

**DETAILS**

**What** An extended period home with seven bedrooms and four reception rooms

**Where** Oxfordshire

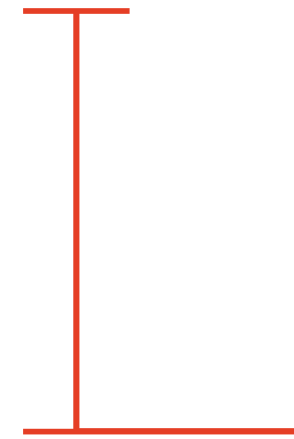
**Interior design** K&H Design

# DIVINE INSPIRATION

An old rectory in the English countryside has been updated and refined without losing any of its Georgian charm

Photography Simon Brown  
Words Catherine Coyle





Life often has a funny way of reminding us that some things are simply meant to be. Carlos and Isabella Simpson had always felt an affinity with the Georgian rectory they discovered in a quaint Oxfordshire village where they were visiting friends. Although it was on the market, the young couple were just starting out, travelling extensively for work and fully immersed in their city jobs. Fast forward five years and, with two young children and increasingly busy work lives, the house was up for sale again – and now the timing was right. “It just called to us,” they say. “It is spacious yet manageable and incredibly peaceful, offering us such a fabulous contrast to our London life.”

Set in a secluded hamlet, the former rectory had been sold off by the Church in 1960. The purchasers back then added a sizeable extension, effectively doubling its size. “Then, about ten years ago, the centre of the house was ravaged by fire,” says Isabella. “Of course, the horrors of a fire outweigh any benefits, but on the positive side here, the resulting restoration works were carried out to such an exacting standard that every joist and ►



[Previous pages] The guest bedroom in the loft makes the most of the skylight that pours natural light onto the bespoke bed. Craigie Hill fabric by the Isle Mill in Silver dresses the headboard and grounds the whole scheme. Paisley scatter cushions in Turnell & Gigon Fantine fabric work in harmony with Holland & Sherry’s cushions in Opera Antique gold silk velvet and bedside lamps and tables by Chelsea Textiles. [This page, above] The Arts & Crafts chaise longue is a bespoke piece by K&H Design, along with the handmade pelmet. [Opposite] De Le Cuona purple velvet cushions are paired with Michael S Smith floral cushions on the bed, while the doll on the bedside table was sourced at Robert Young Antiques



[Above] In the master bathroom there are modern touches to a predominantly Georgian design. Carrara marble has been used for the vanity unit splashback, floor tiles and shower area for a contemporary linear effect, with antique brass highlights and two Original BTC wall lights in polished brass. [Right] The master bedroom suite is a lesson in quiet, simple style, with Chris Holt flooring creating fluidity through the whole space. The occasional chair is by K&H Design and was made specifically to the height requirements of the client; its floral Michael S Smith fabric cushion was designed in-house, too. [Below] The connecting dressing room has an ottoman also upholstered in Michael S Smith fabric



floorboard was replaced and insulated, every electrical cable was protectively coated. By the time we bought the house, its bones were finer than when it was originally built.”

It was nevertheless in need of some adaptation to modern multi-generational living – even if, as a grade II listed building, it was important for its new owners to create a home that remained true to its historical roots.

Just as the property is a marriage of two halves (the original rectory and the extension), so too is the way in which its design scheme has been tackled. The couple brought on board designers Katie Glaister and Henry Miller-Robinson of west

London interior architecture and design studio K&H Design to meld the traditional elements that had initially attracted them to the house with the kind of relaxed, easy elegance they favoured for their weekend bolthole. Striking a balance between classical period decor and comfortable, functional design that works and doesn’t date is a challenge, but it’s one K&H Design relished. “The house divides naturally, with the more formal reception rooms in the Georgian portion of the house and the more relaxed kitchen and family living space in the newer wing,” explains Glaister.

With solid bones and no building work to contend with, ►



Part of the open-plan living area, the breakfast room can be sectioned off with pocket sliding doors. Rose Uniacke's Drapers table is flanked by Niels Otto Møller Model 78 woven dining chairs

the team were in a position most interior designers dream of: collaborating to dress each room to the clients' brief, albeit with a tight timescale in place. "The family have great taste and an exacting eye for detail. They wanted their house to identify as a contemporary English country home. They are also enthusiastic and discerning art collectors, so it was rewarding for us to create backdrops for traditional oil paintings and prints as well as postmodern and contemporary art."

With seven bedrooms to design, the idea was to inject character that would set each space apart, while also sewing a thread through each to unite the scheme. Flow and cohesion, especially in a property of this size and scale, can really help to make a house feel like a home. Here, this has been achieved by eschewing big, showy design statements, and instead employing quality craftsmanship and an understated sense of confidence

and calm. "There was a lot of oak in the property," recalls Henry Miller-Robinson. "The oak flooring across most of the ground floor was very yellow, as was the panelling in the library and ▶

**[Right]** Farrow & Ball's Stiffkey Blue sets the tone in the library, with a handmade marble bookbinding paper on the wall above the fireplace. "This was our opportunity to create an atmosphere, not only to keep a book in, but to read one!" **[Below]** The Rose Uniacke Studio sofa (in De Le Cuona's Shepherd's Cloth linen) is oversized but does not overwhelm the living room. A pair of Wanscher armchairs in Clementine Oliver's Angus wool gives seating options for a larger group when entertaining. The bespoke metal coffee table with a patinated brass top houses three upholstered cubes in different Pierre Frey fabrics. **[Left]** The owners are avid collectors of art, which can be seen all over the house. A Pig bench found at Miles Griffiths Antiques completes this corner





