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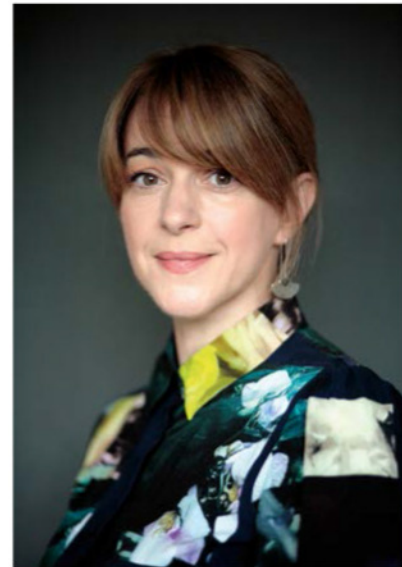
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A letter from home

Welcome to the December issue of *The English Home*. As we work on this special festive issue for you, the word I keep returning to is 'authenticity'. What really matters at Christmas is not that the decorations all match, lunch is perfectly cooked or presents are seamlessly wrapped and finished with ribbons. What matters is that we enjoy creating an authentic setting that means something to us. It's about dusting off the box of decorations, some of which we've had since childhood, making paper chains or adorning the tree together with younger generations and taking the time to enjoy the process and anticipation, away from our usual busy lives.

Thankfully, this year, perhaps in response to the economic climate and increased awareness of waste and sustainability, experts in the art of creating Christmas seem to be in favour of an eclectic look – gone are the days of buying colour co-ordinated decorations from scratch. In this issue, you'll therefore find achievable ideas for preparing your English home for the season, from expert advice on decorating (page 84) to small new buys to keep and add to your personal collection. You'll also find courses on crafting handmade touches (page 122), while the homes we feature all showcase their owners' personal take on creating comfort and joy too.

Merry Christmas,

Samantha

Samantha Scott-Jeffries, Editor

PORTRAIT GRANT SCOTT



The English Home festive offer

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NOTEBOOK

Our monthly edit of news, shopping inspiration and inside information ➤

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Dazzling Ambience

Bring a touch of sparkle to the festive season with these fine crystal decorations by legendary design house Baccarat. Taking its name from the French town in which it was founded in 1764, a group of daring craftsmen set out to transform the four elements of nature – earth, air, fire and water – into glass of impeccable quality and purity. They achieved a secret formula which has earned them an international reputation for exquisite excellence. Baccarat's highly talented craftsmen train for 15 years to perfect the fine art of crystal, which can be found in some of the world's most prestigious homes, hotels and restaurants. baccarat.com





Perfectly Cast

From door knockers to decorations

“Sculpture for front doors” is how Adams & Mack founders Jenny and Mike McClement describe their traditionally sand-cast luxury brass door-knockers inspired by their love of nature. Now, this Totnes-based couple have made some of their charming designs into Christmas decorations and gifts. Hanging decorations in the shape of bees, dachshunds, woodpeckers, greyhounds, hares, otters and fish are made from recycled metal and finished with a velvet ribbon. Decorative boxes and bowls, some filled with candles hand-poured in Devon, are topped with brass-plated lids featuring some of their door-knocker favourites, such as a curled-up fox.

While seeking a knocker for their own door in 2020, stumbling upon an unusual fish example in an antique shop sparked the idea that such a simple object could also be a beautiful sculpture. Passion ignited – yet frustrated by what they saw as a lack of variety in the marketplace – inspiration struck. “We have a background in casting,” they say, “and are no strangers to the ins and outs of making intricate pieces in metal, so we thought, why not create

our own knocker that is as beautiful as it is functional, a piece of art that sits naturally between your home and the outside world? And so we created our first design, Amaris, our salmon. It worked perfectly, and after many admiring comments, we decided to develop a range of original designs for others to enjoy.”

Today, their designs are sand-cast in a family-run foundry in India by skilled artisans with expertise passed down through generations, before being assembled and finished in Jenny and Mike’s Devon workshop.

adamsandmack.com



Joy Unlimited

Meaningful gifting by Arthouse Unlimited

Christmas is a time for joy – and the artists from charity Arthouse Unlimited are joy-spreading experts. They live with complex neuro-diverse and physical support needs, and work with instructors to create artworks which are developed into products for sale, with their name and sometimes their photograph appearing on the packaging. Their designs adorn chocolate, fudge and shortbread, cards – including for Christmas – the Lady Muck beauty range, and more, with every penny from sales ploughed back into the Surrey-based charity.

Artist Peter Andrews (left) says: “It makes me happier coming here every week. It calms me down. I cry my eyes out in happiness each time people buy my work. It’s amazing.”



Artist Philippa Morrison says: “It’s so relaxing painting and drawing. My favourite part is when something gets sold!”

Founder and CEO Becky Sheraidah says: “The artists repeatedly see their work selling on consumable products which adds to the true sense of purpose. I’ve seen individuals really blossom in confidence as the wider society embraces their talents.” arthouseunlimited.org ▶

ALEXANDER THOMAS



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alexanderthomas.com



ABOVE Founder Gisela Graham is celebrating 40 years in business.

BELOW FROM LEFT With glittering fruit and birds, the Dellarobia collection takes inspiration from Florentine artists,

from £5.99; classic motifs bring warm nostalgia, Gingerbread decorations from £5.99; be bold and mix-and-match different decorations, Green Copper baubles from £3.49.

Queen Of Christmas

Gisela Graham celebrates 40 years

For four decades – and 40 Christmases – Gisela Graham’s decorations have brought festive magic to homes across the globe. Started at her kitchen table, she built her business into an international success story. “It’s hard to believe that 40 years have passed,” she says. “We still have the same ethos: keep everything feeling special and personal. We take ‘delivering Christmas’ as seriously now as I did all those years ago. Our 40th Anniversary Christmas Collection is bursting with charm, colour and inspiration.”

The collection’s colour palette extends from jewel tones to midnight blue and classics like cream and gold to festive red, and inspiration ranges from nostalgia to Nordic Jul, walks in a winter forest, and folk art to Florentine artists.

Gisela’s love of Christmas began as a craft-loving child growing up in Germany. “Baubles of all shapes and sizes have become a staple of every box of Christmas decorations over the years,” she says. “Obviously, I love them! Ours are mostly crafted in glass, and we love experimenting with texture, finish, colour and shape to create new classics year after year. For a different twist this Christmas, why not try adding them around the home in unexpected places, not just on the tree? I’ve always loved using some on the Christmas table as well as attaching smaller ones to presents as a ‘little something extra’ alongside handwritten tags.

“It’s impossible to imagine Christmas without twinkling lights and candles, from the mantelpiece to the dining table. There’s a whole host of wonderful candles out there in a cacophony of shapes, colours and sizes. My advice is to also spend a bit of time seeking out the most beautiful holders too, from reflective votives to eye-catching candlesticks. Often, an eclectic mix can look truly magical, especially as the afternoon falls into darkness and the twinkling begins.” giselagram.com.co.uk ▶







Set Anticipation Alight

One of England's oldest candlemakers

In Victorian London in the mid-1800s, Charles Farris was selling oils, soaps and other essentials to locals in Kensington when he spotted a business opportunity. As a committed churchgoer, he noticed the large demand for high-quality candles that his church needed for its weekly services. He made some candles from beeswax, and his church was amazed at their quality, igniting demand from churches across London including Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral.

Farris founded his candle business in 1845, and today – 178 years later – the firm is one of England's oldest candlemakers and proudly holds the Royal Warrant of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

It still makes church candles, but also scented and unscented candles for the home, all handmade in its Wiltshire factory using beeswax and traditional techniques, plus reed diffusers and room sprays. Its festive scents include Winter's Tale with orange zest warmed by cinnamon and cloves, and Winter Evergreen with woody notes of pine cedarwood and sweet base notes of cranberry.

"Nurture your candle's longevity with care," says Kamila Miller of Charles Farris. "Trim the wick, let it remember its first 'memory ring' and enjoy the tranquil, even glow it provides." charlesfarris.com

Diary



Toast's first festive market at Coal Drops Yard in London's King's Cross from 16 November to 17 December will celebrate creativity and craftsmanship with thoughtful and sustainable gifts, makers, workshops and demonstrations. toa.st



With a 40ft Christmas tree, a chalet-themed restaurant and more, Skate At Somerset House With Switzerland Tourism will transform this London landmark into a winter wonderland from 15 November to 14 January. somersethouse.org.uk



Head to Royal Botanic Gardens Kew after dark to behold never-seen-before spectacular illuminations. Highlights include the Palm House light show and a 'Fire Garden' lighting up the Temperate House. From 15 November to 7 January. kew.org ■



Wrapped In Style

Interiors-inspired gift wrap

Discerning interior design devotees seeking festive gift wrap inspiration will adore Schumacher's new wrapping paper featuring some of its most-beloved fabric and wallpaper prints. Richly patterned and luxuriously thick, designs include Salisbury (left), a gracefully nostalgic floral loosely strewn with violets and roses, and Baudin Butterfly, inspired by the illustrations of 17th-century German naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian.

Also in the range are Onie's Teacups, a wonderfully detailed take on chinoiserie with gold accents; Roca Redonda, which showcases fantastical renderings of flowers, branches and seedpods based on an 18th-century French document; Cloud Toile, an ethereal design with the delicacy of an etching; and Magical Menagerie, full of painterly flora and fauna.

Founded in 1889 in New York City by Frederic Schumacher – an entrepreneur long before the term was coined – design house Schumacher is synonymous worldwide for quality fabric, wallpaper, trim and furniture.

Its gift wrap is available from its store at Design Centre Chelsea Harbour and online at fshumacher.co.uk

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DESIGN DISCOVERIES

Influenced by classic Christmas themes, fresh festive ideas create expressive decorations that build up the anticipation and enrich the joy of the season



CONTEMPORARY TABLESCAPE

For festive dining, dress the table with an up-to-date feel. Start with a tablecloth decorated in a subtle seasonal motif, then add tableware and decor in various shades of the same colour palettes – without being exact tonal matches – to ensure a co-ordinated and elegantly varied tablescape.

Red berry tablecloth, from £65; Russett tablemats, £18 each; Mini Scallop napkins, £10 each, all Sarah K. Olive Green cutlery set, £130, Montes & Clark

ENTICING TREATS

To elevate a classic delicacy for hungry guests, serve traditional and unusual varieties of mince pies, dusted in icing sugar, presented on a platter in a wreath shape.

Classic mince pies, £18 for a box of 12; Frangipane and Ricciarelli mince pies, £21 for a box of 12; Miniature mince pies in four varieties, £15 for a box of 16, all Bettys



ALL THE TRIMMINGS

For those with a love of fabric bows, this time of year is the perfect excuse to adorn interiors with these pretty embellishments. Here, as an alternative to a traditional wreath, an oversized bow provides a warm welcome at the door. For a maximalist approach, patterned bows are ideal to decorate garlands on fireplaces, staircases and mirrors.

Dresser check bow, £48, Tori Murphy



COLOURFUL SCENE

If seeking a new stylish take on Christmas colourways, pairing green and pink together has a fresh feel and is adaptable for special celebrations at other times of the year. Here, green candlestick holders, baubles and foliage ensure the soft pink table linen and decorations are anchored with a suitably festive undertone. Shapely fluted tableware adds to the discerning celebratory mood.

Twisted wooden candlesticks, from £30; Cotton Maché vase, from £30; Bel tablecloth, from £125, and napkins, £10 each; Cotton Maché baubles, £24 for a set of six, all Birdie Fortescue ▶



SHOPPING



STARS AT NIGHT

For Christmas trees predominantly decorated in one colour, use two or three sizes of baubles to add overall impact. Beneath the tree, a few oversized decorations, such as these striking stars and large baubles, mixed among the presents add whimsical enchantment.

Baubles, from £10; Maddox Stars, from £12, all Garden Trading



SEASONAL ACCESSORIES

Imbue the home with festive spirit from the beginning of Advent onwards with kitchenware bearing snowy scenes and seasonal motifs. Known for her Christmas collections, Sophie Allport has revisited her popular stag print in a modern palette of neutral greys with a green-blue hue. From tea towels to mugs, the range is designed to make daily pottering in the kitchen feel joyful and Christmassy.

Christmas Stag Scene tea towel, £12.50; Christmas Stags mug £15, Sophie Allport

WHISK IT UP

Updating cooking appliances can help whip up Christmas bakes more easily with the benefit of modern functions. Smeg's newest hand mixer has three attachments, nine speeds and a turbo function to speedily whisk, whip, cream and mix ingredients for a wide range of recipes.

Hand mixer, £149.95 Smeg ▶



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FESTIVE SLEEPOVER

Part of the enjoyment of Christmas is spending time with everyone together – this, of course, includes beloved pets. Encourage furry family members to feel part of the celebrations by positioning a cosy bed by a festive focal point. The pet bed seen here has inset handles to make it easy to move and is elevated off the ground to avoid drafts.

Rattan Mattaban pet bed, large, £550, cushions and machine-washable covers to fit bed available, Oka



REFINED LIGHT

For a smart townhouse or contemporary scheme, opt for Christmas decorations with a pared-back shape and design that will not seem out of place. Although simple, this candle holder carries impact and would look equally fetching used as a pair on a mantelpiece, a hallway console or a dining table.

Deco table top circle candle holder, £49.99, Ivyline



CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN

Heighten the magic of the season for little ones with an advent calendar. The drawers contain a variety of treats from chocolates and sweets, to handmade decorations and miniature games. Join in the fun too with Daylesford's farmshop advent calendar for grown-ups.

Children's Tree Advent Calendar, £125, Daylesford ■

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Golden Mistletoe place mat, £49 for six, Braided Rug Company



Trinity brass candle holder, £49.50, Abode Living



Coniston drinks trolley, £995; Bethnal champagne coupe, £40 for two, all Neptune



Bicos champagne glass, £20, Micucci Interiors

Glitter Edge Honeycomb Christmas tree decorations, £8.99 each, The Wisteria Tree



Malachite coasters, £70 for four, Forward Design



Reusable porcelain place card, cream with gold lustre border, £40, Joanna Ling at The Edition Ninety Four

SPARKLING ENTERTAINING

Dazzle guests as soon as they cross the threshold at Christmas with chic details full of glamour and festive spirit



Stripe Velvet Bow Christmas Crackers, £35, Rose & Grey



Emilia tray, £569, Arteriors



Gold Star Circle light feature, £49.95, Sparkle Lighting

Mila decanter, Dark Emerald, £50, Nkuku



Ribbed glasses from £12 each, Glyndebourne Shop



Hand-painted Christmas macaron bauble boxes, £43 for six, Emma Dodi Cakes



1948 canape plate set, £120, Jonathan Adler

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Aviary Bird serving stand, £69, Sazy

Enamel Robin brooch, £21, Fable England



Robin Luxury Scented Candle Christmas Crackers, £55 for six, Chase and Wonder



Three Hanging Paper Doves £6.50, Cox & Cox

Gold Resin and Metal Goose, £8.99, Dobbies

Edelweiss Robin Christmas stocking, £75, Jan Constantine



Joy Christmas matches, £7.95, Annabel James

Robin stoneware jug, £24.50, Sophie Allport

FEATHERING THE NEST

From cheerful robin redbreasts to the enchanting birds given as gifts in the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, our feathered friends make perfect festive motifs



Winter Fairytale Gold Peacock wrapping paper, £6 for a 10m roll, John Lewis & Partners



Dove concertina paper garland, £12, National Trust Shop



Red Feather Pheasant decoration, £38.99, Joanna Wood



Assorted bird design baubles, £5.99 each, Gisela Graham



Forest Robin cushion, £30, Walton & Co

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SWITCHED ON

In a match made in designer heaven, GP & J Baker and Pooky have joined forces to launch a capsule collection of lampshades combining Pooky's creative genius and affordability with GP & J Baker's beautiful fabrics. The collection of four designs is available in a range of curated colourways with inspiration taken from hand-painted documents discovered in GP & J Baker's world-renowned archive, where some pieces date back to the 17th century. Particular showstoppers include the recoloured and rescaled Ferns and Magnolia patterns, originally painted by textile designer William Turner in the early 19th century. Each pleated shade is trimmed with a bold, contrasting edge sure to create a timeless statement in any room.

pooky.com

THE EDIT

Editor-at-Large Kate Freud shares the new products and brand discoveries that have caught her eye this month



LOOK OUT FOR...

When Annie and Lachlan Stewart met at art college in Edinburgh 40 years ago, they realised they shared the same design philosophy, and their company, ANTA, perfectly reflects this. Its furnishings, textiles and stoneware take inspiration from the Scottish landscape and seasons and ANTA has recently joined forces with Highland Clip to buy wool directly from the local Highland farmers. It also makes its own clay using 100% natural ingredients sourced in the UK, and its factory is solar-powered and heated by the kiln that produces its stoneware collections, including the Cream Thistle, Oakleaf and Rustic Heather designs (left). anta.co.uk



TIMELESS DESIGNS

It is a family affair at Bourne Home, the mother and daughter business which began when the pair unsuccessfully searched for Christmas decorations that were timeless and special. Today they sell beautiful festive ornaments, tree decorations and candle holders – think heirloom angels, cherubs and wreaths – to those who love the classic look. The team behind the brand are currently working on a new collection of 'Bourne Home's Little Sister' Christmas decorations for children and grandchildren to cherish.

bournehome.com ▶

THE LUXURY OF CHRISTMAS



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FIRESIDE FAVOURITES

As the nights draw in, there is no better time to invest in a stove or fireplace for those cosy nights at home. Step forward the award-winning Stovax Heating Group, which offers beautiful fireplaces and stoves fuelled by wood, multi-fuel, gas and electricity. So, whatever the type of home, it has something to suit, whether that be a traditional fireplace for a Victorian terraced property, an electric landscape fire designed for modern media wall installations, or freestanding woodburners for both classic and contemporary homes.

stovax.com

CRAFT CORNER

For over 40 years, Ehrman Tapestry has commissioned some of the world's leading textile designers to revolutionise the traditional craft of needlework with new colours, patterns and ideas. When the business began in 1978, its shop on London's Fulham Road showcased the work of graduates from the Royal College of Art and Central St Martins in particular. One of whom, the American Kaffe Fassett, suggested they produce needlepoint kits, and to this day he remains one of Ehrman Tapestry's most important and prolific designers. Knitting kits, wallpapers and fabrics are also available.

ehrmantapestry.com ■



6 OF THE BEST... CHRISTMAS BAUBLES



1 Light-up dried flower bauble, £25, coxandcox.com

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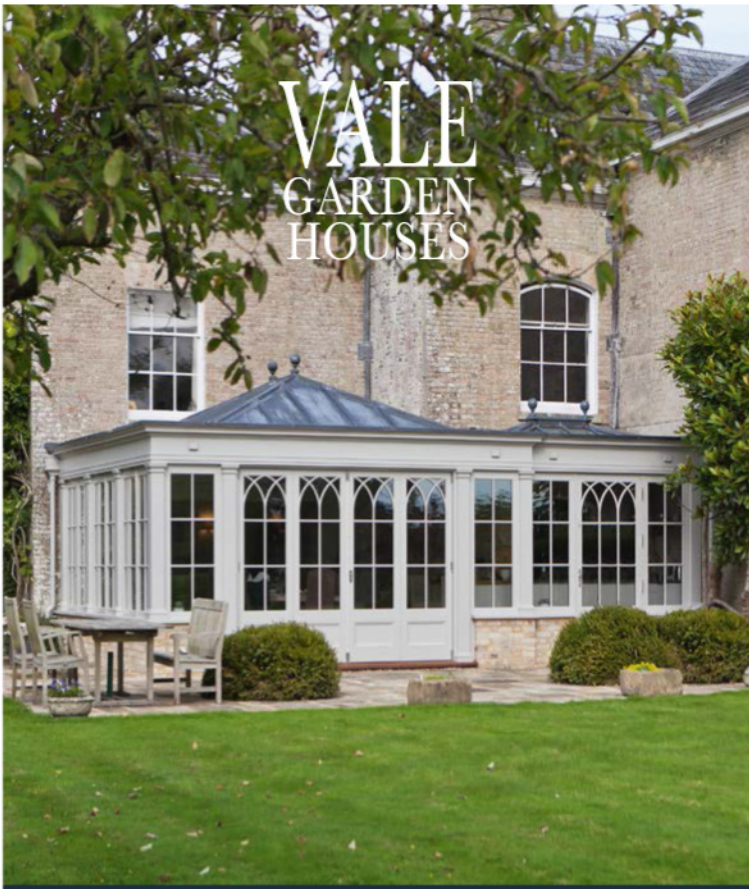
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Naturally FESTIVE

A hint of the country weaves its way into the Christmas decor of Emma and John Sims-Hilditch's London townhouse

FEATURE SUZANNE IMRE PHOTOGRAPHY ASTRID TEMPLIER STYLIST GILL NICHOLAS

ABOVE Emma has combined sleek details with a cosy, country aesthetic to create a welcoming home fit for city living. **RIGHT** Crittall doors from Fabco Sanctuary separate the sitting room and library area, hinting at the original layout of this two-up, two-down townhouse. The Balmoral table by Neptune extends to seat six and the dining chairs are a mix of Flamant's Medy chairs and Neptune's Mowbray chairs.





Creating a connection with nature was one of the driving forces behind the vision for this Victorian house: 'I wanted it to feel like a respite in the city'

While for some, the arrival of the festive season means a mad dash to the shops in search of those elusive gifts, for interior designer Emma Sims-Hilditch, it prompts a long country walk with her family, collecting the natural foliage that she will later use to decorate their London home. With vases of greenery on worktops, and fir garlands twinkling with white lights lining mantels and even strung above the roll-top bath in the principal suite, this is a stylishly unfussy Christmas affair with a firm nod to the colours and textures of nature – much like the design approach that permeates the family's Parson's Green property.

Creating a connection with nature was one of the driving forces behind the vision for this Victorian house. "I wanted it to feel like a respite in the city," explains Emma. As the founder of interior design studio Sims Hilditch, Emma is a proponent of the timeless English country house aesthetic, redefined to reflect the needs of our contemporary lifestyles. She applied her expert decorator's eye to the interiors, but not before considerable thought went into reconfiguring the terraced house – originally a two-up, two-down worker's cottage – to create an expansive, well-conceived space for city living. "People say it's now a Tardis," laughs Emma.

Working with her architectural planning team at Sims Hilditch, and with input from her husband, John, the co-founder of homeware brand Neptune, who is "passionate about architecture", Emma set about restructuring the house to best serve the family's needs, eking out every inch of space to ensure the house worked hard from top to bottom. ▶

RIGHT The upstairs sitting room features an antique armchair from Brownrigg Interiors with a cushion from William Yeoward, and an Olivia sofa and a Keswick coffee table from Neptune. The Swedish flatweave rug is from Robert Stephenson and the linen curtain fabric is Pure 3 in Moon Shell by de Le Cuona. The QVC K by Kelly Hoppen pre-lit Christmas tree is embellished with faux willow spray from The Faux Flower Company and decorations from The Danes.







'I chose a material palette of oak, marble, brass and stone and stuck to it throughout'

ABOVE Emma wanted the kitchen to feel like a social space so opted for the Arundel trestle table and bench from Neptune "as you could squeeze more people around the table". The tumbled limestone floor by Artisans of Devizes flows out to the garden patio.

The couple dug out a basement as well as building into the loft to enable them to create four bedrooms, all with en suites, plus a media room and utility area. Emma adheres to the 'do it once, do it well' mantra. "You only do a project like this once, so if you can budget to do it well, it will pay off," she advises.

Central to the plan was the installation of a continuous oak staircase running through all four floors, which brought a certain balance and order to the layout, and every detail was considered. "We put new cornicing in, we dug deep into the basement to create 2.4 metre-high ceilings on three of the floors and we invested in sound-proofed sash

windows. Ten years on, it is still a very easy house to live in."

With the architectural design resolved, Emma turned her attention to the interiors. "I chose a material palette of oak, marble, brass, Crittall glass and stone and stuck to it throughout," says Emma. Keen for the house to feel cohesive yet the spaces feel individual, she repeated these signature textures through the house in different iterations. Carrara marble tiles were laid in all four bathrooms, but in different patterns and shapes - hexagon tiles in one, circles in another. In the principal bathroom, the Crittall glass wall is softened by a linen curtain. ▶

To create a connection with the garden, Emma chose Jungle Birds wallpaper by Marthe Armitage from Hamilton Weston for this wall in the kitchen. The Mora clock is by Swedish Interior Design while the picture is from Classic Prints in Chelsea.



In the principal bedroom, exuberant Carnival wallpaper by Christopher Farr is tempered by pared-back accessories to create a feeling of serenity. The bespoke headboard is covered in Napoli Vintage linen by Libeco. Larsson chests of drawers by Neptune sit either side of the bed.



‘I was inspired by an English country garden, then layered in the smartness of the grey joinery and Crittall windows to reflect the city location’

ABOVE To create a spa-like effect in the principal en-suite bathroom, Emma focused on luxurious materials, from the marble floor tiles by Fired Earth to the linen curtain in Marseille Oyster by Libeco.

The colour palette reflects the natural world. “I chose lots of greens and pinks, inspired by an English country garden scheme,” says Emma, “but then layered in the smartness of the grey joinery and Crittall to reflect the city location.” Finally, the undulating foliage designs in the wallpapers in the kitchen and principal bedroom introduced pattern. “Luckily my husband trusted me on those,” she adds.

