



SERENE SCENE

When the current owners viewed this eighteenth-century former rectory in Oxfordshire, it was love at first sight and with the help of decorator Emma Sims-Hilditch they have made the interiors their own

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THIS PAGE FROM TOP Steps link two areas of the garden. The snug has sofas designed by Emma. OPPOSITE FROM TOP The dining room is painted in 'Mouse's Back' by Farrow & Ball, chosen to create a dark, inviting atmosphere. The decoration scheme of the drawing room was dictated by the floral curtains, inherited from the previous owners



Just in front of the well-tended church that overlooks this pretty Oxfordshire village is a pair of iron gates, set back slightly from the road. Those fortunate enough to pass through these gates and venture down the beech-lined gravel drive are rewarded by a sight of particularly English beauty: a former rectory, built in light Cotswold stone and covered in wisteria, which on the day of my visit is in full flower, its abundant purple blooms releasing clouds of heady perfume.

The rectory was built in the late eighteenth century, then extended in 1817 and in the mid nineteenth century, when a Gothic Revival-style oratory was added. This has given it an unusual formation and created a courtyard, which the owners use as an outside dining area. In addition to the main building, there is a barn and a stable block, both now used by the team that looks after the gardens. These include vast lawns ending in meadow-style planting, walled garden areas, an orchard and a swimming pool.

The current owners bought the property in 2012, when their eldest son was eight and their twin boys were four. Having decided it was time to move out of London, it was an easy decision for them to relocate to this part of the country. 'My husband grew up in this area, his family are still here and we had a weekend cottage nearby,' explains the owner. However, they were determined to wait for the right house. It was many months before they were invited to view this property, which was not yet on the market. 'As soon as I walked in, I knew that this was it,' recalls the owner. 'The nicest couple, with four children, were living here and it felt like a really happy family home. About two months later, we were on our way out of London.'

Shortly after moving in, she approached Emma Sims-Hilditch – whose name had been passed on by a friend – for some Neptune beds (Emma is the creative director of the company, co-founded by her husband John). 'I explained that we wanted to find some beds for the twins and then said, "Also, we don't have any furniture..."' she explains. Having lived in more contemporary houses previously, they had almost no furniture of the right style or scale. 'Suddenly, I had this big house and I didn't know what to do with it. However, when I went on Emma's website, I thought, "That is

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OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
The old stable block. The kitchen's engineered oak floor has a white oiled finish to chime with the room's light palette. The front door. The Neptune kitchen is painted in the company's 'Lily' and 'Fog' shades. THIS PAGE FROM TOP A yellow lampshade from Fermoie adds a bright touch in the main bedroom. A spare room

my style; that is how I want to live.” For interior designer Emma, it was a dream project. ‘I fell in love with the architecture and the classical proportions of the house. Its bones are very elegant and it has so many original features,’ she enthuses. ‘Early in our conversations, I felt I understood the owner and what she wanted – a version of the country house that is quietly contemporary yet still timeless.’

Emma began in the drawing room, which runs the length of the house and has five full-length sash windows. Her starting point was the curtains that were there when the owners moved in, which are made from heavy linen in a vintage-style floral design. ‘We thought it would be lovely to use something that already belonged to the house and the pink of the roses is perfect for this room,’ says Emma.

In the dining room, a fabric also served as the starting point – in this case, a hunting-scene print from Lewis & Wood in a pink, aqua and inky blue colourway, which has been used for the curtains. ‘Often the scheme for an entire house will grow from a single fabric,’ Emma explains. Also important is her choice of a rich grey-brown for the walls – ‘Mouse’s Back’ by Farrow & Ball. ‘The owners do a lot of entertaining, so the dining room needed an interior that elevated it from the rest of the house. The paint creates a dark, inviting atmosphere.’ The other living areas are more relaxed, particularly the kitchen. With its Neptune cabinets, Carrara marble worktops and ‘Compiègne Leaf’ chandelier from Vaughan, it is a harmonious space, without being bland.

The same can be said of the first floor, the highlight of which is the owners’ bedroom. ‘It is so fresh and breezy,’ says Emma. ‘For the curtains, we have used one of my all time favourite fabrics: “Duchess Paisley” by de Le Cuona. The yellow Fermoie lampshades may not match the purple of the curtains, but somehow that contrast is part of what makes the room work.’ On this floor, as well as the main bedroom’s dressing room, there are two spare rooms.

Above this is the children’s floor. Here the decoration takes a playful turn. One of the boys is cricket mad, so his bedroom has cricket-themed wallpaper and cricket-ball handles on the wardrobe doors. Another bedroom has Ralph Lauren wallpaper in a nautical design and the Neptune beds that began this journey. ‘This house is the most wonderful place. Beautiful, but also homely and lived-in,’ says Emma □

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