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Autumn/
Winter
2013

Life *at* home

LOOK INSIDE ENGLAND'S MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES

20

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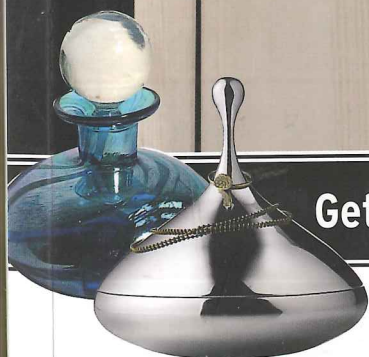


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Photo by
Collin Poole

Regency revival

Set in grounds of three acres and situated in a quiet, rural location not far from Hestercombe Gardens in Somerset, the nine bedroom house would make an ideal venue for country house weekends, weddings and family celebrations, as the Willments intended.

The property also benefited from a range of outbuildings where themed workshops such as art, gardening and silver-smithing could be held.

As a former music producer James was also keen to do workshops on the technicalities of music making.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER BOOTON





An eclectic mix

Dating from around 1810, the original late-Georgian house was a square, three storey building with a Regency-style façade. At different periods the house has been sympathetically extended and today it is almost twice its original size.

Only at the rear of the building can its full height be appreciated as the lower ground floor is built partly into the ground at the front of the house.

When the Willments took over the property in 2012 it was looking 'a little tired' and was in need of some updating, as well as major works involving lifting all the floors and installing a totally new water supply and boiler.

At first they lived in a motor-home outside and then moved into the house where they slept on mattresses in the drawing room during the winter months.

"It was chaos in the house," remembers Chrissie. "The weather was absolutely freezing and as we had no heating we wore coats all day. I had to collect water from outside for tea and coffee. It was very challenging."

Initially James and Chrissie were intending to re-style the interior themselves but admit that they didn't really know where to begin. During a visit to Taunton Chrissie spotted some particularly eye-catching curtains in the window of Country Knole Interiors at 59 East Reach and decided to investigate.

On entering the shop she met its owner, interior designer Melloney Thorne, who has since fabulously transformed the interior of their home.

However, she didn't start with a blank canvas.

When the Willments moved in they brought their own delightfully eclectic mix of furnishings and also 'inherited' a house full of beautiful curtains, many of which were silk, and some stunning pieces of furniture, including a large bespoke wash-stand by Mark Wilkinson.

The very stylish kitchen, also by Mark Wilkinson, had been put in by a previous owner. "There were so many lovely things in the house," says Mel, "it would have been wrong to get rid of everything."

So it was a case of tying it in, but at the same time making each room quite different.

"We've given it a bit of a twist to bring it into the 21st century." In some rooms the curtains were replaced, and blinds added.

"Where we've kept the existing curtains we've put in furnishings that complement them and give the room a very different look," Mel explains.