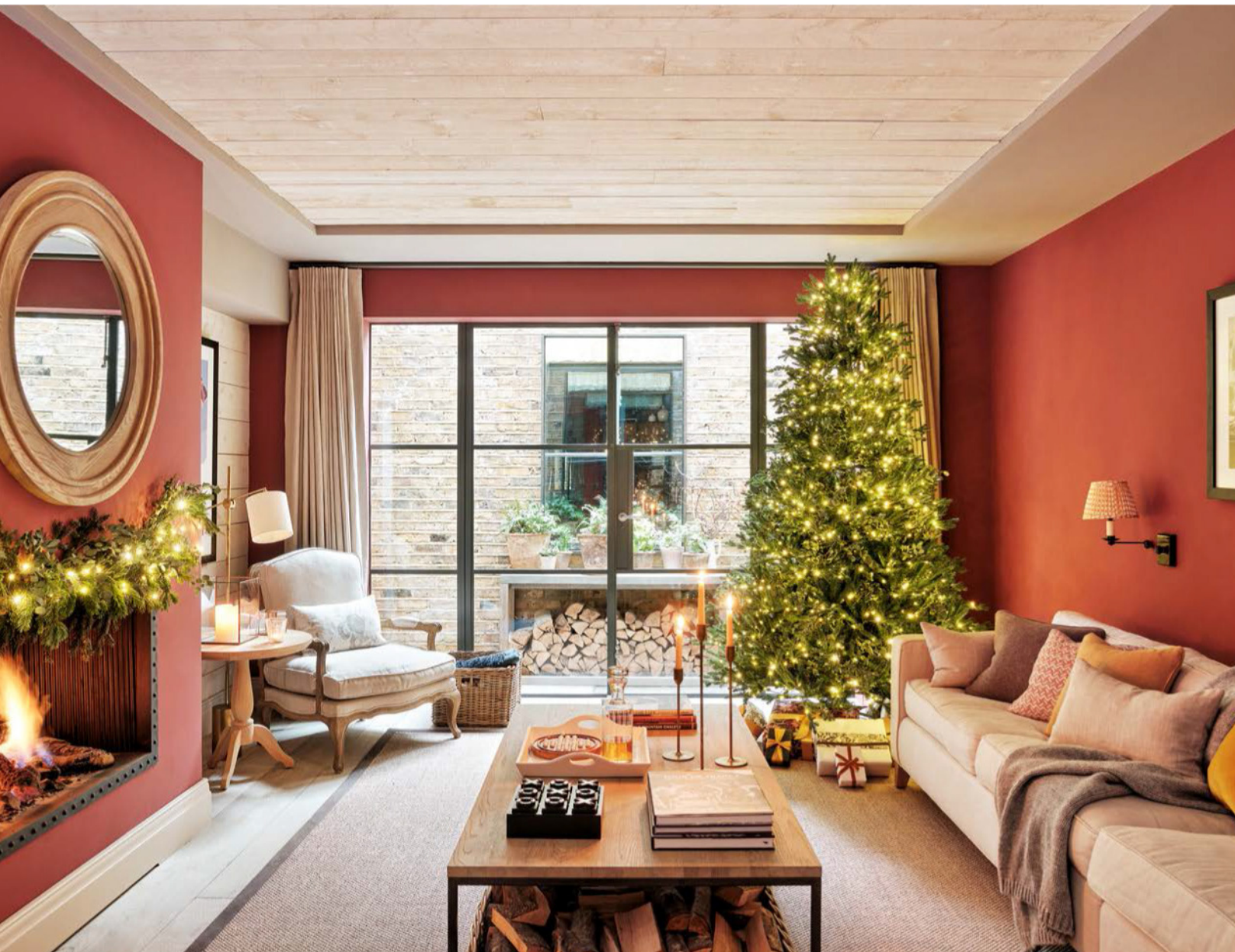
Only in the basement did Emma decide to introduce a richer colour scheme. “There was no point trying to make a north-facing basement sitting room feel light and airy,” she explains. “Better to make the space feel cosy, so I picked a lovely pinky-red shade for the walls

which worked well with the warm tones of the wood and linen upholstery. The black accents were finishing touches, like mascara on a face.”

When it came to furnishing the house, Emma employed a mix of contemporary and antique pieces. In the kitchen, the clean lines of the oak trestle table and long bench complement the curves of a particular favourite, the Gustavian Mora clock. “In the bitterly cold winter months in Sweden, farmers would while away the time carving these amazing clocks, each with an individual body and face,” explains Emma. “I love that our Mora clock has its own personality.” ▶



A minimalist gas fireplace adds an air of cosy luxury to the principal bedroom. The oak floors, by Original Chapel Parquet, are in varying widths echoing the panelling in other rooms. The dressing table is by Chelsea Textiles.



‘The black accents are finishing touches, like mascara on a face’

ABOVE & LEFT
To create a cosy ambience in the media room, Emma chose Paprika paint for the walls and Cranbrook wood panels for the ceiling, both by Neptune. Neville Stephens and Allan Christensen made the gas fireplace. Preston wall lights by Vaughan are topped with shades in Fermoie Wicker linen.

In the sitting room, Emma wanted to introduce a sense of luxury with the teal blue velvet sofa, paired with an antique wing-backed chair covered in natural linen and the modern graphic patterns of the rug. “I like to see the contrast of the matt and sheen of the materials,” she says.

For Emma and John, Christmas is a chance to welcome home their three grown-up children and enjoy long-held traditions like an Alpine raclette supper on Christmas Eve. As the family gather and the candles are lit, pride of place goes to two impressive Christmas trees. One, in the media room, festooned in warm white lights and the other in the sitting room, decked in eucalyptus and white berries. Thanks to this home’s natural spirit and timeless elegance, they both look perfectly at home. ■

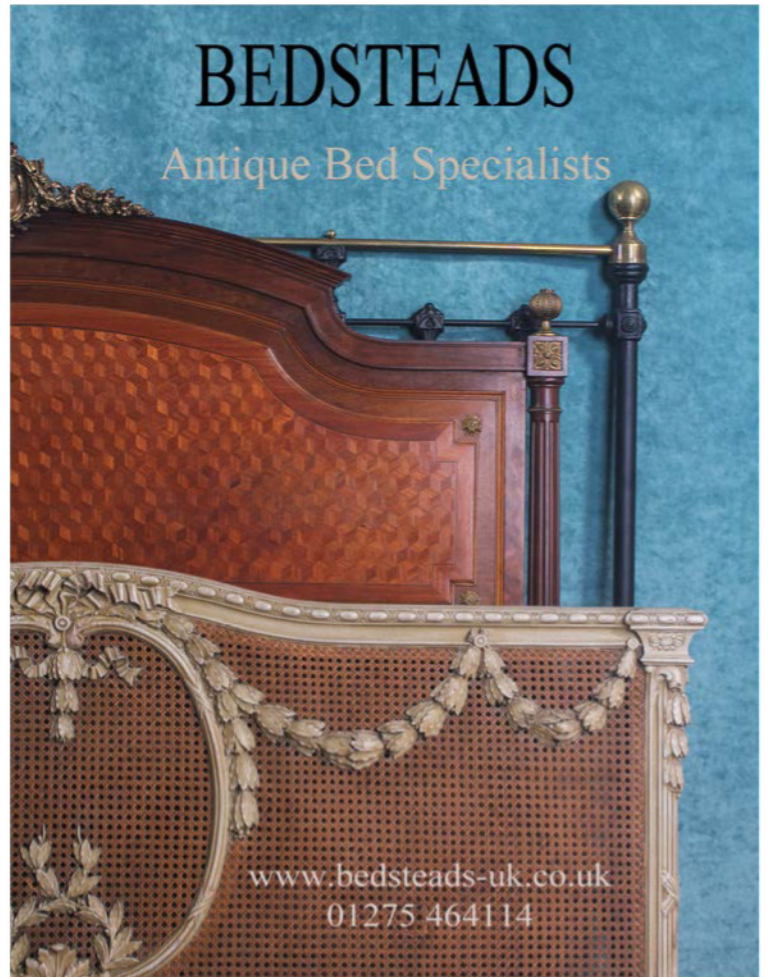


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WILD & WHIMSICAL

An elegant mix of foraged flowers and nostalgic decorations create an enchanting Christmas setting at this characterful cottage in Oxfordshire

FEATURE CHARLOTTE DUNFORD PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MCDONALD

ABOVE James (left) and Arthur (right) at the entrance to their 17th-century stone cottage.

LEFT The book room is decorated with dried foliage, woven around the built-in bookcases and arranged in Arthur's collection of Art Deco bud vases on the antique Moorish table. The yellow shades on the wall lights are from Rosi de Ruig.



‘I always think, let the house tell you what it can take, and given it is this quintessential Cotswold stone cottage, it called to be done in a certain way’

ABOVE The kitchen units were already installed when James bought the cottage. “It’s a joiner-made kitchen, which was rather well done because there isn’t a single straight wall in the place.”

ABOVE RIGHT Walls in Farrow & Ball’s Arsenic bring the little bar area to life. The decorative china on the wall is a Spode set from around 1810.

An undeniable sense of comfort and warmth fills the sitting room of this quintessential Cotswolds cottage. With the crackling fire, twinkling lights and tantalising aroma of handmade mince pies, it is the perfect place for interior designer James Mackie and gardener, author and illustrator Arthur Parkinson to host friends for a small get-together before heading off on their separate ways to celebrate Christmas.

Despite its humble origins as an estate worker’s home, the 17th-century cottage, tucked down a tiny country lane, has a great sense of character. “It has real soul. It feels like it throws its arms around you,” says James, who bought the cottage in 2016, searching for a weekend escape from his demanding role heading up the Impressionist and Modern Art department at Sotheby’s. It was the spiral staircase crafted from

Cotswold stone with its amazing patina that first captured his eye. “My heart leapt and that was the moment I knew,” he recalls.

As with many older buildings, there were pressing matters that needed addressing. Electricals were reworked, interiors painted throughout, and a staircase was installed at the far end of the house to replace a metal ladder. After the initial work was completed, however, James took a break from renovations. “I encourage clients to live for three to four seasons in a house before they start to bash it about. It’s so useful to actually work a house out. So, I did that, then started a big renovation in 2019.”

After leaving Sotheby’s at the start of 2020, James could no longer resist the call of the country and left London permanently, setting up his own interior design studio that summer. Arthur moved in later that ▶

The table in the dining area has been laid with a 19th-century Indian cloth, antique Wedgwood and Spode china, glasses from William Yeoward and fig leaves that have been dried and painted gold for an elegant festive feel. The pendant light is from Jamb.





ABOVE Walls in Edward Bulmer Natural Paint's Malahide create a cosy feeling in the sitting room, with the original hearth and beams adding to the cottage's rustic charm. A natural fibre rug introduces an extra layer of texture and subtle pattern.

same year, instantly as enamoured with the cottage as James was. "It's so beautiful from the outside," he says. "It looks like a little Beatrix Potter watercolour."

A desire for spaces to entertain, inspired several of the changes to the layout of the cottage. The main entrance was moved from the dining area to the porch off the sitting room, allowing James to replace the original table for two with a large antique table and chairs better suited to hosting guests for long lunches and suppers. A small bar area was added off the sitting room, which James particularly likes. "You can have the door open and be talking and mixing martinis while everyone sits around the fireplace," he laughs.

A pivotal part of the renovation was the addition of an elegant extension at the back of the house, known as the book room. "It was about creating a space with more volume, ceiling height and light," explains James, who also needed a place to house all the books he'd collected over the years. "It's wonderful because it's got a particularly big window, which is quite a saviour. Otherwise, the cottage would be quite dark," adds Arthur, who deems it the ideal spot to sit and draw.

When the time came to decorate, James allowed the house to lead. "I always think, let the house tell you what it can take, and given it is this quintessential Cotswold stone cottage, it called to be done in a certain way. Fortunately, we were a good match."



A connection to the natural world, heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, is a thread running throughout

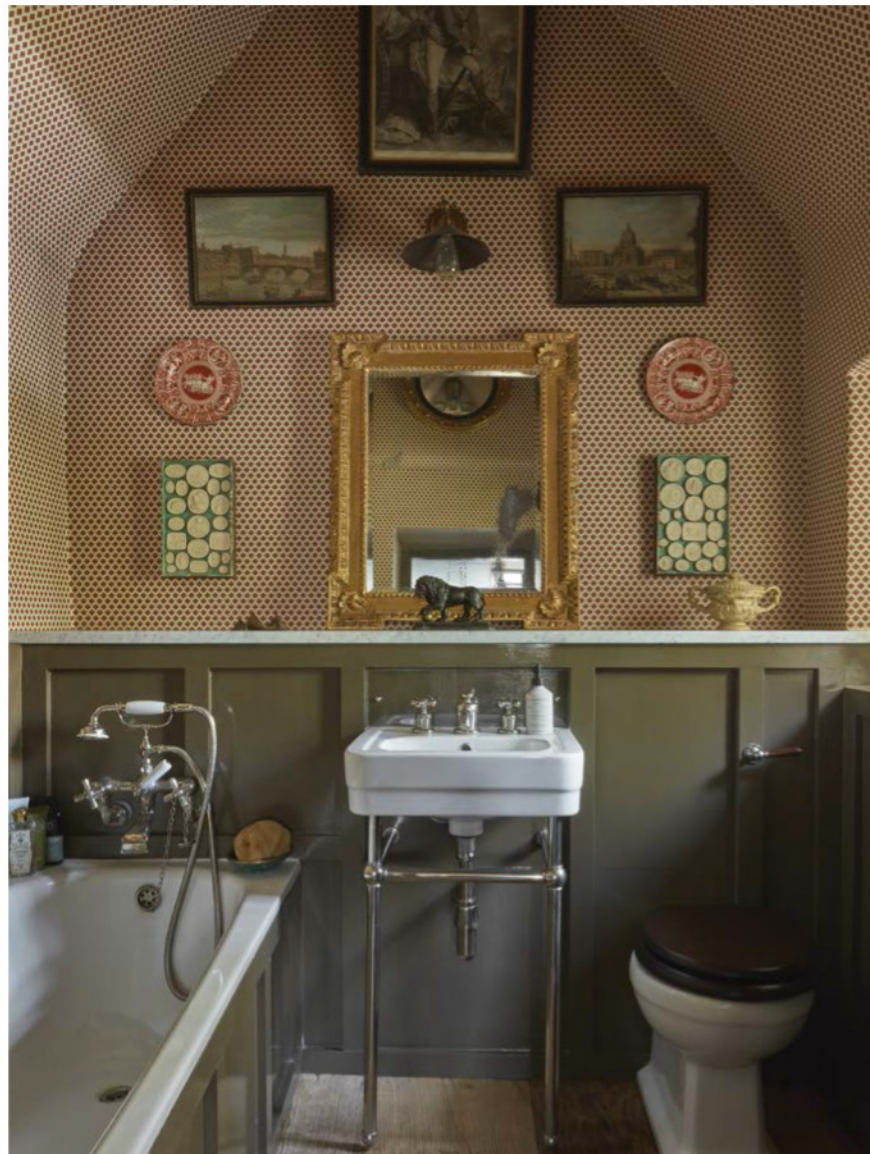
James's collection of treasured antiques and artwork paired with his remarkable eye have resulted in a series of layered rooms that have a distinct quality and character, yet flow seamlessly together.

