



A labour of love

A decade-long restoration project returned this Ernest Newton designed, grade II listed, Arts and Crafts home near Hartley Wintney to near original condition. Interior designer Renée Killian-Dawson casts an approving eye. Photographs by Robert Killian-Dawson

What do I like about Arts and Crafts design? What appeals particularly about Ernest Newton's Fouracres in Hampshire? These are questions that occupied my thoughts as I drove down the long, tree-lined lane flanked by field and paddock.

The main approach to the house affords an opportunity to survey what is in store from the south front. Clearly visible through the mature trees are the projecting gables, a mix of sash and leaded casement windows, modest, half-glazed, simple, cottage-style off-centre door and diapered brickwork beneath fluted chimneystacks.

Many of the hallmarks of what came to be known as the Arts and Crafts movement are seen at this lovely, elegant house. Lorraine and Peter Bryant have clearly honoured the place and its past. Fouracres looks as though it has been immaculately maintained since it was built in 1901. The last decade of endless hard work and discovery belies the easy grandeur that is on show.

"When I first saw Fouracres, there was something about the place that drew me in," said Lorraine. "I know through my research that Newton was greatly respected and well liked, perhaps some of that energy is imbued in the house."

One senses she has drawn heavily upon the precise skills required as a paper conservator for clients such as Messums. Honouring Newton's designs was at the heart of every decision, a job made clearer by utilising original drawings and sketches obtained from the Hampshire County Records Office at Winchester, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and other sources.

The house had been largely untouched for half-a-century. It was swathed in acres of



Above: Subtle marks of distinction at Fouracres; Left: Lorraine and Peter Bryant at home



linoleum, hand-hewn beams were boxed in, the central hall fireplace was boarded over and much of its interior brickwork had to be repaired. Badly damaged floorboards in the drawing room were replaced by extras found in the attics.

Initially, a pair of master craftsmen that Lorraine's mother had used while restoring a series of period houses in her native Hertfordshire virtually moved in. "They literally lived on site so we could move into the master suite and have at least one comfortable set of rooms while we completed the rest of the house room by room as time and budget allowed," she said.

Since an addition built in 1914, according to Newton's plans, nothing had really changed apart from a 1980s staff kitchen that occupied part of the service wing. In the 1890s plan, it had been a boiler room and lavatory. With the

help of conservation architect Alina Wisnicka, it was opened up to the garden with concertina folding glazed doors. Having her studio next door, this has become a wonderful study and garden room for Lorraine, with views of the double borders and raised beds that are graced with lilies, angelica and sweet peas.

"I wanted an unfitted kitchen, but, in the end, chose Martin Moore," said Lorraine. "When we first set up home, I'd gaze in the window of his showroom with longing at the beautiful kitchens, which we couldn't afford. It's a real treat 25 years later to finally have the 'dream kitchen'.

"We thought of knocking through from the kitchen to create one large room, but were loathe to remove the original dressers. We had new oak tops made, restored and repainted both with original glass and even the keys in place."

In the breakfast room, the glass on the dresser reflects light from the garden. The corner

fireplace creates a cosy focal point, and a pine-topped oak table gives the room a country air. Replacing the window with a pair of french windows brings all seasons and soft light into the cheerful room.

After removing hundreds of tons of rubble from the forecourt and elsewhere, Lorraine re-instated the original wellhead and created a lovely cottage garden. The bothy, graced with a brick and stone fireplace, its clay roof tiles still intact, is a rambling timber L-shaped building. The original loose boxes house her two beloved horses, Baron and Luke. Lorraine kept a kitchen garden for years, but eventually the work of maintaining the large grounds, including a formal rose garden, with just a

Clockwise from top left: The modern kitchen; The distinctive Arts and Crafts hall; Comfort to the fore in the drawing room; The cosy sitting room



“The house was largely untouched for half-a-century. It was swathed in acres of linoleum and hand-hewn beams were boxed in”

half-day of help each week, meant putting vegetables aside. They enjoy the abundant produce of West Green Fruits, a field away.

Anyone who has had the care of a large family home knows the enormous amount of energy it takes to restore and maintain. What really struck me was the artful simplicity of Lorraine’s interiors. She has resisted the temptation to stuff the house full of period furniture and has, instead, allowed its simple craftsman bones to shine, accentuated by clean, fresh colours.

As an example, the hall is simply furnished with the restored hearth, a central table with an abundant, early summer arrangement, a loveseat and period lighting from Hector Finch, polished floorboards, and the arched screen with leaded lights separating the reception hall from the entrance.

The drawing room welcomes with its modest proportions, polished floorboards, squashy chenille sofas centred on the hearth and, my favourite piece, a red leather upholstered gentlemen’s chair perched in the corner, from Liberty’s. Next door is the sitting room, which has another original, carved stone chimneypiece and a palette of olive green that Lorraine feels, “is dark and embraces the position of the room rather than brightening it

artificially.” The result is a contemporary lived-in feel with its interlined curtains, enveloping sofa and bookshelves.

Apart from the first floor hall, which has a subtle William Morris wallpaper, the entire house has been painted traditionally by brush using Farrow & Ball paints, which Lorraine believes has no equal. Also on the first floor are several calm and restful guest bedrooms, dotted with Arts and Crafts furniture, fabrics from Renaissance Interiors in Hartley Wintney and a few pretty pieces from Lorraine’s mother. “My mother loves to trawl junk shops, but occasionally she comes back with something really wonderful,” Lorraine added.

In the main guest bathroom there is a small, painted, 19th century hanging cupboard, an ideal foil against the warm green panelling below the dado. Lorraine personally measured, spaced and drew out this panelling to fit into the awkward dimensions of the bathroom. The joiners used her drawings to produce the stylish and appropriate finish. Throughout one is aware of the thoughtful attention to detail; thick wood doors on new cupboards in the dressing rooms and bedrooms - joinery reflecting the original style and standard of craftsmanship.

Alternatively, almost all the hardware in brass, iron and copper, even escutcheons on doors, is original. It was all taken away, cleaned and refitted. Anything needing replacing was re-made as the original.

Without a doubt, Fouracres has been a labour of love for Lorraine, and for Peter, too. An image that particularly stands out is of a small linen cupboard outside the master bath that has two hearts pierced through its creamy white painted door. An unknown joiner left his mark here in 1901, just as Fouracres has left its mark on the Bryants.

Top left: The bedrooms and; Top right: Bathroom have an Arts and Crafts period ambience

FOURACRE HOUSE SUPPLIERS

- Doors for the breakfast room and the new oak worktops on the restored original dressers were designed by **Designer Woodwork** in Alton (www.designerwoodwork.co.uk).
- The building work alterations to the kitchen and terrace were undertaken with great care by **Adam Krefft Construction Ltd.** tel: 07791-001475.
- Plants and seeds were sourced from a local nursery at Hound Green (white.waternursery.co.uk)
- Curtains and soft furnishings were supplied by Henrietta Spencer Churchill’s ‘**Woodstock Designs**’ in Bleinheim for the main reception rooms and master suite, **Renaissance Interiors** in Hartley Wintney for the guest bedrooms and **Su Chases** in Amersham for the kitchen, breakfast room and studies.
- Hartley Wintney High Street was an important source for antique furniture and paintings, as well as items for the home, and beautiful real and artificial flower arrangements came from **Yaya and Co** and **Moutin**.
- The Bryants, with the help of the designer **Robin Williams**, also created the formal area of box balls and woodland planting under the trees, and a beautiful cottage garden in front of the original gardener’s bothy, which still has so many charming original features and is just about unchanged since 1901.

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