



An inherited Persian rug suggested the scheme for the drawing room. The George Sherlock armchairs are covered in Fermoie Plain Linen and the cushions are in Teepee by Parker & Jules. Paint & Paper Library's Steel III paint provides a subtle backdrop for artwork by Emma Haggas over the fireplace and Kate Corbett-Winder above the sofa, both represented by Eastwood Fine Art.

# *Planned* PERFECTION

It was love at second glance for Natasha and Rory Pope when they spotted a problematic property with the potential to be transformed into their ideal family home

FEATURE CHRISTINE STOVELL  
PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MCDONALD





**ABOVE LEFT** The hall console table is one of several inherited pieces Natasha and Rory incorporated into the scheme. Mouse's Back paint by Farrow & Ball was used for the walls. The antique French gilt-wood mirror was sourced from Rough Old Glass.

**ABOVE RIGHT** Natasha had the bespoke kitchen cabinetry made by a local carpenter and joiner. She chose Schumacher fabric from Turnell & Gigon for the Roman blinds.

Searching for the perfect house, where family traditions can be forged and memories created, is an emotional time. Often in the quest to find 'the one', a promising property is rejected in a 'heart over head' decision, but when Natasha Pope and her husband Rory were looking for a home for their family, one less-than-perfect house kept drawing them back.

"We used a search agent as we were living in London with our four young children and knew we didn't have the time to go on random house hunting expeditions," Natasha explains. "We did the typical 'draw a commutable circle around London and look within it', but we also wanted to be closer to our family connections in Hampshire and Dorset."

After six months of searching, the couple had one serious contender, a property about which they had initially been unsure. "It looked impressive from the outside, but the biggest problem was the configuration of the house," says Natasha. "It was essentially a small eighteenth-century farmhouse with Victorian and Edwardian extensions which



had been built on to the sides. There were lots of long dark corridors, a tiny front hall and an apparent disregard for the relationship between the rooms. However, it had a charming quirkiness and we loved the garden, woods and fields, and the range of outbuildings. It needed a lot of work, but we were hooked. Suddenly the thought of making the house 'work' was part of its appeal."

Although many prospective buyers would have been put off by the sheer scale of the renovation, Natasha and Rory had already demonstrated their ability to adapt to the challenge of sweeping changes. A few years previously, the couple had relocated to Tokyo with their children – then aged eight, six, four and two – due to Rory's work. Natasha had been working as a corporate lawyer until then, but retrained and is now a successful yoga teacher.

"We'd moved back from Tokyo only 18 months earlier, and we'd also just completed a big job on our London house, so, although I was keen on a project, a period of less challenge would have been nice," Natasha says cheerfully. "There was a good argument ►



Hague Blue paint by Farrow & Ball was chosen for the breakfast bar for a cohesive flow throughout the ground floor. The brass pendant lights are from Jim Lawrence and the bar stools are from Olive & The Fox.





ABOVE Graphite paint by Fired Earth was chosen for the dining room. The bespoke dining table is by French-Brooks interiors. Floral arrangements are by Longworthy Flowers. RIGHT Originally a small eighteenth-century farmhouse, the property was extended in Victorian and Edwardian times. FAR RIGHT Framed shell prints from Lorfords Antiques hang above an antique wing chair in Joseph velvet by Lewis & Wood.

for knocking down the existing property, but we were determined to retain as much of the old house as possible. We moved in, in August 2012, to acres of red carpet and dated fittings, but waited to begin work until we knew how we would use the space and what we wanted to achieve from it. We considered the aspect and the light through the changing seasons and reversed decisions we'd initially seemed set on."

Work on the main house began properly in January 2014 in a process Natasha describes as "like getting an apple corer and scooping out the middle". A larger staircase was built and spaces opened up to create more light and better flow. However, with building work proceeding at a pace, interior design decisions were coming thick and fast.

"Rory and I were almost at the stage of painting everything white for speed when I casually asked interior designer Victoria Wormsley, founder of French-Brooks Interiors, about sourcing some grasscloth wallpaper. Our eldest daughters attended the same school and are good friends," Natasha explains. "Once Victoria and I got talking, I realised she was exactly the expert eye I needed. I visited Victoria's own country house and saw the amazing

interiors that she had created and knew she would be the perfect interior designer for us."

With 15 years' experience designing interiors across a range of idioms, Victoria's considered approach and collaborative style meant she was perfectly placed to help Natasha manage the large scale of the project and to make effective design decisions quickly. The brief was organic, evolving and flowing over three years. Natasha and Rory's desire was create a comfortable family home with their inherited antiques, pieces brought back from their time Japan, and bold fabrics and colours. This chimed with Victoria's passion for creating interiors that reflect their owners' personalities and tell their stories.

"A professional designer can bring experience to bear by weaving those disparate elements together within the context of the house," says Victoria. "It's about filtering objects so that they still have meaning for the family whilst maintaining a coherent flow throughout. Here, adjacent rooms are linked by colour, but the chinoiserie and quirky pieces give each a distinct identity." Another important role for Victoria is keeping her clients focused on what they have set out to achieve, especially at the end of a long, ►



Curtains in Bohemian Paisley fabric from Mulberry Home, a vintage Berber rug from Maroc Tribal and a sunburst mirror from Lorfords Antiques create an intimate and enveloping feel in the north-facing snug.







Natasha and Rory bought the gilded Japanese screen above their bed when they lived in Tokyo. The grasscloth wall covering is by Phillip Jeffries. The beautiful silk rug by Neisha Crosland for The Rug Company and a bespoke throw made in Heritage Paisley fabric by de Le Cuona are balanced with dark bedside cabinets and lamps by Julian Chichester. The throw and bedside tables are by French-Brooks Interiors.



*‘We love the flow of the house and how it works as a space for our family and guests’*

challenging project when energy levels are flagging. “You have to persevere with the number of decisions and keep going,” she says. “I often say that it’s the last 25 per cent that makes 50 per cent of the difference. It’s what turns something that is simply okay into something exceptional.”

Natasha and Rory’s willingness to see beyond the drawbacks of a property they might easily have rejected, coupled with Victoria’s expertise in drawing things together to create a coherent whole, has resulted in an elegant, settled and much-loved family home. “In the worst moments of a renovation, it’s tempting to cut back or take easier decisions, but I’m so glad we held on to what we wanted,” Natasha says. “We love the flow of the house and how it works as a space for our family and guests. It’s comfortable and relaxed, but also smart and grown up. The house has been completely transformed and we couldn’t be happier with it.” ■

ABOVE Floral gilt wallpaper from Ralph Lauren makes a bold statement in this bedroom. Fern prints from Etalage, cushion fabric by Rubelli and bedside lamps from Pooky add dashes of leafy green.

RIGHT The Jasper Peony wallpaper in Metallic Pure Gold by Lewis & Wood, chosen for Natasha and Rory’s bathroom, is a reminder of when they lived in Japan and forms part of a theme flowing through the house.

