



CHALET GIRLS

The owner of this GLAMOROUS CHALET in the French Alps wanted a MODERN DESIGN that reflected her taste and was suited to year-round use.

She and her interior designer, Kate Earle, a firm friend, achieved this with a NEUTRAL PALETTE and MYRIAD CLEVER DETAILS

TEXT HATTA BYNG | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY

'If Kate isn't available to help me on a project, I'll wait,' says the owner of this chalet in the French Alps. This was her third renovation project with the designer Kate Earle—a fourth is under way—and the first, her house in London, was over 10 years ago. They are now not only designer and client, but 'partners in crime' and firm friends. The owner is heavily involved in each project—she, not Kate, flew out to France for the site meetings: 'it's my house, so it made sense'—and she certainly has a vision of what she wants and how she will live in a house. But she says that even now, after all this experience, she would be loath to do a project by herself, explaining, 'Kate

makes sure I don't make any mistakes and brings an aspect to it that I never could.' Kate's natural bent is also for a slightly softer, prettier look than the owner's and she is happy to be pulled in this direction.

The clients had walked past this Twenties chalet for years and longed to own it, as there are few houses in their original state, and with land, remaining in the area. It had been in the same family for generations but had been run lately as an inexpensive B&B; it was chopped up into minute bedrooms and shower rooms and the basement was very uninviting. The tiles in the entrance hall that were revealed when the lino was removed were the only

internal detail they could salvage.

Local architect Lionel Adam, of Smile Design & Architecture, was brought in. 'We wanted to maintain the beauty and integrity of the exterior, but have interiors that are "us", with a little element of surprise,' says the owner. The exterior therefore is still very much the 'gingerbread, "Edelweiss" style' that you would expect, but the house has been cleverly reoriented so that it also faces down the hill overlooking the town, not just towards Mont Blanc, as it did before. Huge excavations were undertaken and the driveway was relocated so that cars no longer drive through the garden and park obstructing the view, but



OPPOSITE FROM LEFT This Twenties chalet is one of the few in its original state in the area. The exterior belies the modern interior, which has been completely refurbished by designer Kate Earle. The chalet has views of Mont Blanc. THIS PICTURE The original tiles in the entrance hall were the only internal detail that could be salvaged during the extensive renovation



Light-filled, with a soothing colour palette, the interior is its own little jewellery box of a world

enter below the house – now underpinned by a striking, monolithic, corten-steel structure – into a garage. Externally, a balcony was added to the main bedroom, which affords views of the town and mountains. Existing openings in the main reception room were made into floor-to-ceiling french windows, to connect the room with the new terrace and reclaimed garden, designed by Randle Siddeley.

The interior is indeed unexpected. Light-filled, with a soothing colour palette, and furnished with glamorous twentieth-century pieces, it is its own little jewellery box of a world, and not like a conventional chalet at all – the only exposed wood is the oak parquet floor, which is a chic grey rather than rustic red. As the owners come here in summer as well as in winter, they wanted it to feel personal and suitable all year round. As Kate says, 'It is a Twenties house in a town; it didn't feel right to decorate it in a typical chalet style.' Also, both Kate and the owner strongly believe that, as the owner puts it, 'a house is soulless if it doesn't have things that have had another life,' and they often go to antiques fairs together, even when there is no specific project in mind. So the house is filled with interesting and pretty furniture, lamps and accessories from the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair, Alfies Antique Market, Sean Berg, Philip Thomas and more. 'It is not an art collector's house, though,' the owner points out. 'We wanted it to be comfortable, decorative and elegant.'

The ground floor has been opened up to become one open-plan living space comprising kitchen, dining area, sitting area and library/television area, while cleverly preserving a cosiness to each space and a correct sense of proportion. Simple, flat mouldings, which continue the lines of the glazing bars, were applied to the walls to articulate them and to



OPPOSITE Floor-to-ceiling french windows were added to connect the main sitting area with the new terrace and garden. THIS PAGE The ground floor has been opened up to create an open-plan space (above right). The painting in the library area (right) was sourced from Guinevere Antiques, while the vintage coffee table is a copy of one in the main sitting area (opposite), bought at the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair in Battersea



pull the spaces together. These mouldings also relate to the positions of the shelves in the bookcase and the handles on the doors – ‘It is that element of detail that makes a room nice to be in,’ says Kate.

A new staircase leads down to the basement, which houses all the après-ski prerequisites – storage for ski kit, a gym designed by the owner’s friend Jon Roberts, co-owner of Matt Roberts personal training, and a hammam, a massage room and a cinema room. It also leads up to the main bedroom, a study and the spare room. For the former, Kate commissioned a special hand-embroidered fabric to line the wall behind the bed, picking up colours used elsewhere in the room. The spare room was ‘a bit of departure for the owner,’ says Kate; the moment she saw the room, the pretty Nicole Fabre print used for the curtains came to mind. It had been discontinued, but she had it



ABOVE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The chalet’s garden was redesigned by landscape architects Randle Siddeley Associates. Carefully placed cabinets enclose the kitchen area without disrupting the open-plan layout. A hatch with a sliding shutter between the kitchen and dining areas adds to this effect. OPPOSITE The lighting is by British designer Tom Dixon and provides a focal point to the room





reprinted and teamed it with a specialist-painted frieze and some extremely decorative wicker mirrors bought at the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair. The owner now thinks it's her favourite bedroom; it is indeed enchanting.

The architect and owner had already chosen the striking Arabascato marble for the bathrooms, but Kate, who loves the mathematical challenge of designing a bathroom, drew up the designs for each one, 'to get the detailing right'.

The attic is the children's domain, and every bit as thought through and sophisticated as the rest of the house, yet fun. There are two bedrooms; one is large, with four beds tucked into the eaves, each with a curtain and a built-in chest so that the children have their own space and can store personal things. The second bedroom is tiny, with one bed ingeniously built

in under another, in an L-shape configuration. The pine ceilings have been painted and Kate chose rustic yet smart Emery & Cie tiles for the large bathroom that links the two bedrooms.

There is also the 'baby chalet' in the garden, with two more double bedrooms, so the house can sleep 14 if needed. All in all, it is a deeply comfortable and practical house but with a distinct sense of glamour. The owner is full of praise for all involved, from the architect, 'who has ensured that we barely turn the heating on, it works like such a well-oiled machine', to the Burgundy-based joiners, M B A Menuiserie, 'who are true artisans', and, of course, Kate, 'who elevated everyone's game'. 'It was a really happy collaboration,' she enthuses □

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ABOVE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Chests of drawers were made as bedside tables to provide extra storage in the main bedroom. The marble used for the flooring and elsewhere in the bathroom is Arabascato. In the spare bedroom, cupboards have been covered in grasscloth. On the attic floor (remaining pictures), a large bathroom links the two, children's bedrooms. In one bedroom, an L-shape configuration makes the most of the space; in the other, curtains offer dormitory-style bunks privacy. OPPOSITE The spare bedroom has a painted frieze and a grouping of wicker mirrors, which were bought at the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair

