

The entrance hall and staircase walls are painted in Oval Room Blue by Farrow & Ball. The French marble-topped hall table was bought from antiques dealer Hugh Leuchars. The Toile de Tours Murillo fabric used for the curtain is by Le Manach at Pierre Frey.

Gothic MASTERPIECE

An early-nineteenth-century rectory in Hampshire is given a bold redesign in keeping with its period but with all the comforts of modern living

FEATURE & STYLING CLAIRE WAYMAN PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MCDONALD



ABOVE The rug, from Parsua, was the starting point for the drawing room scheme. The ottoman was made to Victoria's design by David Seyfried using Dalton Stripe from Mulberry Home with a bullion fringe made to order from Claremont London. The abstract painting on the left is by Scottish painter William Johnstone and the one on the right is by Victor Pasmore.

Tucked away down a quiet lane in a sleepy hamlet in Hampshire, sits a Grade II listed rectory, completely hidden from view. However, upon approach, the property's impressive Gothic revival architecture, with its strong symmetry, arched windows and imposing entrance, demand attention. Built in 1828 on the site of a ramshackle parsonage, the house was designed by architect Henry Harrison – also responsible for several properties on the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair – under the watchful eye of Reverend T Douglas Hodgson, who had been appointed the rector of the parish a few years earlier. When the reverend died in 1884 the house fell into disrepair as the church struggled to maintain its upkeep. The onset of decay was so bad it is reputed that the actor Sir Alec Guinness fell through the rotten floorboards when the house was used as a location for the television dramatisation of John le Carré's book *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* in the 1970s. Fast forward to 2012 when interior designer Victoria Wormsley and her husband were looking

for a country house within easy reach of London. The rectory, surrounded by picturesque fields and graceful mature trees, instantly caught their attention. "I hadn't imagined I'd fall for a house with such strong Gothic architecture," explains Victoria. "I thought I'd prefer a more classically Georgian house but I was excited to discover that this house had a really pleasing layout, with a great flow and beautiful views of the countryside. Often the layouts in old, listed houses don't really work and you can't often get consent to change anything, so this was a real find." Fortunately, the previous owners had a carried out a major renovation 15 years beforehand, including fixing dry rot, rebuilding a single-storey wing and knocking down a wall to create the open-plan kitchen. "As the house was perfectly habitable we were able to live in it for a year before starting our renovation," Victoria says. "This meant I could think about how I wanted to use the space. Having that time definitely meant I came up with better solutions." When the time came for the builders to move in, she and her family moved out for 18 months. ▶



A dramatic shot taffeta called Carnival in Kiwi by 1970s designer Michael Szell from Christopher Farr was used for the dining room curtains. The deep amber wall colour is SC298 Walnut Tree by Papers and Paints. The French chandelier is from Ebury Trading.



LEFT Having considered using classic Carrara marble for the island worktop but knowing that it stains easily, Victoria opted for Silestone in Lyra which has blue-grey veining that echoes the grey paint on the island.

BELOW LEFT Gothic arches and hood mouldings above each window create a decorative facade. Victoria has created a pared-back, formal front garden, echoing the symmetry of the architecture.

BELOW The distressed convex mirror, originally from an Eastern European factory where it was used to prevent forklift collisions on corners, came from 17-21 Antiques. Victoria is seated at the oak dining table made to her design by a local cabinetmaker.



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Feeling that number of bedrooms was insufficient for the size of the house, Victoria decided that one of the more important jobs was to rework the single-storey wing and change it into a two-storey version. By doing so, she created a large family room on the ground floor and two extra bedrooms, each with an en-suite bathroom, above.

When designing the interiors, Victoria opted to use bold colours. “I chose the colours in response to the strong character of the Regency architecture, Gothic features and high ceilings,” she explains. The grand yet welcoming entrance hall sets the tone for the rest of the house with its dramatic Gothic cornicing and arch. “I felt this space needed a statement colour so I chose a chalky blue-grey

which I think has an affinity with the architecture,” says Victoria. “The colours that I’ve used are strong but not garish. To me, that’s the English country style. Early-Georgian interiors can be quite austere, but by the time they’d got to the Regency period, decoration had become a lot more flamboyant, so I felt like I needed to reference this. I wanted to create an English country house style with a contemporary approach that was sympathetic to the period architecture.”