An antique rug and Bennison's Wabi Sabi fabric were the starting points for the book room. "I've loved Bennison fabrics for a long time and this one I'd actually bought years ago and had been waiting to use," says James. The walls are painted in Edward Bulmer

Natural Paint's Mummy, named after the colour of mummified remains, which was conducive to designing a year-round space. "It can be almost a donkey brown grey, then a rich chocolate under artificial light, so it creates different atmospheres in different seasons," he says.

A connection to the natural world, heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts school, is a thread running throughout, from Arthur's floral displays ▶

ABOVE Mismatched decorations and dried alliums adorn the faux Christmas tree from Cox & Cox. James bought the Regency-style sofa from an antique-dealer friend.



'I harvest and save flowers throughout the year and all the beams up in the attic get stuffed with alliums, hydrangeas and straw flowers'

ABOVE The principal bedroom is decorated in Farrow & Ball's Oval Room, with a Lewis & Wood border and curtains in Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler's Strawberry Leaf. The bed is from Wessex Beds.

ABOVE RIGHT Treasured pieces surround a George II Kentian mirror in the bathroom. The wallpaper is from Howe and the basin from The Water Monopoly.

foraged from the garden and the apple green kitchen cabinets, to the striking use of an iconic William Morris pattern in the guest bedroom. "The classic Willow Boughs wallpaper was a nod to Kelmscott close by," says James. "It felt like an interesting take-off point to bring something of that local flavour."

The couple take inspiration from another nearby house when it comes to the festive season. "For Christmas, I often think about Chatsworth because it's done with such panache," says Arthur. "I think you can get a lot of inspiration from stately homes." Despite the difference in size, there is undoubtedly a similar sense of magic in the cottage. "I try to really go for it, particularly because there's so many different angles that can be made to look fairy-like and nymph-like very easily," he continues. Dried flowers from the garden play a prominent part in the decorations, beautiful in colour and form as well as lightweight

enough to dress precious antiques. "I harvest and save flowers throughout the year and all the beams up in the attic get stuffed with alliums, hydrangeas and straw flowers," says Arthur.

Alongside the more natural accents sit an eclectic array of Christmas decorations collected since childhood. "Each year I probably buy one or two new ones and then the tree gets bigger and bigger to take them all," says James. Arthur also enjoys incorporating cherished possessions such as his "little farm animal models", with his bird decorations positioned "around the sitting room mirror like it's an aviary."

After celebrating with their families, their return home to the cottage provides an enchanting escape for James and Arthur, worlds away from the noise and chaos of the festivities. Decorated in their uniquely elegant and "sparkly" way, it is perfectly set for magical yet peaceful winter evenings. ■



In the guest bedroom, matching mustard yellow lamp shades from Pooky sit atop bases from Charles Edwards, James's good friend and mentor. A pair of Robert Kime cushions are arranged on the bed, along with a quilt bought at a pop up on Pimlico Road.



Medieval TREASURE

The owners of this Wealden hall house in Sussex have restored its historical integrity, exposing original structures and making it a welcoming, vibrant home for Christmas

FEATURE SERENA FOKSCHANER
PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

ABOVE The medieval hall house, with its distinctive lime-rendered facade, is set within a garden that has been re-established with newly planted orchards and herbaceous beds.

RIGHT Aglow with lights and swathes of dried flowers, the sitting room is the epitome of a cosy setting for hosting Christmas. The coffee table is from Spencer Swaffer in Lewes, while the mantelpiece is filled with ceramic pieces including Staffordshire figures and mochaware.







‘Our whole vision was that we wanted to put back things that had been ripped out’

ABOVE Genevieve and her golden Labrador, Bear, outside the front door, which is dressed in swags of cedar and ivy. The lantern and doorbell are from local antique shops and the door is painted in Farrow & Ball’s Lime White.

Genevieve Harris’s passion in life is restoring and breathing new life into unloved and overlooked items, from clothes to furniture and fabrics. So, as soon as she and her husband, Guy, stumbled upon a completely dilapidated medieval house outside Rye in East Sussex, they were captivated.

“We fell for it,” says Genevieve. “It was crumbling and run down, almost a squat, but it had a lovely feel and energy, and great bones.” The Wealden hall house – a vernacular timber-framed house traditional in South East England – had been given to its previous occupants in the 1960s as a wedding present. Where they had

sought to modernise it, cement and plasterboard had been laid over precious board and bead panelling and brace doors. The house had not breathed for years, with layers of incongruous modern materials masking original features.

The main house – two bedrooms upstairs and the main hall and dining room downstairs – was built in the 1440s, with a Georgian kitchen, principal bedroom and cellar added in the mid-18th century. A scullery, created at the back in the 19th century, is one of Genevieve’s favourite rooms. “It’s the tiniest room in the house but has a traditional Victorian, high-ceilinged larder where they would have hung the meat. Our ▶



The Christmas tree is dressed with a selection of antique baubles and bows collected by Genevieve since she was a child. Wrapping paper from The Paper Place in Rye covers the presents beneath the tree.

The dining room table is laid for Christmas with a selection of Royal Staffordshire plates and Klimchi Hobnail glasses. The Delft candlesticks were from a local car boot sale and the Delft plates came from an antiques shop in Hastings Old Town. The oil painting by Harold Gresley is of Guy's great-great-grandfather, Frank Gresley.





predecessor kept ducks in there, and we restored the original dresser for all the jars and preserves.”

The house had a “really good, fluid layout with a lovely sized kitchen”, so there was not any need to change the flow and structure of the rooms. However, it desperately required attention and significant changes needed to be made. After 18 months collaborating with specialist planners, the building began. The couple, with their two young children – Greta, who was nine at the time, and Rex, who was four – lived in the house throughout the next three years of building work. “That was probably one of the biggest challenges, not having a home. We were still living in it when half the house was open and covered in tarp!” says Genevieve.

The couple wanted to preserve as many original architectural components as possible. “Our whole vision was that we wanted to put back things that had been ripped out, or to find pieces that were in keeping with the era of the house,” explains Genevieve. Most of the original beams were saved, and the mock Tudorbethan front “which was really hurting the front of the building” was removed.

What makes the house feel so right is how sensitively it has been pieced back together. Wattle and daub walls were painstakingly taken off, reconstituted, and put back in the original manner; sheep’s wool insulation ▶

ABOVE The kitchen overlooks the duck pond and is a hive of activity at Christmas. The cabinets were designed by Guy in a Georgian style, in keeping with the period of the room, and are painted in Haymarket by Mylands.

RIGHT The elegant sofa in another part of the sitting room is upholstered in Morris & Co’s Willow fabric. Vintage Italian table lamps found at a local car boot sale tie together the scheme of muted greens and pinks.



Rex's bedroom, which was part of the original medieval hall, has a beautiful brass bed with an antique quilt found on Etsy. The wooden trunk is a sheep farmer's show box found at Pilgrims Hospice in Tenterden. The stockings, made in archival William Morris prints, were handmade by Winifred J in Devon.





that had all but disintegrated was reinstated to allow the house to breathe. One of the most satisfying discoveries was the beautiful brick floor, which had been submerged under concrete and asbestos tiles. “Guy was on his hands and knees for months chiselling away, and we realised the bricks ran throughout the whole ground floor.”

Initially, Genevieve had been reluctant to put bold colours into the house, worried it would not be in keeping with its age, but she “soon realised that everything being so neutral wasn’t really me.” Instead of painting the walls wild colours, she focused on the woodwork, painting doors and cabinets in the kitchen a joyful yellow, and the window frames and doors in the living room a bold, bright green that evokes the lush greens of outside and reacts beautifully to natural light. This lends the room a versatility, making it zippy and lively in the day, cosy and cocooning at night.

“There was no plan,” says Genevieve of the decoration. “I felt my way.” She came across certain pieces at car boot sales, for example, and let them take the lead. “I am obsessed by second-hand sales and auctions.” For this reason, Genevieve is known to her many followers on Instagram as Mrs Truffle Pig. It is this skilful mixing of old and new pieces which gives her interiors the impression of having evolved over time and make her home feel so comfortable.

“In the winter, the house comes into its own. It’s

really cosy,” she enthuses. “Preparations for Christmas begin in October when we make chutneys from the garden, for the cheeseboard; prepare the Christmas pudding; distil sloe gin from the hedgerows and preserve apples.” Genevieve and Greta make crackers, each one tailored to their guests and, a few days before Christmas, the family bring in bundles of fresh greenery from their garden. “We buy bunches of mistletoe from the local farm shop and plant hyacinths and snowdrops from Rye Farmer’s Market in antique pots.” Genevieve will dress the outside doors using swags of cedar and ivy. “It’s easier than it looks, lasts until the new year and is all compostable. I love the excitement of Christmas Eve, when the house is full and all the fires are lit.”

In a nod to Genevieve’s French-Canadian heritage, after church the family sit down to *Tourtière*, a spiced meat pie with mash and gravy. For her, Christmas is an opportunity to host family and friends and make the house feel colourful and welcoming. “It’s a very sensory experience,” she says. “Smelling the woodsmoke outside, and as soon as you come in, you smell food cooking.”

The medieval hall glows in the soft light of the Christmas tree, with candles along the mantelpieces creating a warmth that emanates throughout the house. The Harris’s deep respect for historical integrity and their approach to sustainable sourcing have given this home a new lease of that will “hopefully now last for another 500 years.” ■

ABOVE The principal bedroom is painted in Light Blue by Farrow & Ball. Layers of pattern create warmth and cosiness, with curtains in Colefax and Fowler’s whimsical Alicia print, and an antique patchwork quilt from Canada. The chair, which is inherited and covered in a green Designers Guild Varese II velvet, adds a dash of bright colour.

Marina felt that the muted tones of Neptune's Honed Slate would be the perfect backdrop for the period features, paintings and antiques in the drawing room. The cushions on the right-hand sofa are from Oka and Susie Watson Designs.





PAST & PRESENT

Marina and Jeremy Dew can now celebrate the festive season in style at their elegant, beautifully restored 18th-century home

FEATURE JANET MCMEEKIN PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH
STYLING JANET MCMEEKIN AND SMOKE & MIRRORS HOUSE STYLING



‘It really needed somebody to think cleverly about the layout and outside of the box’

When friends and family crunch along the gravel drive and cross the elegant bridge in the garden to arrive at Marina and Jeremy Dew’s magical Georgian home for Christmas celebrations, they feel as though they have stepped into a bygone era. “There’s an overwhelming sense of history here,” Marina says. “I felt it even before I set foot inside the house, and guests often remark that it’s like being transported back through the centuries, particularly during the festive season.”

The couple, who are passionate about sensitively restoring period properties, first spotted this West Sussex house online in early 2019. “At the time, we were living in nearby Surrey and, although we had thoroughly enjoyed renovating that house, we love a challenge and had itchy feet,” Marina explains. “The property intrigued me, but as Jeremy wasn’t so keen, we decided to leave it.”

Six months later, noticing that the handsome house was still on the market, Marina persuaded Jeremy to investigate further. Driving through the leafy lanes of the picturesque village with its abundance of attractive Georgian houses and distinctive medieval church, the couple were enchanted. “From the moment the gates leading to the house opened and we caught a glimpse of this exceptionally attractive home with its little stream running through the expansive gardens, we were captivated,” Marina recalls. “The house was even better than I’d imagined and Jeremy was impressed.”

During the next hour, while strolling around the property, the couple agreed that this rather dated gem had vast potential. “The decor was not quite to our taste, and part of the downstairs layout was rather strange. However, I was confident that Jeremy could work his magic to visualise how we could transform the house,” says Marina.

Believed to date from the 1770s, with later Victorian additions, the Grade II listed property boasts a raft of period features, from original fireplaces and wooden shutters to ornate cornicing, ceiling and wall mouldings, picture and dado rails, Palladian columns and beautiful wood panel doors. “It was charming, and we just had to buy it,” says Marina.

Having previously renovated many listed properties, the Dews knew that they would have to think very carefully about how to reconfigure the higgledy-piggledy central area of the ground floor to create ▶



ABOVE An eye-catching pendant light, bought in Belgium, is often a talking point in this charming drawing room.

LEFT When considering how to create the opening in the kitchen, Jeremy was inspired by the arch that leads through from the snug area. The walls have been painted in Farrow & Ball’s Old White.



Repainting the existing cabinetry in Farrow & Ball's Mouse's Back, and buying a colourful seat pad and cushions from Bone Interiors, has given this cosy corner of the kitchen a vibrant, fresh feel. Marina painted the circular table in Annie Sloan's Paris Grey. The mince pies are from Bettys.



ABOVE The burnt orange sofa from Oka makes a statement in this now light-flooded space. The cushions on the sofa are all from Oka. **LEFT** “The intricate veranda is such a beautiful feature and so unusual,” says Marina. It has been painted in Little Greene’s Portland Stone Dark. The table and chair were bought at an antiques fair.

a much better flow. “At the time, the kitchen felt rather dark and a little claustrophobic, while the view of the beautiful back garden was blocked by the walls of an old storage room and some kitchen units,” says Marina, who runs Smoke & Mirrors House Styling with her daughter, Verity. “It really needed someone to think cleverly about the layout and outside of the box.”

Having brainstormed a multitude of ideas to no avail, Jeremy came up with a workable solution that was given the green light by the conservation officer and planners. The changes entailed installing two new roof lights and repositioning walls to enlarge the area adjacent to the kitchen, creating a lovely new, gallery-style room. “Jeremy also suggested making an opening in the existing kitchen wall to let light flood in and gain views across the new gallery space into the garden,” Marina adds.

