

COUNTRY LIFE®

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EVERY WEEK

Nibbling nasturtiums and lunching on lillies: a floral feast



Chelsea Flower Show preview

Elizabeth I's corridor creeping

Plus: hoopoes, Wendy houses and growing figs

The designer's room

Emily Todhunter has turned a disused carriage house into a multi-purpose space

THE designer is one half of the tremendously successful duo Todhunter Earle, an interior design practice that has built an enviable reputation for its ability to combine timeless classicism with modern flair. Projects range from smart London town houses and country houses to Alpine chalets and villas on the Costa Smeralda in Sardinia.

Emily was asked by the owners of a pretty house in Berkshire to convert their carriage house, which had been empty for some time, and to create a space that could serve several purposes, principally as a family room in which university-aged children could come home and watch a film with friends (the sofa seats 10) and as a place to relax with the papers.

However, the room is also intended as somewhere to have fun, hence the audio-visual elements, bar and disco balls. Another important consideration was a connection to the garden, so the colour palette was designed so that the room doesn't jar after an afternoon in the potting shed.

In order to turn the room from an outbuilding to something more sophisticated, Emily commissioned R. W. Armstrong (01256 850177; www.rwarmstrong.co.uk) to install panelling. The lighting—critical to ensure the room could be used in a variety of ways—was designed by Sally Storey of John Cullen (020-7371 9000; www.johncullenlighting.com). The (heated) timber floors are by Schotten and Hansen (020-8752 0978; <http://schotten-hansen.com>) and the fabric wall panel—which improves the room's acoustics—has been covered in a matte velvet by Claremont (020-7581 9575; www.claremontfurnishing.com).

The result is an extremely tasteful balance between classic English country with a hint of fun and glitz. ➤
Arabella Youens
Todhunter Earle (020-7349 9999; <http://todhunterearle.com>)



Ask the expert Creating a media room



Emily Todhunter suggests ways to create a space for relaxing and entertaining

What are the most important things to consider when you're planning a media room?

You have to work out how it's going to be used and by whom. This is fairly straightforward if it's going to be a cinema for adults, in which case, the challenges are mood, acoustics and comfort. However, more often than not, the so-called media room also functions as a playroom for children, somewhere for the teenagers to play video games and the family to get together to watch a film as well as a party room.

In London, it's more common for media rooms to be built in basements that are pretty confined spaces, but where it's possible to have fun decorating in an amusing or rather kitsch way. We did a room recently for teenage sisters that had hot-pink suede fabric on the walls, for example, but, usually, we're decorating them to amuse the men of the house: huge comfortable sofas, bars, popcorn machines, leg rests that kick up, drinks holders and all the boys' toys!

Media rooms in the country are usually very different—less confined and with more focus on creating the ultimate party barn.

Do you have any advice on technology?

A media or party room is probably the most complicated room in the house as far as technology is concerned, so the next decision I'd have to make would be to partner up with an audio-visual consultant. Their role has changed of late—it's no longer just about designing the TV and the surround sound; it's really more about designing an intelligent system to control every-

thing in the house from the lighting, heating and air-conditioning to security and door entry.

It sounds a bit scary, but it means that you don't have six remote controls on your coffee table—everything can be quite simply controlled from an iPad or tablet.

Work with a consultant who speaks a language that everyone can understand—the likes of Luke Newland (<http://newland.solutions>), Robert Taussig (www.roberttaussig.co.uk) or Angus Gibson (<http://lamontconsultants.co.uk>) are all brilliant.

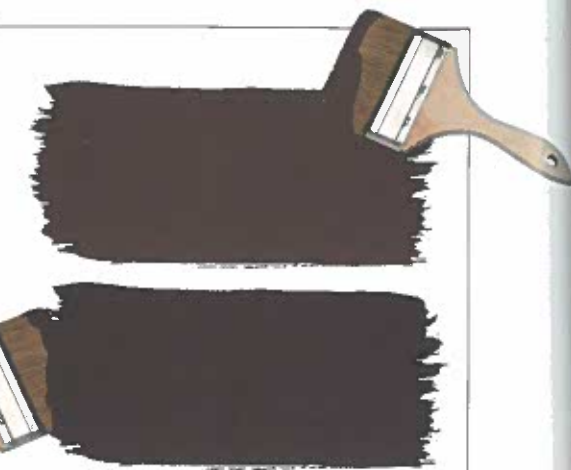
How do you decorate a multi-purpose media room?

The type of flooring you choose is very important as it needs to be hard-wearing enough for a party, but can't be too noisy. A timber floor works well. We sometimes specify lightweight rugs so that they can be rolled up and stored when clients are in party mode.

Even if you're not in London and don't have any close neighbours, acoustics are still vitally important. Fabric walling is very good for this. It looks fantastic, but it's expensive, so you wouldn't want to run the risk of teenagers spilling drinks on it. Padded leather or leather-look walls are more durable. Bill Amberg (www.billamberg.com) does some great walling that's wipeable and absorbs sound brilliantly.

It also helps if there's flexibility—we've made some huge modular L-shaped and U-shaped sofas that can be taken apart and pushed to the side of the room or stored. In any event, the sofas have to be really comfortable and made in hard-wearing fabrics so that they don't get ruined when there's a party.

Top right: Hot Paprika, Dulux (0333 222 7171; www.dulux.co.uk). Above right: Brinjal, Farrow & Ball (01202 876141; www.farrow-ball.com). Right: Isis coffee table, Soane (020-7730 6400; www.soane.co.uk). Below: Sofa, Lawson Wood (020-7228 9812; www.lawson-wood.com)



What about colour schemes?

The instinct, whether the room is in London or the country, is to go for dark colours because it's perceived as more of a nighttime room. Dark red and aubergine work well in a womb-like way. However, that doesn't always work in the country. If the room relates strongly to the garden, then it might be a better idea to go for dark greys and greens. In a city house, you can throw in a big sense of humour and go to town with the colours.

And any lighting tips?

Again, this is another completely critical area. Lighting will set the mood of the room and will be fundamental in changing it from a cosy family space to a glitzy party venue. Even after years of designing these spaces, I still like to work with lighting designers, particularly when it comes to these multi-purpose rooms. The likes of Sally Storey (<http://johnncullenlighting.co.uk>) are so up to speed with what's available and it's an industry that's constantly evolving.

Todhunter Earle (020-7349 9999; <http://todhunterearle.com>)



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