioning the stairs in the entrance hall allowed daylight to flood the space and create a cosy nook to sit in. "We chose straight spindles and a polished wooden bannister as this simple design was truer to what would have been found in a cottage," says Antonia.

RIGHT Hidden behind a door on the upper landing is a secret staircase – one of the things which persuaded the Stewarts to buy the house.



Whilst the couple were keen to have a project, when they excitedly raced from London to view the house they had no real idea what was to come. Originally built as three cottages in the 1600s, and at some point converted into one residence, the house was at that time owned by an Oxford don and his wife who had enjoyed a long and happy family life there. "We loved the fact it was all books and beams, yet still had so much potential, especially for the children," says Antonia. "There was a secret staircase to the top floor, lots of space to play and great opportunities for hide-and-seek," she remembers. "Thanks to the previous owners it had a lovely feel, but because of its age, was very tired and in need of some attention."

Initially, the Stewarts kept their London home and used the Oxfordshire house purely for weekends and holidays. "Because we were going to embark on a big project, we didn't do anything at all for 18

months," remembers Antonia. "We had no curtains and had to issue guests with eye masks in lieu of blinds and curtains."

During this time the couple planned their restoration campaign for, amongst other things, the property needed replastering, replumbing and rewiring throughout. "It was one of those places where if you went upstairs to the loo and switched on the light the kitchen would be plunged into darkness," Antonia laughs. They also decided to reposition the staircase in the entrance hall to allow more light in, put in extra windows throughout – including two extra dormer windows in the roof – and added an extension to enlarge the kitchen. "The original kitchen was tiny for the size of the house," Antonia explains.

As the house was Grade II listed, they had to liaise with the local council. "The conservation officer was excellent and advised us in advance about what

ABOVE A wood-burning stove from Chesney's creates an inviting corner to sit in the entrance hall. The sofa is from Sofa Workshop and is covered in a printed linen by Romo. The cushions on the sofa are by Carola van Dyke. The Berkeley armchair from Kingcome Sofas is covered in Colefax and Fowler's Lemark Plaid.



would and wouldn't be acceptable," says Antonia. After the plans were agreed, the family moved out and the builders moved in to create the five-bedroom, three-bathroom property that exists now. "We were basically doing a 200-year overhaul," says Antonia. "We sprayed the beams against potential woodworm and we stripped back the mish-mash of previous plaster repairs and replaced them with lime plaster."

In order to make the extension appear as seamless as possible and in keeping with the rest of the house, Henry searched for authentic, locally quarried bricks for the exterior and sourced a blacksmith for the new internal ironmongery, whilst Antonia scoured reclamation yards to find suitable beams and doors.

The most extraordinary task to be carried out was relining the original chimney flues with parging - a render mix. "The pargeter arrived and lit a very hot fire - more than 1,000 degrees - to burn off years of residue inside the chimney flues," says Antonia. "Then this tiny lady joined him and - if you can believe this - shimmied up inside each chimney like something out of the *Water Babies*, and hand-flailed any remaining debris before they were relined. The flues are works of art now."

ABOVE Knowles & Christou printed its Ikebana wallpaper in a fresh green colourway at Antonia's request as she wanted something bright and zingy for the master bedroom. The quilt and bedlinen are from Charmajesty. **LEFT** The bold Robert Stephenson rug adds verve to the airy scheme and ties in with the greens, purples and browns in the room.



ABOVE The top-floor guest bedroom is painted in Blazer by Farrow & Ball. The bedside tables are from Chelsea Textiles and the lamps – made from wooden skittles – came from Belgium.

RIGHT Antonia found the right-hand bed on eBay for £60 and the other at Winchcombe Reclamation. The blind fabric is from Brunswig & Fils.

When it came to the furnishing of her new home, Antonia was in no doubt about how she wanted it to look. "I wanted people to be able to come in and relax and not worry about leaving a dirty mark here and there," she says. She also wanted the house to look "as if it had come together over time", so she used furniture that had belonged to her late mother, including the gently faded pink sofa in the study, and sharpened the look with contemporary designs from favourite suppliers such as Vanderhurd and Galbraith & Paul.

Another major influence on the interior decoration was her acquisition of home accessories and fabric company Hollyhock Home, which she bought from a friend after falling in love with its Rabbits design. "I've used Hollyhock Home bedlinen in the children's bedrooms. There is something so inspiring about it. It has that lovely, English, slightly old-fashioned feel, harking back to a simpler way of life and bringing back happy childhood memories," she says. "This house puts that into play – trying to give our children a lovely time in a lovely home, just as we had." ■

