

HERE to STAY

The owners of this country house in Somerset had not anticipated taking on such a large project, but their careful renovation enhanced by modern decorative touches, has resulted in a smart, yet comfortable forever home

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BOTH PAGES At the back of the house, garden designer Arne Maynard has extended the terrace to create an outdoor dining area with a table and chairs from The Conran Shop. Adjacent is the Georgian orangery, which was updated by the Victorians and now houses a second kitchen



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The front door opens onto a large hall. In the dining room, Alexander Mulligan's 'Djenne' table from Mint takes centre stage. Fitted Plain English units maximise storage, while Philippe Starck's 'Mademoiselle' chairs add colour and pattern in the kitchen. The drawing room has a pair of Talisman sofas covered in bold 'Chartreuse' velvet from Designers Guild (also opposite)



Sometimes the net has to be cast improbably wide to catch your dreams. Or your dream house, at least. The owners of this magical Somerset pile had started their search for what they affectionately call their 'resting place' in the more obvious and practical county of Hampshire, clinging to the notion of a short commute to London. But in 2011, within moments of pulling up at the then-neglected Hamstone façade of the house with its crumbling Doric columns and stone pilasters, emotions took over reason and the couple knew they had to have it. With a total of 16 house moves between them, they determined that this would be their last.

Today it is a welcoming and beautifully proportioned family home, dating predominantly from the nineteenth-century and nestling in dreamy West Country contours. As for architectural features, it has the full set, with its Georgian bay windows and elegantly curved orangery, its perfectly positioned central staircase, and its acres of reception rooms. Outside is similarly spectacular, with specimen trees, a sunken garden, stone coach house, tennis court and swimming pool. 'We had to do a huge amount of work to get it looking like this,' explains the owner, who masterminded the restoration with the occasional help of her husband. 'He had already fallen in love, while I was still taking stock of everything that needed doing.'

Fortunately, she is a past master at doing up houses. Having worked on several projects with her friend, Mark Panter of Panter Hudspith Architects, she decided to deploy him again here. 'There is a certain shorthand between us that saves a lot of time,' she explains. Decisive, exacting and remarkably unsentimental, the owner who, by her own admission, is capable of spending months agonising over family and work matters, has always been less worried about making snap decisions about the house.

There was, in fact, very little that needed doing structurally, as the house, which is Grade II*-listed, has a near perfect layout. 'It was more a case of rewiring and replumbing, getting rid of a lot of asbestos, and putting in a few more loos and bathrooms,' she says. Restoring the orangery was the biggest expense, as the timbers had rotted to a state of near collapse, but with the installation of a modern Bulthaup work unit, it has been transformed into a summer kitchen and entertaining space. 'It was originally built by the

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The refurbished swimming pool is tiled with a grey mosaic that catches the sunlight, and complements the Belgian blue stone used around the pool. This provides a clean contrast to the white furniture bough in France



FROM LEFT Visitors approach the house through the arch of a stone coach house, which is now a self-contained staff flat. A south-facing door leads from the library onto a wrought-iron porch and the terrace beyond



Georgians as an orangery and then revamped by the Victorians with its intensely geometric floor tiles. It was built to look over the landscape, and it is a fabulous place for relaxing,’ the owner says. The family – she and her husband have three almost grown-up daughters – still congregate in the original kitchen, now fitted out with floor-to-ceiling Plain English pieces, but situated as it is in the original service end of the house, it lacks the light, elegance and space of the orangery. ‘My taste has become more contemporary as time goes on,’ she continues. ‘So my girls made me promise to keep the kitchen cosy.’ To make the most of the space, she has forgone an island and food preparation takes place instead on the oak kitchen table.

With occasional help from the decorator Sarah Spencer, another tried and trusted ally, the owner mixed family furniture with new acquisitions to fill the significant floor space. With a palette of greys and yellows, she set about lessening the house’s formality and giving it a cosier edge, using a carefully edited selection of suppliers, namely Designers Guild, B&B Italia, Little Greene and The Rug Company. The floorboards on the ground and first floors, however, nearly got the better of both of them. Many had to be got rid of as they were damaged by the process of asbestos removal, while the remaining ones had suffered from being pulled up and patched in over the centuries, but the owner was determined that they be exposed as part of the new decoration. Bristol company Chaunceys Timber Flooring sensitively replaced what was needed, keeping as many original boards as possible. ‘But it wasn’t until this lovely local French polisher called Mark Coray came along that everything started to come together,’ she says, explaining how he custom-mixed a beautiful slate-brown stain that blended everything together throughout the house.

With the house finally finished, the owners employed the garden designer Arne Maynard to create a formal garden at the front of the house, and to revitalise the rest of the garden with low-maintenance borders. ‘It has been planted to look like it has been here forever, whereas in fact, when we got here, it was just lawns,’ the owner explains. ‘This has been a major project, and not one I was expecting. But all of the bits of our lives as a family have ended up here, and I feel that we have all found our forever place’ □

Panter Hudspith Architects: panterhudspith.com
Arne Maynard Garden Design: arnemaynard.com



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Marset’s ‘Discoco 53’ chandelier hangs at the top of the staircase. A daughter’s bedroom has a pastel palette, with a rug from The Rug Company. Two Designers Guild beds upholstered in ‘Brera’ linen furnish an attic bedroom. One of the two main bathrooms has a free-standing tub and basin by Jaime Hayon for Bisazza

