



Colour & LIGHT

An eighteenth-century country house in Worcestershire is given a vibrant update by its new owners

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ABOVE Originally a Tudor farmhouse, the property was updated in the eighteenth century with a facade more in keeping with the fashions of the era.

LEFT Pale blue velvet sofas in the drawing room are upholstered in a Houllès fabric and are paired with yellow stools in a Schumacher velvet and cushions from Nushka. Marion and Richard installed classic pilasters to define the space, and egg and dart corning in keeping with the age of the property.



ABOVE A parquet floor discovered under thick carpet in the entrance hall has been cleaned and restored. Wallpaper from Galbraith & Paul is paired with Eau de Nil by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint below the dado rail.

BELOW Azurite by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint is a joyful blue in the snug. Dark yellow cushions and Lewis & Wood Rooksmoor Velvet piping on the bespoke wing-back chair echo the colours of the dining room beyond. An inviting Beaumont Fletcher sofa is covered in Pierre Frey fabric.



Marion initially chose blue for the drawing room but realised that it fought against the views. "Kate suggested Evie by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint, a green which brings the room to life and grounds it in its natural surroundings," says Marion.



'I wasn't set on a traditional country house. I would have been happy living somewhere modern, but I walked in and immediately felt something'

The allure of the countryside has, perhaps, never been greater than in current times. There is a rural idyll for every dream, from snug cottages to grand estates, so when Marion and Richard Knight embarked on buying their first country home together, they began by stepping back to take a cool-headed look at what was right for them. "That was the hardest and most intensive part of the process," says Marion. "We had no county affiliation, but we needed good access to London and Oxford for business. Previously we'd both led very urban lives, travelling extensively for work and living in cities as diverse as Tokyo, London, New York and Hong Kong.

We'd each pursued our own corporate careers, so the most important part of our search was working out what we really needed together. We decided on a list of 10 things we really cared about in a country house, and three things we didn't want, and drew up a shortlist from there." Richard was working in South Africa when Marion went to view a property which had suddenly become available. "I was open-minded about it," Marion explains. "I wasn't set on a traditional country house. I would have been equally happy living somewhere modern, but I walked in and immediately felt something. The house had a resonance that spoke

ABOVE New wood flooring in a Versailles pattern adds elegance to the drawing room. The curtains are in Travelling Light by Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth. LEFT In the dining room, a vintage Chinese lamp with a bespoke Daisy shade by A Shade Above stands on a Regency-style plinth.



'At every window, you are drawn towards the surroundings. There are river views to one side, hills on the other, and all around there are huge trees'

ABOVE LEFT The boot room, installed as part of Marion and Richard's renovations, features cabinetry painted in Farrow & Ball's Downpipe set against walls in Little Greene's Aged Ivory and blinds in a striped fabric by Malabar. ABOVE RIGHT The breakfast room walls are in Bone China Blue by Little Greene, whilst the curtains are in Benaki by Lewis & Wood.

to me. I rang Richard and told him, 'You need to see this to see if we're on the same page', and when he walked in, he immediately loved it too.' Tucked away in a secluded corner of Worcestershire, in a bend of the River Avon, the house bears the traces of generations of past inhabitants. The first record of a dwelling on the site is an entry in the Domesday Book when the land belonged to Westminster Abbey. The current house began life as a Tudor farmhouse, vestiges of which can be seen in beams in the dining room and in the cellar. The farmhouse was enhanced early in the eighteenth century in order to create a substantial, rectangular country house with a fashionable classical facade and decorative filigree ironwork. Sadly, it was then halved by estate duties in the 1950s to leave what is still a considerable seven-bedroom property.

It was the setting of the house, with its aspect and landscape, that beguiled both Marion and Richard. "At every window, in every room, you are drawn towards the surroundings," says Marion. "There are river views to one side, hills on the other, and all around the estate there are huge mature trees. The old glass in the windows has a special quality, too, which seems to make everything shimmer and dance in the light whether looking out or looking in." Whilst the house was structurally sound – much to Marion and Richard's relief – it was in need of some sympathetic renovation and restoration. The stucco was cleaned and repaired, service rooms were created, including a utility and boot room, and a monstrous boiler in a garage was replaced in the overhaul of the plumbing and heating systems. New double doors in the kitchen gave easier access to the outside space ▶

The base cabinets in the kitchen by Mark Wilkinson are painted in Blue Verditer and the wall cabinets in Stone Pale Warm, both by Little Greene. The blinds are in Christopher Moore's Grandes Ecailles and the cream Whitten vase on the island is from Neptune. The plant is from Junglist.



