

Designed by Surtees Furniture, in collaboration with interior designer Laura Passey, the bespoke kitchen is painted in Lichen by Farrow & Ball. The Buscot limestone flooring is from Artisans of Devizes, whilst the glass Tim pendants are from Hector Finch. The stylish bar stools from Ateliers London have seats covered in Jane Churchill's Sherborne fabric.

Coming HOME

Feeling an instant connection with a tired Victorian country house in Surrey, Tracy Verrier knew she had made the right choice to return home

FEATURE CLAIR WAYMAN PHOTOGRAPHY ASTRID TEMPLER



ABOVE A Lattice globe light from Jamb hangs above the bespoke table by Titchmarsh & Goodwin which also features a lattice motif around the edge. The George Smith Fairhill sofa, covered in the dramatic Roi Soleil blue brocade from Rubelli, accentuates the richness of the original Victorian oak panelling and parquet flooring.

Having spent almost 20 years living happily in America, English couple Tracy and James Verrier started to yearn for their homeland. “We were living in Michigan, and the original plan was to retire to South Carolina, but the more we came back to the UK for visits, the more we started to appreciate being home again,” says Tracy.

So, in August 2016, Tracy and James flew over for an initial whistle-stop tour of potential properties. On the second day of the search, an estate agent told them about an impressive Victorian residence about to go on the market in the heart of the Surrey countryside. “We fell in love as soon as we saw it, with its strong symmetry and imposing facade,” Tracy explains. “We honestly weren’t expecting it

all to happen so quickly, but we didn’t want to let it go, so we put in an offer.”

Built in 1898, the house was full of character but very dated, so Tracy enlisted the help of interior designer Laura Passey to breathe new life into it. “It felt like the house was a person that needed to be taken care of,” Laura says. “The fact that we were redesigning the whole house just added to the specialness of this project. I’ve got a musical background so I tend to think of the comparisons between design and music, with different elements weaving together. As the property is quite grand, I felt I could do something on a symphonic scale, introducing various themes and considering how they would play off each other throughout the house.” ▶



The Ropley chandeliers by Vaughan were the starting point for the scheme in the dining room, which includes hand-painted and embroidered *Paradiso* wallcovering by Fromental. The bespoke walnut dining table, designed by Surtees Furniture, in collaboration with Laura Passey, has been finished to match the Klint dining chairs by Julian Chichester, which are covered in Pelham velvet by Fox Linton.

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LEFT A magnificent magnolia tree festoons the front of the house. When designing the interiors Laura took inspiration from the plants and flowers found in the three-acre garden.

RIGHT The burr walnut cabinet was made by Titchmarsh & Goodwin and offers a place to display favourite china and glassware.





‘I like to pull all the senses into the design process – the poetry of words, visuals, music, memories and historical references’

ABOVE This side of the double drawing room features George Smith sofas, covered in Radiance Parsnip by Jason D’Souza and a George Smith ottoman covered in Lewis & Wood’s Stockholm Stitch. A Chrysanthemum table lamp by Richard Taylor Designs sits on a nest of Salvatore side tables from Porta Romana.

In a previous era, the house had servants’ quarters, back stairs and servants’ bells, which Laura used as a springboard for her design inspiration. “I had television programmes like *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* in mind, contrasting a pared-back, earthy ‘Victorian housekeeper’ theme with a lavish, noble style which I called ‘painter’s garden,’” she explains.

Laura was guided by the style of the house and the couple’s taste. “I like to pull all the senses into the design process – the poetry of words, visuals, music, memories and historical references,” she explains. “Tracy wanted something really fabulous and beautiful. She was quite brave and bold about it all.” They all decided on a smart-casual country look that would feel relaxed and gentle. “I knew I wanted to embrace

a warm, cosy look that was also smart, but not twee or stuffy,” says Tracy.

The builders started work in September 2017, and throughout much of the renovation Tracy was still living in America, making trips to inspect the progress. Laura collaborated with and guided Tracy along the way, taking her to showrooms and furniture workshops. “I loved being involved in the whole process, from choosing furniture to fabrics, even down to the tiebacks and trimmings,” says Tracy. “Working with Laura was fun. We bounced ideas off each other, and if either of us didn’t like something, we weren’t shy to speak up.”

