

A stylish MARRIAGE

Presented with a scheme last changed in 1947, interior designer Kate Earle combined two apparently divergent style preferences to harmonious effect in her family's Suffolk home

FEATURE CHRISTINE STOVELL PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL

A custom-printed de Gournay wallpaper, rescaled to take the pattern up to the picture rail, covers the walls in the dining room. The original carved-oak surround of the Delft-tiled chimney piece has been painted white for a lighter feel. An off-white, Sahco linen has been chosen for the curtains.



To the right of the staircase is a further sitting area lit by deep bay windows featuring armorial glass. A pair of wing chairs are upholstered in Groundwork by David Hicks and the curtain fabric is Zebra by Neisha Crossland.



LEFT Kate has opened up several small rooms to create a large kitchen and dining area, where a wall of part-glazed 1930s pantry cupboards is both practical and beautiful. The limed-oak table and chairs are by Philippe Hurel. RIGHT The imposing entrance of the late-nineteenth-century exterior.



Rising from a quintessentially English landscape, an imposing red brick and stone country house with tall chimneys, gables and cupolas stretches towards the wide East Anglian sky. This is now the much-loved country home of interior designer Kate Earle, her husband Tom Hill and children Orlando, 17 and Lily, 15, but Kate's first impressions were a little different. "When I first came, I couldn't picture myself living here," she says. "It just wasn't the sort of house, I imagined I'd live in."

Tom, a barrister and Queen's Counsel with a passion for architectural history, bought the house in 1996, six years before the couple's marriage. At its core is a modest Georgian house which was added to and

reconfigured in the late 1890s by the Hon Stanhope Tollemache in preparation for his own marriage. Frank Brown of Ipswich, a pupil of George Street – who designed the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand – carried out a major expansion of the earlier house and added a pair of circular twin towers to the front, which now bears a distinctively Victorian facade.

Inside, a lighter touch was applied to what is still, essentially, a late-Georgian interior. A white-painted staircase rises from the generous entrance hall which is described on the 1920s servants' bell board as the 'lounge hall' and was created to suit the prevailing taste of the time for a more open-plan reception space. Off this central hall, in what was originally the morning

ABOVE The handsome carved staircase and open-plan seating area off the entrance hall are just two of the changes made to the original late-Georgian property in the 1890s.



room, is Tom's study with its library and sitting area. Here, Kate has replaced a heavy late-nineteenth-century chimney piece with a more architecturally appropriate Regency-style fire surround in white and green marble. On the opposite side of the hall is the formal dining room, which leads through to a family room and Kate's office and sitting room. When it came to the kitchen, several small rooms were knocked through to create a large kitchen and dining area, but Kate retained the characterful 1950s cream Aga as well as a wall of beautifully made 1930s part-glazed pantry cupboards.

Kate and her business partner Emily Todhunter are the women behind Todhunter Earle, one of the UK's most successful interiors businesses. Often described as the creators of 'quiet glamour' and 'timeless modern comfort' they have been at the forefront of the international interior design industry for over 20 years. However, 'quiet glamour' was far ▶



ABOVE & LEFT The elegant Gillows bookcases in Tom's study were bought at Christie's. Cushions by Robert Kime add an extra dash of colour to a pleasing fusion of styles. The green and white marble fireplace is teamed with walls painted in Ball Green by Farrow & Ball. **RIGHT** The view from the dining room across the hall to Tom's study.





ABOVE Uplifting golden yellow paint has been used for the grand entrance hall with woodwork in a fresh white. Paintings and busts which once filled Tom's bachelor pad in London have found their natural place in the family's country home.

LEFT Despite not being overly enamoured of the house when she first saw it, Kate has grown to love it, transforming it into a light-suffused, inviting space with an organic, evolved look that befits its architecture.

from being the order of the day when Kate first stepped into the house and was faced with what she describes as "miles of peach-coloured gloss paint" and velvet curtains labelled 'Harvey Nichols 1947' firmly dating the period since the house received its last extensive refurbishment.

Guided by her own design intuition, memories of her grandparents' house and her husband's extensive collection of early nineteenth-century furniture, busts and pictures, Kate began what she light-heartedly refers to as "negotiating with Tom" on the redecoration. "His London bachelor pad was known as the 'Wallace Collection'," she says, with a smile, "but we agreed that all of those things would be perfect for the country and I would transform the London flat."

Whereas for clients it is usual for Kate to create an entire scheme to present them with, here she has taken a room-by-room approach. It has been a sensitive balancing act between the personal and professional and has contributed to the sense of an organic and evolving country house style. Kate says she decorates by "reading the room". "It's usually

obvious," she remarks. "Either a piece of furniture, a great carpet or a paint colour is the starting point and the rest just flows." In the dining room, for example, leading off the sunny yellow-and-white entrance hall, a customised de Gournay wallpaper sets the tone whilst also alluding to the history of the house. "The design is an eighteenth-century document called Askew, which I had scaled up and recoloured. I also had the base design reduced to suit the height of the room," Kate says.

Upstairs, where the principal bedrooms lead off the broad first-floor landing, the crisp freshness of Kate and Tom's bedroom, with the walls and curtains in leafy wallpaper and fabric, takes its cue from views across the garden. "Most of the furniture was bought at the Ickworth House sale in 1996," explains Kate. A sophisticated and comfortably elegant spare room, also with glorious views, is inspired by Nancy Lancaster's white room at Kelmarsh Hall. In another spare room, in what is known as the children's wing, Kate's use of a discontinued Cole & Son wallpaper, the large-pattern Madras Violet, was so successful the company brought it back into production. ▶

ABOVE In Kate and Tom's bedroom the four-poster bed is dressed with sumptuous silks from Todhunter Earle. The bamboo-pattern wallpaper, Victories from The Emily Todhunter Collection, connects with the garden view beyond.

RIGHT Guests are spoilt in this elegant bedroom where Tuileries wallpaper, also from The Emily Todhunter Collection, a painted French bed, a silk eiderdown, pillows and hangings create a calm, luxurious retreat.





‘This is very much a country house and a family home – I wanted to respect the architecture, the location and our lifestyle here’

Throughout the house, Kate has cleverly blended her husband’s fondness for classic and traditional English pieces with her own preference for mid-twentieth-century decorative elements in a happy and harmonious marriage of styles to create a home that is elegant, inviting and deeply personal. “Whilst my taste has become a lot more contemporary over the years, this is very much a country house and a family home,” Kate reflects. “I wanted to respect the architecture, the location and our lifestyle here.”

With both of their families close by, a beach hut at Felixstowe, sailing off the Shotley Peninsula and holidays on the beaches of Norfolk, it is easy to see why Kate and Tom relish precious weekends in the country. “We see our old friends and our children meet up with their children,” Kate explains. “We both love our work, and with a base in London, we truly have the best of both worlds.” ■



ABOVE Antique paisley eiderdowns, Melin Tregwynt checked blankets and a riot of flowers in the form of Madras Violets wallpaper by Cole & Son all contribute to the cosy, welcoming feel of this pretty guest bedroom.

LEFT Lined with Cole & Son’s Hummingbirds wallpaper and fittings from Sitting Pretty Bathrooms, Tom’s bathroom is a classic, stylish space.