In October 2021, a team of builders began remodelling the Dews’ home, fitting five new bathrooms, turning a disused cupboard into a downstairs cloakroom, updating the plumbing and electrics, and decorating throughout. “When we’re renovating properties, Jeremy and I are always mindful of working with the existing home to salvage and repurpose fittings if possible,” Marina explains. “In this case, we decided that the wooden kitchen cabinets were good quality and by painting them, fitting quartz ▶

By repositioning walls, the couple have been able to create a dining area that is ideal for festive get-togethers. The antique table was salvaged from a monastery, while the chairs were bought from One World. The circular mirror was sourced during a trip to Ardingly Antiques Fair.





‘I wanted the spaces to flow seamlessly into one another with each one subtly different, depending on its aspect and the light’

worktops and a Neptune island, we would give this space a fresh feel and the elegant, modern country look I was striving for. It was a similar situation in the library, where the shelving was absolutely fine. It just needed updating.”

When it came to choosing colours and schemes, Marina took her time, thoughtfully considering each room, as well as the overarching palette, in order to create a cohesive feel throughout. “I wanted the spaces to flow seamlessly into one another with each one being subtly different, depending on its aspect and the light,” she reveals. “In recent years, I’ve tended to go for a fairly neutral palette, but I wanted to introduce more colour, such as the burnt orange sofa in the gallery, sage green tones in the main bedroom and striking wallpaper.”

Painting the pillars and magnificent windows in the gallery black was a bold decision, but Marina feels this has worked well and injected drama into the space. “Our decorator was very sceptical when I asked him to buy Farrow & Ball’s Soft Black for the gallery,” Marina recalls.

Although building during the pandemic and living in the house throughout the 12-month project was undoubtedly challenging, the Dews feel the end result has been well worth all the upheaval and effort. “When we moved here close to the start of the first lockdown, all of a sudden nobody was allowed to travel,” says Marina. “Jeremy and I went for lovely walks around our beautiful village and met so many friendly people, including some whose relatives had worked at our house in years gone by. It was fascinating to hear their tales of the lords and ladies who used to live in our home.”

During the festive season the Dews often throw a large party for friends and also invite close family to stay at Christmas. “It’s wonderful to entertain in the home that we’ve poured so much time, energy and love into,” says Marina. “I sometimes think of Christmases in the past here and hope that, as custodians, we are honouring both the house and its previous occupants by making our own special memories here.” ■



ABOVE Repainting the cabinets in Neptune’s Charcoal has given the library a cossetting feel. The original wooden shutters have been deliberately left unpainted.

LEFT Thinking creatively, Jeremy suggested converting a disused, ground-floor cupboard into a handy cloakroom. The chinoiserie wallpaper was bought on Etsy. The mirror is from One World and the pendant lights are from Design Vintage.



To link the sage tones in the drawing room with this tranquil bedroom, Marina chose Neptune's Honed Slate. The antique chandelier lends a romantic feel.

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STYLE INSPIRATION

Elevate Christmas decorating with magical details, set the scene for guests with inviting bedrooms, and discover expert advice for using shades of red in interiors ➤

RUBY RICHES

The classic colours of Christmas are often the ones we turn to time and time again for imbuing festive cheer. For some, it is the glistening of gold, for others the natural allure of green, but jolly ruby red has to be the most captivating and resonant colour of the season. Try using purely rich red designs for wrapping papers for a wonderfully merry look beneath the tree. Designs that are not particularly seasonal become festive with the addition of a silk or velvet ribbon.

Bungalow handmade papers, Madi Ruby, £4.50 a sheet, available at Curated Living. For ideas for using red in interiors all year round, turn to page 100.





Make it MAGICAL

Discover the stylists' secrets to elevating Christmas decorating for a touch of extra magic, sparkle and impact

WONDER WALL

Kris Manolo, Design lead, Atkin & Thyme

"This year embrace maximalism with plenty of statement lights, decorations and furniture. Don't worry about anything matching – the latest trends include an eclectic approach – so just go for what you love. Wreaths can be used indoors, too, to add some cheer to walls or hang on a mirror. Here (*above*), we've taken a maximalist approach, using an oversized wreath to create a focal point for a bar area at a party. It adds instant wow factor and would also look great placed in a hallway to give guests a fabulously festive welcome."

MAXIMUM IMPACT

Guy Daltry, Head of product, Garden Trading

"When it comes to decorations on a fireplace, the more the merrier! For all-out festive foliage, incorporate a garland, draped delicately over the mantel, hung high on the chimney breast above, or used to frame architectural detailing within the home. Ivy, conifer branches, and eucalyptus are great additions to create a dramatic festive focal point. This impressive garland makes a feature of the chimney breast, adding drama while allowing space for candles or other decorations. Some small hooks might be needed to secure the garland at picture rail height. Choose a definite colour theme and stick to this throughout. Luxe deep blues and glimmering gold details combine to fashion a dramatic, glamorous feel. Use paper decorations, plenty of baubles, lanterns, candles, and not to forget twinkling fairy lights." ▶

Spindle armchair, Carbon, £300; Ablington lantern, from £25; Maddox paper trees, from £12, all Garden Trading

LEFT Indoor Outdoor LED Fir Wreath, 100cm, £299, Atkin and Thyme





A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Martha Bowen, Marketing lead, Ivyline

“A beautifully arranged Christmas stair swag, featuring natural elements, can bring a truly impressive touch to your staircase and hallway during the festive season. Despite its striking and luxurious appearance, achieving this look is remarkably simple, making it a unique alternative to a classic stair garland. Customise the swags with various types of foliage, branches, and flowers and adorn them with decorations that tie in with Christmas decor around the house. By incorporating dried and long-lasting greenery, the display will remain vibrant and appealing throughout the entire festive period.”

ABOVE Regency metallic tiered vases, from £39.99 each; Hanging antique brass mercury glass stars, £34.99 each, Ivyline



‘The kitchen is the hub of the festivities so I always like to make sure I add a little sparkle here’

TWINKLE EVERYWHERE

Sue Jones, Co-founder, Oka

“We often busy ourselves with decorating the hallway, dining room and living room, but in my home, the kitchen is really the hub of festivities, so I always like to make sure to add a little sparkle here too. It has to stay practical for cooking up Christmas feasts, so I like to adorn the tops of cupboards and open shelving with festive foliage like pine branches or faux garlands, with twinkling lights running through, of course. If you have a kitchen island, try adding a small centrepiece, an arrangement of winter berries or a wreath with varying heights of candles work really well.” ▶

ABOVE Round Callanish indoor/outdoor dining table, £2,395; Washakie Velvet dining chairs, £425 each, Oka





‘Make a magical pocket of wonder beneath the tree with an abundance of faux ivory candles’

PRESENTED PERFECTLY

Faye Kingsford, Digital designer, Lights4fun

“Make a magical pocket of wonder beneath the tree with an abundance of ivory candles – opting for LED ones such as our TruGlow will mean this is a safe but effective option. Dot the candles in among your special gifts, styling a selection of different heights and shapes around the foot of the tree, with smaller votive candles and presents styled more towards the front. The gentle flicker of candlelight will create an enchanting ambience that will delight on Christmas morning, complementing the soft twinkle of your Christmas tree lights and creating the perfect finishing touch to your festive decor.”

LEFT Ivory TruGlow LED Candles, from £11.99 for a 12cm pillar, all Lights4Fun

‘Transform a bunch of mistletoe into a Christmas centrepiece with the twinkle of tiny white lights’

ALL AGLOW

Simon Temprell, Interior design lead, Neptune

“A generous bunch of mistletoe can become a Christmas centrepiece when you twist tiny white lights through it. The battery-operated LED fairy lights are attached to a length of bendy copper or silver wire and can easily be manipulated to spread the lights evenly through the branches. The tiny lights will bring the white berries into focus, and you can add some decorative ribbon, tied in a bow, at the top.”

RIGHT Goring faceted bead lights, £10; Mistletoe twigs, £18 each, both Neptune



Ultimate lights
pre-lit Christmas
tree, 8ft, £895,
and all decorations,
Cox & Cox



EXTRA SPARKLE

Danielle Le Vaillant, Head of photography and film, Cox & Co

“Capturing the ambience of an extravagant, low-lit house richly decorated for the season, this look is brimming with old-school elegance and vintage charm. Here the decorating is all about more is more, with a palette of soft gold, cream and white, and draped swags of pearls between layers and layers of decorative pieces to create impressive repeat patterns in the tree. Don’t be afraid to keep embellishing to create a sense of grandeur. What really makes this tree magical is the number of lights. Our Ultimate Lights Pre-Lit Christmas Tree (above) is our most impressive and opulent tree ever – illuminated with 5,400 bulbs – over five times the number of bulbs on other 8ft trees. Adding more lights to a tree guarantees more twinkle and sparkle, so try doubling the amount usually used, or even more. Clip-on candle lights are another layer that heightens the magic. Create further grandeur by replaying the deep green, graceful swags of the tree on stairways, tabletops and over a vintage-style mirror, perfectly placed to reflect the light and magnify views of the stunning tree around the room.” ▶



MAKE A STATEMENT

*Mark Winstanley, Chief creative officer,
The White Company*

“There is just something so special about a Christmas mantelpiece – dressed in an abundance of greenery and flickering candles it is such a focal point. Tradition is important to my Christmas scheme, but at the same time it’s always nice to try something different. Our oversized baubles add such impact – adjust the ribbon lengths adding both high and low focal points and your fireplace becomes a beautiful feature.” ■

ABOVE *Ultimate mercury ribbed bauble, £45; Ultimate mercury champagne bauble, £35, and all other decorations, The White Company*



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Heavenly *sleep*

Inviting guests to stay for the festive period makes Christmas all the more enjoyable. Use expert advice to create a bedroom that can be enjoyed at this special time and all year round, without any compromise to functionality or style

PURPOSEFUL FURNITURE

Guest bedrooms vary significantly in size, from compact and cosy to large enough to double up as a home office or reading retreat when not in use by visiting guests. Bear this in mind when selecting furniture and storage. Bed size is of course paramount to making a guest bedroom work: a double is always welcoming, but consider twin singles that can be pushed together, offering maximum flexibility for guests of all ages. Small doubles work particularly well in a guest bedroom providing a workable compromise between a single and standard double, particularly when a striking design such as a patterned upholstered headboard or a heritage iron bedstead makes a style statement. Mark Tremlett of The Cornish Bed Company advises seeking out beds that can be “fully customised and manufactured as a bedstead, bed surround, headboard, or even as a bedstead with no foot end, making them suitable for rooms of all dimensions, whilst remaining the focal point, adding welcoming charm and character.”

Team with a good quality mattress – regular visitors might benefit from a premium style, making their stay more of a home-from-home experience. Chris Tattersall, sleep expert and managing director of Woolroom, suggests luxurious wool. “Sleeping on a wool mattress has numerous benefits for your sleep,” he explains. “The most notable is that users will sleep cool in summer and warm in winter due to wool’s entirely natural temperature regulating qualities. Furthermore, because wool boasts antimicrobial properties, a wool mattress will offer protection against bacteria, mould, mildew and other microbes, naturally making it a great hypoallergenic option for any guests ▶

LEFT Add a festive touches to make guests feel enveloped in the Christmas mood – a small tree or garland will set the tone.

*Pre-Lit Foraged Winter Garland, £95,
The White Company*

who may be allergy sufferers, of which you may not be aware.” For extra comfort add a mattress topper. “A good quality feather-filled topper will provide additional comfort as well as give you that hotel feel in an instant,” says Charlie Marshall, founder of Loaf.

Good storage is key, and a wardrobe is a must, particularly in winter for guests’ overcoats and extra layers – the rest of the year it can double up as storage for household linens. For compact rooms, bedside tables and cabinets that are slender in style are ideal, such as antique Georgian pieces and French designs. If space is available, introduce a relaxed seating area, says Lucy Uren, creative director of Rowen & Wren. “An inviting armchair is a great way to enhance your guest bedroom’s comfort, and is made all the more special with the soft glow of a thoughtfully placed lamp.” It is also thoughtful to include a bench or a folding luggage rack on which to place cases.

LIGHTING & ACCESSORIES

Lighting and accessories will add personality to the mix. A bedside light is a must: Lucy Vaughan, co-founder of Vaughan Ltd, suggests a handy swing arm wall light. “It is a perfect bedside lighting alternative to a table lamp; not only does it add decorative charm alongside a headboard, it also frees up the space on a bedside table. In smaller guest bedrooms, it is a helpful space-saving solution where there is no room for a side table.” Clip lights positioned by the bed or dressing table work well, requiring just a socket to plug into. “A plug-in light frees up bedsides for flowers and ▶



EIGHT OF THE BEST BEDROOM ACCESSORIES

The right shape and colour will add individuality to a scheme

- 1 *Witham Clover mirror*, £250, Sophie Allport
- 2 *Cypress and Eucalyptus diffuser*, £32, Plum and Ashby
- 3 *Luggage stand*, £468, Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler
- 4 *Scalloped bin*, £135, Master The Art
- 5 *Oatmeal linen robe*, £79, Piglet in Bed
- 6 *Faux Shagreen dressing table mirror in Pale Celadon* £495, Oka
- 7 *Padded fabric-covered coat hanger in Buti Blue*, £12.50, Molly Mahon
- 8 *Green Ditsy Tissue box cover*, £18, Sarah K





BUYER'S GUIDE

FAR LEFT A wardrobe with shelves and hanging space is ideal for storing clothes and extra bedding.

Aldwych wardrobe, Potter's Pink, £3,876, Neptune

LEFT Select bedside tables that add sophistication and interest to a guest bedroom.

Bobbin large bedside table, from £482, Turner Pocock x Chelsea Textiles

THIS IMAGE Glowing decorations make a guest bedroom feel festive.