One of Tracy’s requests was for a pink drawing room, so Laura chose a delicate, warm pastel scheme

with elegant floral touches to tie in with her ‘painter’s garden’ theme. “As this is a very pink room and quite a strong statement already, I let the colour do the talking by keeping the styling relatively simple, so the space can breathe,” says Laura. The dining room also received an opulent redesign, with a mix of luxurious bespoke, hand-painted chinoiserie wallpaper, blue velvet dining chairs and decadent chandeliers.

Meanwhile, upstairs was completely reconfigured and a sumptuous master suite created in a restrained palette of warm, champagne neutrals. Tracy also gained a dedicated sewing room by knocking through two tiny bedrooms which would have been servants’ quarters in times gone by. Working with a trusted team meant that Laura could reassure Tracy when she had moments of uncertainty. “At times it was distressing to see the house being pulled apart,” says Tracy, “but I knew it had to be done, because everything needed updating.”

Feeling very protective of the house, Tracy was keen to preserve as much of its character as possible. “We ▶

ABOVE & RIGHT Two Kingcome sofas in Lelièvre’s Paros fabric, topped with cushions in Evesham linen by Colefax and Fowler continue the understated elegance on this side of the double drawing room. Cabana Weave wallpaper from Phillip Jeffries adds subtle texture. The Figeac chandelier and customised Brockton coffee table are both by Vaughan, and the Louis Philippe mirror with laurel leaf moulding is from Overmantels.





'Everything I love has been brought together under one roof and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else'

ABOVE The pared-back look in this bathroom ties in with the 'woodland walk' and 'Victorian housekeeper' theme. The marble-topped vanity by Surtees Furniture is painted in The Botanist by Paint & Paper Library. The weathered-brass bath from Catchpole & Rye plays on the utilitarian feel, along with The Water Monopoly aged-brass Rockwell mirrors and Original BTC York wall lights.

had the original oak panelling and the bannisters in the hall French polished, but I didn't want the imperfections taken out," she explains. "I wanted to retain as much of the quirkiness of the building as I could and wouldn't let the builders straighten everything up, which is why the upstairs landing still slopes. She's crooked and that's fine. She's over 100 years old."

When it came to the decoration of the central hall, Laura let the Victorian oak panelling lead her. "This space feels quite grand, as well as cocooning and warm, so I played to that by choosing opulent gold furniture and a dramatic, rich blue brocade for the sofa," she says," she says. "Then the lighter, brighter rooms spill out from either side, with the vibrant blue chairs in the dining room echoing the blue in the hall."

The biggest transformation in the house has been the kitchen. This was previously a series of smaller rooms, including a cramped galley kitchen, which, once these were opened up, became a vast, light-filled space with views onto the garden and

the magnificent Californian Redwood tree. With a focus on practicality, the smart but relatively restrained kitchen design was inspired by Laura's 'Victorian housekeeper' theme and overlaps with her 'woodland walk' theme. A peaceful, muted green was chosen for the cabinets and Laura encouraged Tracy to have all the window frames and doors painted in the same green to create a cocooning effect. "That scared me a bit," says Tracy, "but as soon as it was done, I knew it was a brilliant idea because it links so beautifully with the garden [see page 6]."

Tracy and James moved into their beautifully updated, much-loved home in the summer of 2018 and now revel in every aspect of it. "It's hard to pick one room that's my favourite," Tracy says. "I love it all. Sometimes I walk into the drawing room in the evening, with the candles lit, and I just feel a sense of complete contentment. Everything I love has been brought together under one roof and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Our family walk in and they can see it's our house - it's us. I'm very proud of it all." ■



ABOVE The oak Sooma dressing table from William Yeoward is teamed with a round button stool from Porta Romana covered in Lewis & Wood's Rooksmoor velvet in Sea Holly.

ABOVE Fromental hand-painted chinoiserie wall panels create a luxurious feel in the master bedroom. The bed from Savoir Beds is covered in Basmati Jasmine on the headboard, with a silk velvet on the bed base, both from Holly Hunt. The Murano glass table lamps from Bella

Figura sit on bedside tables by Surtees Furniture. **BELOW** Seraphina wallpaper by Colefax and Fowler takes centre stage in this pretty guest bedroom. Laura Passey designed the bed which features Lucia Claro linen by Elitis from Abbott & Boyd. Sybil table lamps from

Porta Romana sit on Ebury side tables from The Odd Chair Company. The bespoke ottoman is covered in Monceau Ivoire from Manuel Canovas. The round mirror above the fireplace is from Overmantels. To see more of Laura's interior design work visit laurapassey.com