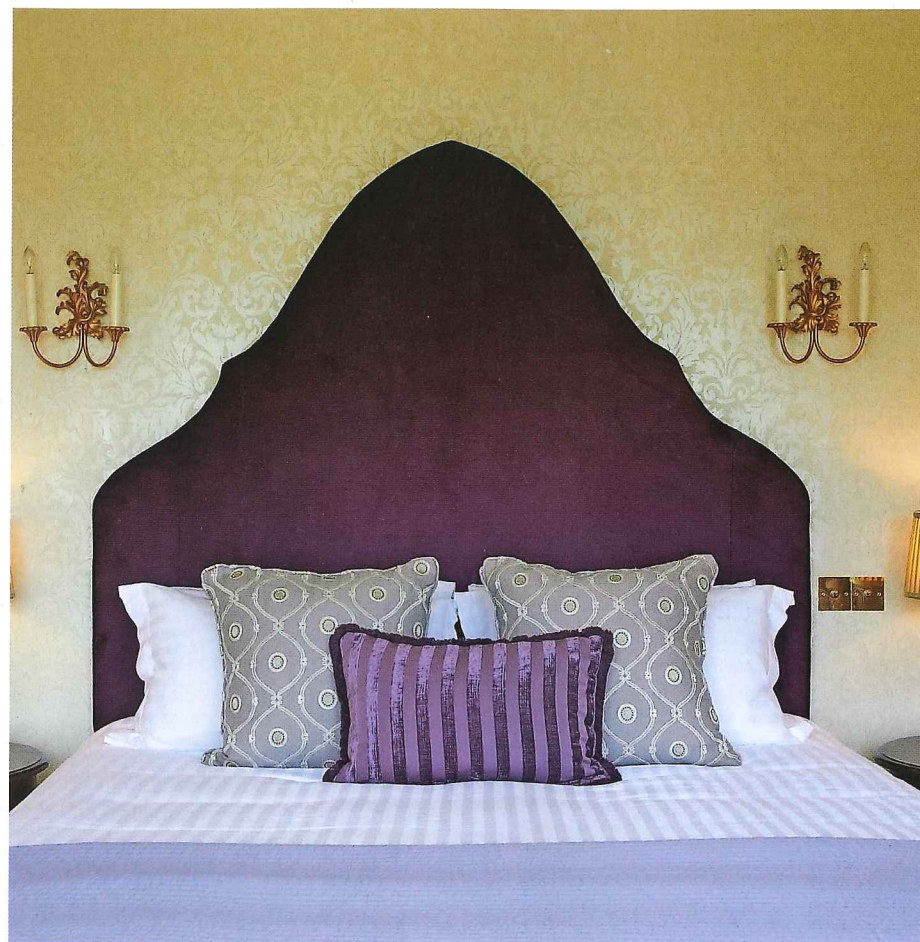
Chrissie adds, "Mel has managed to juggle round and re-use all the furniture that was left here, which is wonderful because we don't like to just throw things away." Mel continues, "The house needs to feel as if it's evolved over time, and we've been sympathetic to that."



Drawing board

The elegant drawing room on its south-facing side was built on, with a master bedroom suite above, to replace an existing conservatory, and on the northern side other rooms were added.





A designer finish

"Every room has a very different theme," Chrissie points out. "Rather than trying to replicate a country house environment, Mel has made it feel modern, funky and warm and inviting for any guests that stay there." The old cellar now functions as a disco room and is equipped with coloured lights, a sound system and even a smoke machine.

The Willment family certainly knows how to party!

"Downstairs is fun now," remarks James, with a beaming smile.

The former 'safe room', still with its safe in situ, is now a bedroom with a distinctly Highlands hunting lodge feel, thanks to Johnson's of Elgin Crimmond check Russet on the bespoke headboard made by Country Knole, with matching Roman blinds, and an antlers ceiling light that James found.

The cushions are a selection in Warwick Bertram check, Wemyss Finesse and Linwood Letters.

In the garden room Mel has used a strong Normandy grey by Little Greene, which

goes well with the existing curtains, and in the French Room she has chosen pale blue Zoffany La Seine that complements both James and Chrissie's French furniture and the Brockham Old Blue curtains (Colefax & Fowler) that Chrissie first saw in Mel's shop window.

Woodwork throughout the house is finished in Farrow and Ball Skimming Stone. The master bedroom is dramatically different, too. Previously the walls were yellow and the carpet blue.

Here, Mel has used Linwood Tivoli Ivory wallpaper to complement the existing curtains, but added a bold splash of colour with purple Apollo Velvet (from Sunbury Design) on the shapely headboard that she designed herself, coupled with a made to measure valance with contrast kick pleats in gold.

"We've never used an interior designer before," says James.

"It's saved us money, actually, and it's something I'd certainly recommend.

Mel's been here holding our hand all through the job." ■



Time to upgrade

As the house was Grade II listed, the new owners had to seek permission before converting a single, long bathroom into two separate bathrooms for adjoining bedrooms.