Glass Lantern fairy lights, Lights4fun



5



6



7



8





morning coffee,” advises Sheena Lawrence, co-director of Jim Lawrence. “Fitted with a plug and in-line switch, all you need is a bedside socket.” Sockets are of course key. “Double plug sockets with dual AC type charging ports are ideal to pair with your plug-in, providing space for your guests to power several devices,” adds Lawrence. “If you need a little extra, extension leads offer more options for hairdryers and other necessary appliances.”

Accessorise the room with rugs and decorative pieces with the focus on pattern, colour and personality. Sue Jones, co-founder and creative director at Oka, says it is important a guest bedroom is an inviting and comfortable space that will make people feel instantly at home. “Soft furnishings are ideal for building on the character and colour of the room and they can be easily swapped season to season. I like to start by choosing a rug as the base and layering in colours that complement. Don’t forget about adding different textures to really bring a cosy feel – think fringing, faux

fur and embroidery.” Use paintings and artwork too, choosing pieces that strike a balance between being characterful but not too personal. A selection of books and little extras such as a bedside tray with a carafe and glass will always add to the experience or, as Lucy Uren of Rowen & Wren likes to do, add a vase of flowers and even a chocolate or two. “Year round, I love to welcome guests with vases of seasonal pickings from the garden, so as Christmas nears, I swap garden flowers for jugs of festive greenery and berries. In the days leading up to Christmas these will often be adorned with the odd bauble, decoration or tree chocolate if the visitors happen to be children.”

THE BEST PREPARATIONS

There is no better way to ensure the room is guest-ready than trying it out prior to their arrival. So, lie on the bed or stay overnight in the room to measure the

LEFT Add character and practicality with a classic iron bedstead. Agnes bed, from £2,010, The Cornish Bed Company

ABOVE Twin beds provide versatility, as they can be pushed together to create a double if necessary. Puffin single bed in Charlotte Gaisford Sharanshar Green, piped in House Cotton Sorbet, from £1,642, The Headboard Workshop

BUYER'S GUIDE



The little extras will make guests feel all the more special. Recycled wool blanket, £80, Sorbet Living

comfort factor, read under the light to ensure the illumination is sufficient and dress the bed to suit the season. Charlie Marshall, founder of Loaf, suggests linen for comfort. "Laid-back 100 per cent linen feels soft, natural and lived in and needs no ironing, making it fuss-free and easy to throw on at the drop of a hat when guests come to stay, all year round."

For Christmas, Chrissie Rucker, founder of The White Company, suggests getting rooms ready a week before. "Add extra cosy throws and cushions. Every guest bedroom ideally needs to smell great (use a diffuser), have a super-soft robe, lovely soft towel and special treats to use in the bath or shower. I also love to add a touch of Christmas with a small tree on top of a chest of drawers (pre-lit faux trees are brilliant for this) and a couple of Christmas decorations hanging from the wardrobe." For a final flourish, why not, as Sarah Kostoris, founder of Sarah K Designs, suggests, add a monogrammed pillowcase? "At Christmas time, a monogrammed baby pillowcase adds that special little extra touch as a lovely surprise finish and a wonderful keepsake gift too." ■

ABOVE LEFT A bench at the end of the bed can be the perfect answer if an occasional chair will not fit in a guest bedroom. Mila upholstered bench in flax linen, £698, Rowen & Wren
RIGHT Create a welcome and relaxing aroma conducive to sleep with a scented candle or diffuser. Sleep fragrance oil, £10, signature candle, £22, and signature diffuser, £38; Ceramic candle and diffuser plate, £6; Aldbury throw £160, all The White Company



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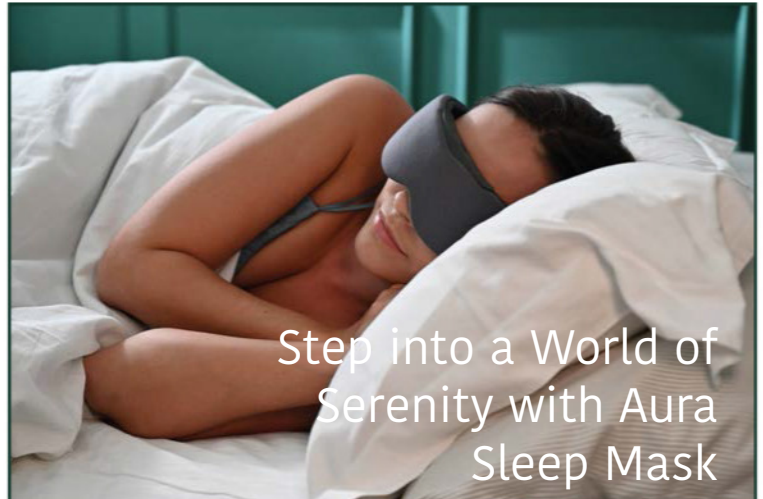


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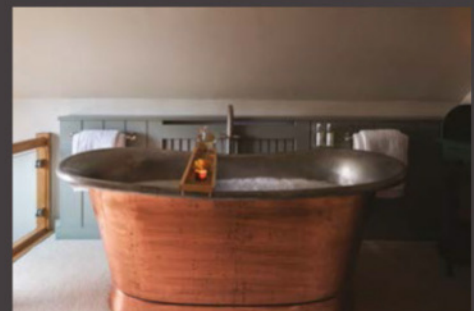
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RED

Creative Combinations

Continuing our series celebrating the evolution of colour and pattern, we explore how trends and historical influences have shaped British interiors, this time focusing on revitalising red

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE

A bold, energetic colour with a complex history, red is a tone associated with power, confidence and moral strength. Beloved by monarchs, who often wore it to represent a God-given right to the throne, it is a hue reminiscent of both fire and blood, symbolising life and, in the Western world, love and passion. In Asian cultures, it represents good fortune, joy and fertility. Originally a rudimentary paint made from red clay tens of thousands of years ago, it is one of the world's oldest colours. Today, red receives mixed press:

dynamic and powerful, it can evoke strong emotions; prolonged exposure to deep red can increase heart rate and metabolism. Used creatively, as an accent in a decorative scheme, combined with other colours in pattern, or in a less vivid tonal variant, it adds warmth, verve and sophistication.

Primary attraction

Originally derived from red ochre, a natural clay pigment, this bold tone has shaped our understanding of colour. "Red is perhaps the first colour commodity" ▶

A period dining hall in a former chapel decorated by Salvesen Graham has been given a sense of opulence thanks to walls in Farrow & Ball's Incarnadine and standout artwork. OPPOSITE In this scheme by Kelling Designs, a chair upholstered in a rich red with a multicolour geometric back adds verve and depth to surrounding natural wood elements.





‘Colours with red bases, such as ox-blood reds, which have brown tones, are flattering and impart a sense of warmth and comfort’

Edward Bulmer, interior designer and paint specialist

ABOVE LEFT

Opening into an airy cloakroom, this jib door covered in faux red suede preserves the jewel-like essence of this cossetting hallway designed by Alidad.

LEFT In this elegant cloakroom by Lara Clark, Deveries wallpaper by Ottoline is complemented by a vanity painted in Geisha by Paint & Paper Library, adding depth and texture.

throughout society,” says colour consultant Fiona de Lys. “I am particularly fond of earthy, richer tones with hues leaning towards oranges and pinks. To me, these reds embody the idea of being grounded and the juxtaposition between ancient history and the present.”

Red has a primitive quality, particularly those tones that edge towards brown. While a saturated application of this colour in its most vivid form can work well in small spaces, it tends to be more effective as an accent, either through furniture or introduced via bold wood trim choices on doors, architraves and windows, where a high gloss finish also works particularly well. “The primary hue itself is certainly not for the faint-hearted and should be used carefully in the home,” advises Anna Hill, of paint specialist Fenwick & Tilbrook. “Instead, I love reds with a twist, such as pinks and berry shades, as they feel so versatile. Bold reds work better as a colour pop. A piece of furniture painted in red is more pleasing to the eye than a fully red room.” ▶



Three different shades of red for walls, ceiling and woodwork create a cocoon-like feeling in this guest room corridor by Nicola Harding. A cherry red artwork frame is a vibrant finishing touch. OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT A brightly upholstered ottoman picks out the olive tones of the joinery beyond while adding a bold colour statement to anchor this space, designed by Hám Interiors.



LEFT Deep tones, such as this red fabric upholstered bed by Kelling Designs, can work particularly well against a clean palette featuring period details such as panelling and corning.

BELOW LEFT In this modern apartment by Leo Wood, a rich red velvet cushion, a bespoke geometric rug by Coral & Hive and a vibrant artwork by Alex Cumming add vibrancy to pale limewash walls and a bouclé sofa.

BELOW A check handwoven floor treatment by Vandurhurd and 8 Holland Street, comprising an unusual combination of sky blue and rust, introduces a modern-retro note to a period scheme.



However, it is also a question of balance. Integrated well, red lends verve and energy. “I will always love red ticking or gingham, as cushions or curtains, because they create such a classic, cosy and homely feel,” says interior designer, Susie Atkinson. “I do also, however, like introducing red in more unexpected and subtle ways to evoke a contemporary feel – perhaps through using a checked wallpaper border around doorways.”

Red alert

This is a transformative tone that works best when it is fully integrated into a scheme, partnered with complementary colours and patterns. “I find bright red wonderful as a symbol, but less useful as a decorating colour,” says interior designer and heritage paint specialist, Edward Bulmer. “However, colours with red bases, such as ox-blood reds, which have brown tones, are flattering and impart a sense of warmth and comfort.”

The key is to use this colour in the right setting, taking into account a room’s use, orientation and architectural features. “In its strongest incarnation, red is a lively colour, not best suited to creating a restful, sanctuary-like bedroom, for example,” advises Sarah Davies-Bennion at Kate Guinness Design. “But there are ways to add drama. Some of my favourites include red and white stripes, maybe even with a circus tent ceiling, for a bold nursery or playroom; a jewel-box red lamp base and shade against an otherwise simple backdrop, or a high all-over gloss paint treatment in a small-but-perfectly-formed guest loo. We have also recently painted a bathroom vanity unit in a wonderful pillar box red.”

As a colour associated with energy, alertness, drive and stimulation, red is a colour often incorporated in work spaces within the system of Feng Shui. It is a tone that can also sit well dining rooms. “Red walls make the perfect backdrop for meals with loved ones and look elegant by candlelight,” says interior designer Emma Deterding. “Being a dynamic tone, red suits sociable spaces. Well-lit pictures in gilt frames also look good against this backdrop.”

Colour specialist Fiona de Lys advises against decorating north- or south-facing rooms in brighter reds. “That can result in either a harsh start to the day ▶



ABOVE RIGHT Deep red marble and metro tiles bring warmth and sophistication to a compact ensuite by Naomi Astley Clarke. An off-red painted door completes the jewel-box effect.

RIGHT In this pretty bathroom scheme by interior designer Joanna In this pretty bathroom by Lucy Cunningham, pitched walls lined in a Fanny Shorter fabric are complemented by a jaunty red and pink striped blind and rich red armchair for a touch of old-school glamour.



ABOVE In this classic scheme, fabrics by Bennison, including a sofa in Little Aztec, pick out the rich red tones of the heirloom painting that anchors the room.

LEFT Deep burgundy tones, complemented by rich-hued Rose Lace Market tiles, bring a sense of depth and elegance to this deVOL kitchen painted in Refectory Red.

OPPOSITE A terracotta linen wallpaper creates a sophisticated delineation between living and dining areas in this family home designed by Studio Peake. The artwork is by Dana Finch.

from the bright morning light, or Dante's *Inferno* with the afternoon sun," she says. "And west-facing rooms work well in slightly richer or earthier tones, as do libraries and studies filled with books and rich woodwork."

Another way to incorporate this tone is via textiles and tonal colour combinations. Interior design studio Salvesen Graham recommends introducing it via upholstered headboards, through fabric or piping, or adding a red tassel fringe to plain window treatments, while textile designer Wendy Morrison favours a playful approach. "I absolutely love red with pink and red with orange," she says. "These are unusual combinations, with each being very close together on the colour wheel. I also love red as an accent, via a red lacquered lattice chair, for example."

New ways

These days, the availability of a host of nuanced reds, from cherry to burgundy, coral to crimson, has given rise to an increasingly creative approach. Deep blood reds can be an elegant choice for kitchen joinery, especially when paired with warm wood, such as oak or walnut. "This works surprisingly well for kitchens that lead to the garden," says Fiona de Lys. "The red contrasts with the green space beyond in much the same way that a frame contains a picture." This is a ▶





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‘Bold reds work better as a colour pop. A piece of furniture painted in red is more pleasing to the eye than a fully red room’

Anna Hill, Fenwick & Tilbrook

tone that also works well as a finish for baths and vanity units, complemented by large format chequerboard flooring.

Adding pattern into the mix introduces a softening yet cohesive element. “In my powder room, I’ve paired Farrow & Ball’s Rectory Red with a kaleidoscopic marbled wallpaper,” says interior designer Sarah Peake. “The result is a warm, jazzy and vibrant space. We also recently used a red brick linen from Fermoie to line the walls of a drawing room – its textured weave and convivial warmth help to create an understated, comfortable scheme.”

For interest and gravitas, consider using red as a grounding anchor. “I recently opted for a red marmoleum floor, paired with a calmer brown-pink colour on the walls,” says Kinder Design’s Leo Wood. “Adding a vibrant red as the base layer was a really effective way of bringing in the drama in a more considered way.”