Victoria’s first consideration was to look at the orientation of each room. The drawing room, for example, faces north-west and has a cool light, so she selected a warm cream colour for the walls. To prevent the decor from feeling too traditional she

ABOVE Victoria chose the New Classic kitchen cabinets with Quarter Round mouldings from Martin Moore and had a chimney made to create a focal point. She chose a soft blue-grey colour called Plumbago from Fired Earth for the kitchen island. The Oak Tree chandelier is by Cox London.



incorporated some mid-century art in her schemes. "I'm much more interested in collecting British modern than eighteenth or nineteenth-century art. It creates an interesting juxtaposition," she says.

A wonderful sense of coherence and continuity has been created throughout the house. For instance, the drawing room flows into the formal dining room, with earthy tones linking the two spaces. "I designed the schemes together but they weren't meant to match. These two adjacent rooms are linked by colour but still retain quite different personalities," she explains. "I instinctively designed the formal dining room to be quite stimulating and dramatic. You only tend to use a dining room when you're entertaining at night, so it's a great place to make a statement and create a sense of occasion. The chandelier adds to the glamorous feel, especially when the lights are dimmed. The drawing room feels much more relaxing and tranquil."

As the owner of interior design practice French-Brooks, Victoria has spent many years designing high-end homes for clients in London, but this is the first country house that she has redesigned. "I've always had a big interest in art, history, antiques and architecture, so this was an interesting personal project," she explains.

A few technological improvements have been made to the house in addition to those of a structural and decorating nature. For instance, atmospheric lighting using a Lutron system – which can be controlled remotely to change light settings rather than having several dimmer switches – and a Sonos sound system using speakers hidden inside cabinets, add to the ambience in this welcoming home.

New oak flooring with underfloor heating has also been installed, along with extra radiators. "Our plumber worked out that we had 30 per cent too few radiators. It was a cold winter when we first moved in – I used to get up in the morning and put thermals ►

ABOVE LEFT Now integrated into the main house, the boot room used to be a basic outbuilding with a pump to collect water in the days before running water.

ABOVE RIGHT Oval Edwardian mirrors from the Blanchard Collective reflect light around this guest bedroom – one of two on the new second-storey reworked wing. The headboard was made to Victoria's design using Stockholm Stitch in Greige from Lewis & Wood.



ABOVE As the master bedroom is north-facing, Victoria chose a delicately patterned wallpaper from the Veere Grenney Collection at Tissus d'Hélène in a warm salmon colour, Temple in Pink, to make the room feel cosier. The painting above the bed is by English artist Ivon Hitchens.

RIGHT The walls in this bedroom are painted in Chalky Downs by Dulux Trade. Victoria had the headboards made to her design using Hornbuckle in Red Earth, a herringbone wool fabric from de Le Cuona.

on under my jeans. I could never work out why the house was so cold until the plumber did the calculations,” Victoria says. The high ceilings and huge windows mean it takes a lot to heat the house, so having thick interlined curtains makes a big difference. Victoria is a big fan of beautiful English-made curtains – the low-tech solution to blocking out draughts. “I think well-made curtains are one of the best aspects about country houses. England has got a really strong tradition of making fabulous curtains.”

When designing the open-plan kitchen and dining area, Victoria wanted to balance practicality with the grand nature of the room so she came up with a “grand rustic” style. “I wanted to find pieces that have an aged, rustic feel, but with the right proportions for the space. The large-scale naturalistic oak-leaf chandelier suits both the country setting and the grand proportions of the room.

A keen gardener, Victoria relishes her time at her country home. “As soon as I arrive from London I immediately go and see what’s happened in the garden or head to the kitchen, make a cup of tea and look out at the view. I’m so much more aware of the seasons when I’m here,” she says. ■