'Simple measures added to the sense of space, bathing the rooms in light and allowing the house to breathe again'

ABOVE LEFT The framed sarong from Malaysia was the inspiration for this bathroom's colour scheme. A Sheraton bath from Imperial is teamed with a blind in Colefax and Fowler's Hector linen with a passementerie fringe from Houlès. For similar tiles, try Mandarin Stone's Pod tiles.

ABOVE RIGHT The framed antique Fortuny velvet piece, mounted on Robert Kime wallpaper, was conceived by Kate for the master bedroom.

and steps beyond the drawing room were made wider and deeper. Apparently simple measures, like removing a thick hedge outside the drawing room, and moving a stone trough outside the study, added to the sense of space, bathing the rooms in light and allowing the house to breathe again.

"The previous owners, now our neighbours and friends, had lived in and loved the house for 30 years. Its traditionally formal style suited them, but they had no qualms at all about us introducing a fresh new look," Marion adds.

Marion had become acquainted with interior designer Kate Aslangul, founder of Oakley Moore Interior Design, an award-winning London-based design practice, through an art history group and their rapport grew during lectures and gallery visits. Marion decided Kate was the expert eye she needed for interior design help. "I liked Kate's breadth of vision and expression. She has innate style and doesn't impose her ideas on her clients," Marion remarks. "We didn't

want something that was too styled or 'tweedy'; we were looking for what Richard described as 'country house with bite', something with a cosmopolitan feel. Above all though, we wanted to bring in the wonderful views and the light. As an Australian, I can't bear being in the dark!"

Kate specialises in creating elegant, comfortable and timeless interiors for her clients, designed to lift the spirits and give joy for years to come. "It's a privilege to be part of this relationship, so my aim is to deliver for my clients more than they ever thought possible." Kate reflects. "Marion and Richard's house initially had a very introspective feel; it was closed in by vegetation at the windows outside and by heavy curtains and thick carpeting inside. They wanted a vista and a seamless relationship between the house and the surrounding landscape."

A trained photographer, Kate has an instinctive eye for sight lines which is evident throughout the house; even in what is now an uninterrupted view from the ▶

In the master bedroom, curtains in Savannah Cotton from Warris Gianni & Co are trimmed with borders in Cairo by Thibaut. The quilt on the bed is from Birdie Fortescue, the throw is from de Le Cuona and the cushions are in Dereham fabric by Blithfield. The flowers here and throughout are from Saltbox & Co.



ABOVE New definition and charm have been brought to this guest bedroom with the addition of a baldachin above the bed, a family piece, making it a firm favourite with visitors. Drapes in Tabby Weave from Tittle & Marr, Orrisa silk by James Hare and trim from Samuel & Sons are matched with Brideshead wallpaper by Nina Campbell for Osborne and Little. Visit oakleymoore.com to see more of Kate Aslangul's design work.

front door, through the house to the gardens beyond, clever framing allows the space to unfold at a leisurely pace. Similarly, a sophisticated balance of colours and textures gives each room its unique identity whilst maintaining flow. "By keeping everything slightly unbalanced, rather than completely symmetrical, each shape bounces to another and helps create the feel of the house; there are no jolts or change of tempo but rather the feel of a babbling brook," notes Kate.

Throughout, the project was highly collaborative with respect and admiration on both sides. With Kate's help, Marion and Richard have brought together a rich array of art, textiles and colour to create a home that exudes warmth, elegance and character, "to truly weave in their stories and create a tapestry of their lives," Kate says.

For Marion and Richard, their dreams for their country house have been fulfilled. "For the first time, we have a home where our families and friends can meet, relax together or enjoy their own space," says Marion. "We love it and couldn't be happier." ■



ABOVE The tiling design for the guest bathroom was inspired by the Casa de Pilatos – a palace in Seville – and created in tiles from Fired Earth. Little Greene's Hicks Blue used on the woodwork is echoed in the blind, which is in GP & J Baker's Izmir fabric.

BELOW Sky Blue by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint, used for the walls and joinery, creates a tranquil wash of colour in the luxurious guest shower room. The mirror is from Oka and tiles from Fired Earth.