Of course, red is also a deeply festive tone and, while it pairs naturally with green foliage for a winter-foraged look, it is best to avoid pairing it with green decor. “That can look a little too Christmassy year-round,” thinks interior designer Lucy Cunningham. “But it can be deeply festive in other ways, such as for home bars or drinks cupboards. An unexpected hit of red as you open the cupboard looks seriously smart, especially against glass and brass, making these hidden spaces deeply dramatic.” Prized for its vibrancy and dynamism, this is a tone that, used in balance, delivers impact and energy to a scheme. ■

ABOVE RIGHT A graphic geometric rug and a high gloss stool, Studio Atkinson’s Cylindrical Lacquer Table, inject contemporary appeal into this classic scheme.

RIGHT In this bathroom scheme by Neptune, a Chichester washstand painted in Paprika is complemented by earthy neutrals for a rich twist on classic design details.



SHOPPING



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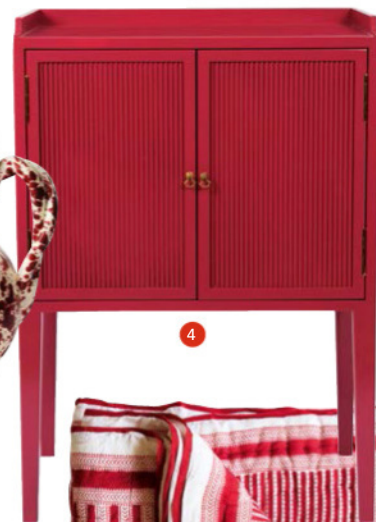
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4



6

SCARLET ALERT

Create depth with a rich solid, whimsy through candy stripes, and bright notes with prints and blush tones

- 1 Ruby Roo tablecloth, from £75, Faro Home
- 2 Tablecloth, Florence, Red, £126 a metre; fabric on chair, Anna-Lisa, Bordeaux, £126 a metre, both Cathy Nordström
- 3 Chelsea dome eight-inch pendant, Burgundy, £79, Industville
- 4 Fluted side table in Cranachan, from £1,250, Georgie Wykeham Designs
- 5 Burgundy Splatterware vase, £85, Montes & Clark
- 6 Stripe quilt, Red, from £225, The Mews Furnishings
- 7 Neptune II CO 02 radiator, £599.62, The Radiator Centre
- 8 Geminus Advance bath, Red, from £2,207, painted exterior/plinth feet, from £390, The Albion Bath Company
- 9 Can-Can Claypaint, £54 for 2.5l, Earthborn
- 10 Finley armchair in Heritage Red Stripe, £1,148, Rowen & Wren
- 11 Heritage upholstered counter stool, £315, Ercol
- 12 Cormack candle holders, Raspberry, £18 for a pair, Oka



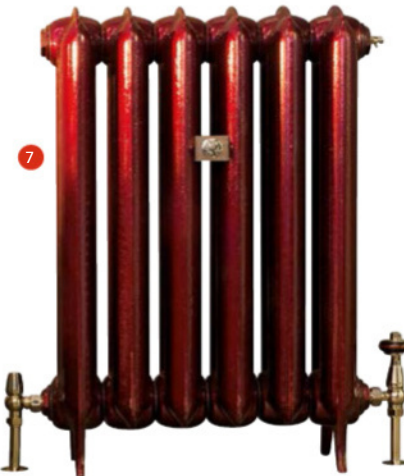
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FEATURE SUZANNA LE GROVE
PHOTOGRAPH (CATHY NORDSTRÖM) © FANNY RADVIK



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CALLAGHANS OF SHREWSBURY

A CURATED COLLECTION

Buying art can be a daunting prospect. Here, Stella Callaghan of the art gallery Callaghans of Shrewsbury reveals how to start and continue collecting

As the celebrated artist Salvador Dali once said, “a true artist is not one who is inspired but one who inspires others.” This, of course, is the great joy of art, as Stella, who along with her husband Daniel owns the Fine Art gallery Callaghans of Shrewsbury, can attest. “We always recommend our clients choose works they feel inspired by and ultimately fall in love with,” she explains. “The ‘pop-off-the-wall’ pieces you could get lost in every day.”

There is no doubt that the Callaghans know a thing or two about art, having garnered an outstanding reputation both in the UK and across the world during their gallery’s 35-year history. The company specialises in European 19th- and 20th-century paintings – particularly those by Claude Venard, Henri Lasbasque

and Marcel Dyf, to name a few – as well as contemporary sculpture and early 20th-century furniture by the Italian designer Carlo Bugatti.

So, when it comes to building an art collection, where does one start? As Stella says, it is best to follow the heart when it comes to art. “Once we know our client and they know us, we can curate their collections together. But we always recommend buying pieces that give you pleasure. The pieces you can’t help but keep looking at,” she says.

As such, Stella would not recommend following artistic trends, but striking out on one’s own with a bit of advice from an art dealer. “We always tell our clients to buy the best pieces they can afford and to avoid buying multiple pieces that they only like rather than love,” she says. “That said, if you’re buying en masse

for a space like an office, you don't need to be so emotionally invested."

For some, buying art can be a daunting prospect, but the Callaghans always reassure their clients that, in a few years, their taste has changed, or they move to a different-style property that would lend itself to another genre of art, they can help sell their current pieces and buy new ones instead. "Art is an investment not just in the emotional sense but in monetary terms as well," Stella explains. "It's far more enjoyable and attractive than a stocks and shares certificate filed away in a filing cabinet."

Over the years, Stella and Daniel have seen the value of art for themselves. "We purchased our first painting by Claude Venard about 30 years ago for £125, and today his pieces are selling for between £8,000 and £80,000," Daniel says. In fact, the French artist Venard has gone on to prove a particular favourite of the couple's, with the gallery now specialising in his works. "We have sold Venard's works to everyone from private collectors buying for their beach cottage in Nantucket, to large corporate financial institutions in London. His allure really is universal."

So, in a dream world, if we all owned a Venard, does Stella have any advice on how to frame a painting? "Framing is so important, it's something worth investing in. The right frame can make all the difference to the presentation of the piece," she explains. "At Callaghans we will always offer advice on how best to frame a piece. Most seasoned art dealers spend hours sourcing and selecting the right frames for thousands of pieces, whether it be a bespoke hand-finished floating frame or a gilded swept traditional frame. You have to consider the style of the painting, the period and the palette, which can often be echoed in the finish of the frame you choose."

Finally, how to hang the piece at home? A tape measure and spirit level are vital, and if following the rules, most museums hang modern and contemporary works at 1.55m from the ground to the middle of the picture (the Old Masters are hung higher), so it falls at the average eye level. It is also recommended to use a double fixing either side of the piece for extra security. "When hanging pictures, it's important to also take into account the lighting and ceiling height of the property," Stella explains. If hanging a single piece and unsure where to put it, begin by leaning it against a



wall or piece of furniture until confident the right spot has been found. If hanging a montage, either ask for advice from an art dealer, or use a theme to put the prints together, for example, birds. "Don't be afraid to mix pieces from different periods and genres," Stella adds. "Art can be uplifting, sobering, funny and emotional, bringing elements to one's life at a different level. Sometimes just taking a few minutes to enjoy a work of art can change your day." So, what better investment can there be? ■

callaghan-finepaintings.com

TOP *Reclining Nude*, Claude Venard (1913-1999), 38cm x 46cm, oil on canvas, signed
ABOVE *La Riviere*, Marcel Dyf (1899-1985), 46cm x 56cm, oil on canvas, signed
OPPOSITE *La Plage de Cannes*, Henri Lebasque (1865-1937), 46cm x 53cm, oil on panel, signed

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LIVING THE SEASON

Inspiration for seasonal pastimes and making the most of life at home starts here ►

CHRISTMAS CHIFFON CAKE

This delicious orange sponge cake provides a light alternative to rich seasonal bakes and its elegant decoration is centrepiece-worthy for any Christmas party

INGREDIENTS

225g self-raising flour
250g icing sugar
3 tsp baking powder
1 tsp orange zest
6 eggs and 2 egg whites
1 tsp vanilla extract
200ml orange juice
120ml rapeseed oil
500g vanilla buttercream
½ handful of physalis

METHOD:

- Preheat oven to 170°C, gas 3.
- Mix the flour, 200g icing sugar, baking powder, orange zest and a pinch of salt in a bowl.
- Separate the eggs. Mix the yolks, vanilla and orange juice with the oil. Add to the flour mix and stir in. Whisk the egg whites with the remaining sugar until stiff; fold in.
- Pour into a greased and lined 25cm round cake tin. Bake for 45 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes, turn out onto a rack; leave to cool.
- Cut the cake into three even layers. Sandwich together with a thin layer of buttercream and then use the remaining buttercream to ice the top and sides. Decorate the cake with the physalis and serve. Makes 10–12 slices.







What to do in **DECEMBER**

This is the month for decking the halls, conjuring up a Christmas cocktail, foraging for foliage, lighting a candle and, of course, leaving some tasty morsels for Father Christmas and his reindeer

CREATE... *a Christmas scene*

There is nothing nicer than taking a walk on a crisp winter's evening and snatching a quick gaze into homes that have been furnished with a fabulously large fir tree almost touching the ceiling, covered with baubles and twinkling lights and taking pride of place in the front window. A large part of the fun of Christmas is choosing a tree and enjoying the ritual of decorating it from head to foot with baubles, bells, ribbons and strings of fairy lights. It is hugely reminiscent of Victorian times and often a tree is the scene that fronts Christmas cards as the ultimate symbol of festive gatherings and winter warmth. Many English homes have a large bay window that acts as the perfect framework, so be inspired by Victorian nostalgia and deck the tree with a cornucopia of colour, vintage charm and festive sparkle. For a look that is full of flamboyance, source velvet ribbons with which to suspend baubles from the branches, as well as to add the finishing touches to presents wrapped in pretty paper and popped under the tree. ▶

Hand-painted decorations, £29 for a set of five; Handmade wrapping paper in Cranberry Stripe, Fern Lattice and Yellow Bloom, all £12 for a set of three; Monroe Red Stripe cushion, £72; Elbert ottoman in Sage Stripe, £768; Remy two-seater sofa in Dark Olive velvet, £2,528; Wilford armchair in Plaster Pink, £1,064, all Rowen & Wren

Triomphe tripod
antiqued mirror
table, £495;
Ranelagh
champagne
flutes, £55 for
four, all Oka



CLASSIC FRENCH 75 CHAMPAGNE

- Add 45ml gin, 15ml lemon juice, 7.5ml sugar syrup and ice to a cocktail mixer and shake. Pour into a glass and top up with about 75ml champagne.
- For a festive twist substitute the sugar syrup with homemade rosemary syrup: simmer one cup of water and one cup of sugar in a pan, stirring until dissolved. Add a handful of rosemary and leave about 15 minutes before straining and bottling up.
- For a mocktail alternative, instead of champagne and gin use tonic water, a little more lemon juice and rosemary syrup, or a lemon flavoured sparkling water or soda.

ENGLISH MARTINI

- Strip rosemary leaves from the stem and muddle in the base of the shaker. Add 60ml London Dry Gin, 25ml Elderflower liqueur. Shake with ice and fine strain into a chilled glass.

FURTHER READING

Difford's Guide To Cocktails, £33,
by Simon Difford

SERVE UP... *a tray of classic cocktails and mocktails with a seasonal twist*

Experiment with citrus and herby flavour combinations, using lemon, lime or clementine alongside rosemary or thyme, to add extra flavour to all sorts of festive favourites and non-alcoholic alternatives. Rosemary and thyme form the base of many classic cocktails, as well as herb-infused syrups, and work particularly well with gin, vodka and whisky-based drinks. They always spruce up the flavour of alcohol-free cordials too. Of course, Christmas would not be the same without

the popping of a cork and a champagne toast – why not put a herby twist on a classic champagne cocktail such as the French 75, by adding a dash of homemade rosemary-infused syrup along with the lemon juice, or serve up a classic martini with a winter aromatic at its base as a sophisticated seasonal aperitif. Head to diffordsguide.com for expert tips and recipes and enjoy – it is Christmas after all, so get the champagne flutes and cocktail glasses washed and polished ready for the party.

TAKE... *the time to reflect and calmly prepare*

Make a space on the mantelpiece or in the centre of the dining table for a festive foliage-inspired arrangement. Place an advent candle in the centre, then enjoy the age-old tradition of lighting it at regular intervals during the countdown to Christmas. A set of four candles in an advent wreath allows for one to be burned on each of the four Sundays before Christmas day. Alternatively, source a single candle that has four separate weekly markings and style with some coloured baubles and festive foliage. A poinsettia is a seasonal favourite, much revered for its stunning array of red and pink tones and its star-like pointed petal formation. A stem or two is sufficient to add a graceful touch, along with a sprig of holly, ivy or other leafy foliage sprayed in a decadent gold or silver. Why not make a regular time each Sunday in the run up to Christmas, to burn the candle while reflecting on jobs already completed and adding to the list any others that still need to be undertaken? A calm way to prepare and avoid a mad panic and frantic rush in those final few days. ▶

Christmas poinsettia decoration, from £9.99, Stars for Europe





FEATURE SARA EMSLIE

UPDATE... *serveware for entertaining*

Well ahead of time, invest in new plates, boards and platters which will take away the hassle of hosting Christmas parties and buffets, and make gatherings that little bit more special. Consider items that will add different levels of height when grouped together on a buffet table, or can be used to create a centrepiece for a sit-down dinner. A classic cake stand complete with a protective glass dome is hugely versatile and ensures food is suitably covered up while still visible;

this makes it ideal for displaying everything from the celebration Christmas cake to a pile of freshly made mince pies, and it can even be used as a handy cheese plate. A stand with a dome will also come into its own for that all-important ritual on Christmas Eve, making a protective covering for a thank-you snack for Father Christmas. Gather a few favourite treats, such as a glass of sherry and a mince pie, and pop them under the dome to leave out, along with a carrot or two for Rudolph.