**[Above]** When creating children's bedrooms, it can be difficult to find a balance that won't age too drastically. Inspired by the subtle pink of old English roses, the walls in this girls' bedroom are painted in Edward Bulmer's Cuisse de Nymphé Emue. The coronets were found in a junk shop in Wales and are hung with muslin trimmed in Samuel & Sons' Lancaster Fan Edge and tied with satin ribbons. **[Right]** Camping meets aviation, astrology and adventure in this boys' room, where Farrow & Ball's Pigeon provides the base colour. A custom-made wigwam is fashioned from a GP&J Baker fabric, while Drysdale mattresses are personalised with box valances in Ian Mankin's vintage stripe fabric. **[Far right]** The original fireplace is offset by a hand-painted mural and hanging model aeroplane



dining room, so we had the floors sanded and treated with a reactive stain to deepen and mute the tones and enhance the character of the timber. This was vital to the foundations of the design – sophisticated and timeless.”

In one bedroom, for example, K&H have combined old and new elements, such as a contemporary-style Arts and Crafts chaise longue that sits in front of the window. It's upholstered in a plain linen but its cushions – antique velvet and traditional chintz – harmonise with the bed, which is dressed in a handwoven bedspread made from dyed silk and faced with a soft velvet. Ornate pelmets designed in-house maximise the classically proportioned Georgian windows and ‘crown’ the Chelsea Textiles curtains.

Elsewhere, such as in the grand master bedroom suite, the designers have adhered to a neutral backdrop in order to put the focus on the architectural detailing. A semi-circular window seat adds impressive dimensions to the suite, ▶

with pillars lending an air of gravitas. Farrow & Ball's Shadow White is offset by Edward Bulmer's Drab Green for the recessed bookshelves. Bedding by Josephine Home is complemented by bespoke textiles, such as a reversible throw (Ralph Lauren's Aquitaine Sheer on one side and De Le Cuona's Heritage Pearl on the other) that shows off the beautiful valance. "It's a large room with relatively low ceilings," say the designers. "The carpet was replaced with timber flooring, which we feel successfully grounded the furniture and, counterintuitively, succeeded in adding a sense of height."

While backdrops remain neutral, the designers had fun with colour in key areas. Each palette was chosen depending on how the spaces are used. "We're never afraid to use colour," says Katie Glaister. "Having some rooms that are bolder just adds to the character. The scheme extends through the flooring, panelling

and interior architecture, unifying the different spaces. The blue study is a winter room, for example, but is also very inviting when guests arrive. It's a warm but very curated theme that runs through the whole house."

Similarly, the drawing room is used more frequently in autumn and winter and so tones of burnt ochre, terracotta and rich red have been introduced, with antique brass and gilt frames to complement these hues. An Alfred Potter portrait brings together all of the traditionally Georgian tones in this room. Up in the attic bedroom suite, meanwhile, green is the central colour. The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's French Gray, with elements of nature in the rest of the scheme to pull the look together. A Chelsea Textiles bench has been upholstered in woven horsehair by John Boyd Textiles, while the bed is dressed in Holland & Sherry's Alona taupe linen, with De Le ▶

"WE'RE NEVER AFRAID TO USE COLOUR. HAVING SOME ROOMS THAT ARE BOLDER JUST ADDS TO THE CHARACTER"



[Opposite] This downstairs loo reflects the traditional Georgian country house and gives all visitors an interesting vista. And what better way to create this narrative of times gone by than to use Marthe Armitage's Manor House wallpaper. The little lampshades are from Pooky lighting. This room offers tranquillity and intrigue to all its guests and has become one of the most coveted rooms in the house; attention to detail, even in the children's rooms, is key [Left and above] The writing bureau was found at Lorforde's Antiques in Tetbury, while the lan Mankin fabric on the headboards tempers the blues of the Josephine Linen bedding. This blue bedroom is typically used by a nanny





[Left] This quiet nook shows how calming and transformative colour can be, while the treated oak flooring continues throughout the house; The boot room, with its bespoke shoe storage and seat, is great for keeping all the outdoor paraphernalia in one place. The subtle tones of the Farrow & Ball Mouse's Back paint is nicely offset by Edward Bulmer's Red Ochre inside the cupboard [Below] Original flagstones, symmetrical latticed windows and a fanlight above the front door: the rectory's Georgian beauty in all its period splendour

Cuona's Bisley fabric on the reverse in for a touch of luxury.

It's an accomplished design team that can curate a style that looks like it has been formed over generations – especially given just three months to redecorate (Christmas was the deadline). K&H Design worked hard to fill each room with treasures that lend the home an air of established comfort – and still left some space for the family to add their own touches over the coming years. “We had just 14 weeks, so time was always going to be a challenge on this project, but we succeeded in our mission,” say the two lead designers.

“So often we fall in love with a piece of furniture only to find that the lead time is too long or the item is snatched by another buyer, and the sourcing process has to restart.

“But the devil is in the detail, as they say, and everything has to be just right.” ■