Acacia cheese or cake dome, £49, ProCook



*GATHER... foliage to
add flourishes to each and
every room*

A winter walk in a nearby woodland or forest is the perfect opportunity to find lichen-covered twigs, cones, holly, ivy, yew, teasels, seed pods and leaves that can be used to decorate empty corners of the home. Why not include seasonal spice favourites too, such as star anise and sticks of cinnamon, along with bundles of herbs and foraged finds, which can be added to a willow wreath and hung from the front door as a festive welcome. For extra Christmas flair, brush some with a small amount of white emulsion paint to create the effect of a sprinkling of snow. Attach bundles to a length of rustic string for a country style garland that can be hung from a peg rail, underneath a mantelpiece or in a room painted in a suitably festive shade of green. ■

Wall, Sunday Stroll Claypaint; chair, Tom's Bakery Claypaint; Foliage dipped in Eyebright Claypaint, both £57.50 for 2.5l, Earthborn





Christmas CRAFTING

Sign up to a workshop during the festive period and learn how to make gifts and treats that are truly bespoke

ABOVE Make Christmas decoration biscuits at Biscuiteers School of Icing.

ABOVE RIGHT Stollen is just one of the seasonal favourites to take home after the Christmas Baking Workshop at The Riverford Field Kitchen.

RIGHT Learn to make a delicious Christmas lunch during a course at The Raymond Blanc Cookery School.

Embrace a handmade approach to this year's celebrations by learning a new craft or skill at a host of creative workshops to make Christmas presents, feasting and decorations even more special. Discover the art of calligraphy to create beautifully handwritten cards, gift tags and menus for the table, or take the opportunity to make something decorative or edible to give as a gift, or learn how to elevate everyday dishes into gastronomic treats for all to enjoy over the festive season.

EDIBLE DELIGHTS

In the run-up to Christmas, enjoy a workshop focusing on festive foods to discover a new skill or technique and take seasonal classics to new culinary heights. From canapes and chocolates to confectionery and traditional bakes, there are food courses covering all kinds of

dishes to whet the appetite. Simply enrol to create a memorable edible decoration, master the art of breadmaking, and enhance cookery skills to excite the tastebuds of friends and family year-round.

The Riverford Field Kitchen

Tie on an apron, roll up the sleeves and learn how to create sensational home-baked and beautifully spiced Christmas breads to give to family and friends. The workshop is led by experienced pastry chef Andy Tyrrell, who will share his knowledge, tips and techniques for creating seasonal favourites to take away - including traditional stollen, orange and cranberry brioche and a festive focaccia. Students will also learn how to make sourdough flatbreads to enjoy alongside the workshop lunch.

Christmas Baking Workshop, 20-21 November, £150, Devon; fieldkitchen.riverford.co.uk



Biscuiteers School of Icing

Decorate biscuits at the Biscuiteers School of Icing. An icing expert will demonstrate the tips and techniques required to skillfully hand-ice to perfection. Each student will create a tin of their own Christmas-inspired creations. Alternatively, get a group of four or more like-minded friends together and book a private Gingerbread House Icing Class.

Learn to Ice Christmas Biscuits, multiple dates in November and December, £90, London; biscuiteers.com

The Raymond Blanc Cookery School

Elevate the traditional Christmas lunch to a new level with a one-day course providing a festive-laden, hands-on practical session coupled with expert advice. Learn how to cook a delicious starter and turkey, as well as making a delicious Christmas pudding to take home and enjoy. Refreshments and a working lunch are included. Participants will go home able to impress guests on Christmas Day by serving up a feast using new-found confidence and flavour techniques.

Traditional Christmas Lunch Course, 5, 9, 13 or 20 December, £395, Oxfordshire; raymondblanc.com ▶





Daylesford Farm

Create an array of handmade sweet treats with a series of demonstrations and guided hands-on cookery sessions. Have fun making delectable goodies such as decorated biscuits, traditional mince pies, sweet fudge and honeycomb that can be packed up as part of a hamper or popped in a stocking.

Edible Christmas Gifts 30 November, 8 December, 16 December, £210, Gloucestershire; daylesford.com



EMMA DODI, Founder, Emma Dodi Cakes

As well as making bespoke cakes, professional baker Emma Dodi specialises in hand-painted macarons decorated to celebrate all occasions. Take note of Emma's advice on making these edible treats:

- "When baking or cooking, it is so important to plan everything in advance. Read the recipe fully before starting, have all the ingredients and, most importantly, have the equipment ready. This is particularly important if you are attempting something new where timings are key to the success of the recipe."
- "Christmas is the perfect time to show off your culinary prowess and a gift made by you will always be so gratefully received. If you are looking to add a real wow-factor then personalising your gift will achieve just that. Edible paints and a paintbrush go a long way if you want to personalise macarons (as I do), and they also work with biscuits and cakes. Alternatively, you could try your hand at chocolate or icing calligraphy. Personalising your gift will really add that extra magical touch."
- "Don't delay! The biggest problem we all seem to have around Christmas time is that there are never enough hours in the day, so prepare as much as you can as far in advance as you can."

emmadodicakes.com



HANDMADE GIFTS

A gift that is handmade carries such personal meaning and will always make the recipient feel cherished. There are a multitude of courses and workshops at this time of year designed for making all sorts of decorative items and homeware, so this Christmas take the time to try something new – from embroidery to paper craft, ceramics to candle making or even concocting bespoke artisan soaps – and wrap up a unique present to pop under the tree.

Master The Art

Be inspired at Shropshire-based Master the Art School of Decorative Finishes to replicate the delicate beauty of snowdrops, one of winter's favourite blooms, using crepe paper dipped into wax and decorated with oil paint. Expert craftswoman Charlotte Hepworth will lead participants through the process, guiding them on the best ways to capture the elegance of these pretty flowers. The result will be an everlasting potted plant that can be used year after year to grace the centre of the Christmas dining table or a sitting-room mantelpiece.

Paper Snowdrops Workshop with Charlotte Hepworth, 6 December, £130, Shropshire; mastertheart.uk



Highgrove Traditional Crafts

Join embroidery specialist Hannah Mansfield in the stunning setting of Highgrove for a two-day workshop to explore the essentials of goldwork techniques (*top left*). Learn how to pad the fabric and create an outline shape out of wire before in-filling the shape with purl wire. Each student will make their very own acer leaf embroidered motif, inspired by the acer tree collection in the arboretum at Highgrove.

An Introduction to Goldwork with Hannah Mansfield, 2–3 December, £190, Gloucestershire; highgrovegardens.com

True Grace Candle Making

Christmas would not be the same without the soft glow of a candle. Why not master the art of making a scented candle (*above*) with a two-hour long session that includes an introduction to fragrance, a guide to fragrance families and an explanation of how fragrance can affect the mood? The scented candle created in the practical session has a 40-hour burn time and a gift box and tag to package it in. All students receive a goody bag at the end of the workshop.

Candle making workshop, 10, 11 or 30 November, 8, 13 or 20 December, £65, Wiltshire; truegrace.co.uk

Old Bexley Soap and Candle Co

Have fun learning the essentials of soap making (*above left*) in a five-hour workshop with Paula, the award-winning founder of Old Bexley Soap and Candle Co. Learn the traditional cold-process technique, learn how to add fragrance, colour soap and master the skills needed to be able to create eight luxury palm-oil-free soaps. Along with taking away bespoke artisanal soaps, participants should have the confidence to continue making fragrant soaps at home.

Beginners Soap Making Course, 11 November, 9 December, £135, Kent; oldbexleysoap.co.uk

KAREN BEK, Willow weaver and basketmaker

Norfolk-based professional willow weaver Karen Bek finds the process meditative and calming. She runs workshops throughout East Anglia teaching people how to make festive decorations with natural materials found and gathered in Norfolk. Karen offers her top weaving tips:

- "Willow can be woven to create Christmas ornaments (*top right*), table decorations and gifts, all with a traditional feel. I would suggest making miniature wreaths for napkin rings from cornus, willow or lengths of ivy, or cordage out of plant fibres (rush, day lily, daffodil and iris leaves) to use instead of string and wire for your garlands and ornaments."
- "Use local materials: take a walk in your local area and collect a range of materials such as acorns, pine cones, moss, twigs, willow, cornus, hazel and lichens."
- "Experimenting is key; collect colourful stems and branches in autumn/winter and practice weaving into shapes. Cornus has vivid winter colour and can be used like willow."

Find courses at karenbekwillow.co.uk ▶



ANGELO MEOLA, Calligrapher

From the day Angelo Meola picked up his first dip pen, every aspect of this ancient art form has fascinated him. He enjoys using a variety of different calligraphy styles to create bespoke stationery for all occasions. Here are Angelo's tips for improving calligraphy and hand-lettering skills:

- Use good quality paper – ideally you will want a very smooth untextured paper which is uncoated. This will allow the nib to glide across the paper. If the paper is textured or too fibrous, you may find the nib catching and propelling the ink everywhere.
- An important element of calligraphy is being able to hold the pen lightly with a loose grip. Your muscles will also be looser and you will be able to create smooth consistent calligraphy, especially important if you'd like to do large flourishes.
- Try metallic ink like gold at Christmas as it will be quite striking and festive. When using metallic ink, ideally you want to create a contrast between ink and paper colour, such as gold ink on black paper.
- When writing place cards for Christmas Day, each guest name should be the same size, so I would recommend starting with the longest guest name that fits on your place card comfortably and using that as your size guide."
- Should the real letter from Father Christmas get lost in the post, then you'll have to handwrite one yourself on behalf of Father Christmas. Ideally, some worn-looking paper adds plenty of character and the odd ink spill also adds to the charm. Prepare your text in advance so it helps create a bit of fluidity, which will be reflected in your calligraphy."

angelomeola.co.uk



WELL-CRAFTED LETTERS

Shed any inhibitions of not having beautiful handwriting with a beginner's course in calligraphy. Learn the basic strokes for the letters of the alphabet and create glorious messages for greetings cards, gift tags, menus and party invites. Alternatively, craft elaborate illustrated art to frame or decorative pieces to give as a gift.

London Calligraphy

Sign up for an in-person course (online courses are also available) with London Calligraphy to be immersed in the beautiful and hugely inspiring setting of The Art Workers' Guild. Located in the heart of Bloomsbury, this Georgian townhouse is the perfect place in which to learn the art and craft of calligraphy under the expert guidance of internationally acclaimed calligrapher, illustrator and former fashion designer, Katie Noakes.

In-person Christmas Calligraphy Course for Beginners, 7, 8, 18, 19, 24, 29 November, 1, 6, 7, 13 December, £68, London; londoncalligraphy.com

Meticulous Ink

Enjoy this short, intensive two-and-a-half-hour-long session with Meticulous Ink's owner Athena in the beautiful surroundings of the letterpress print studio in Bath and learn the basics of copperplate calligraphy, focusing on how to use a dip pen with flexible nib to make simple strokes and begin writing in beautiful script lettering. After the workshop each participant will take away a set of calligraphy essentials including a wooden nib holder, flexible copperplate nib, calligraphy practice sheets, a copperplate calligraphy guide sheet and a pot of iron gall ink to continue to enjoy this new hobby at home.

Beginner Copperplate Calligraphy Workshops, 25 November and 9 December, £60, Bath; meticulousink.com



Mellor & Rose

Join Beverly, Polly and Lucy Mellor at various locations around Lancashire, Cumbria and Yorkshire for a special Christmas-themed set of lettering workshops. Learn festive-inspired dip-pen calligraphy to enhance all sorts of festive stationery such as cards, tags and menus. Alternatively sign up for a Christmas Bauble Lettering workshop and learn the skills of hand-lettering with a chalk pen before progressing to making a set of mixed-size Christmas tree baubles. Each hand-decorated bauble will be personalised with the name of the intended gift recipient. *Christmas Calligraphy Workshop* 3, 8, 11, 12, 19, 22, 25 November, 2, 10 December, £69; *Christmas Bauble Lettering Workshop* 4, 12, 16, 25 November, £65, Liverpool, and all over; mellorandrose.co.uk

Wild Sea Calligraphy

Join calligrapher Lyndsey Gribble at one of her workshops taking place at various locations in Devon and Cornwall. Using a pen and ink, each session teaches participants how to master the art of brushstrokes to add intricate messages to festive stationery, as well as how to create calligraphy illustrations – such as lettered stars or snowflakes – to adorn bespoke, handmade Christmas card designs. *Christmas Calligraphy Cards Workshop* 14 November, £40; *Christmas Calligraphy Workshop* 5, 7 or 14 December, £55, Devon/Cornwall; wildseacalligraphy.com ■



ABOVE LEFT Using calligraphy practice sheets on a course at Meticulous Ink in Bath.

ABOVE RIGHT Create lettered star Christmas cards at a Wild Sea Calligraphy course.

ABOVE Discover the joy of handwriting with a dip pen and ink with London Calligraphy.

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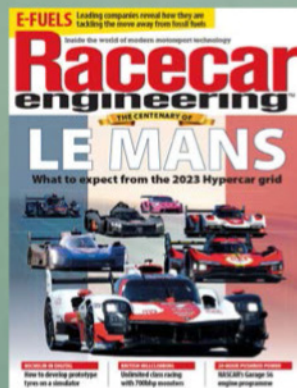
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ONE FINAL THING...

Decorate the front or back door with a festive swag as a fresh twist on a traditional wreath

Festive swags have an effortless natural charm. Dobbies has created this example using ivy and evergreens as the base. It advises tying twine around the end to hold foliage in place. Next, decide the length of the swag and trim accordingly. Treat it like a bouquet of flowers and place delicate foliage evenly throughout the display, securing with twine. Finish with a ribbon tied around the end to cover the twine.

LED lantern, £9.99; pillar candles from £2.99, Dobbies



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