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COOL CALM & collected

A mix of contemporary and antique pieces is the key to an elegant family home in the Thames Valley

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OPPOSITE A simple, stunning arrangement of lilac blossom and eye-catching accessories make a stylish statement in the sitting room **THIS PAGE** A glazed cupboard beside the

fireplace in the dining room holds an eclectic display of antique china, beautiful shells, delicate coral and other natural finds, which add to the air of appealing rustic elegance





THIS PAGE, LEFT A striking metal clock by Weathereye, antiqued-mirror splashback and blind in a bold geometric pattern by GP & J Baker introduce distinctive decorative touches to a classic, white-painted Harvey Jones kitchen **BELOW** Cushions in shades of grey and blue echo the colours of a moody seascape on the wall in the sitting room **OPPOSITE** A set of antique framed botanist papers hang above a wrought-iron console table in the dining room, which was skilfully repurposed from an antique French balcony by Tyson London



When you've experienced the delights of a rural upbringing but find yourself living in the city, it's usually only a matter of time before the call of the countryside proves too great to resist. For Fiona Parke and her husband Patrick, the tipping point came a few months after the birth of their daughter Chloë. "I wanted her first steps to be on a patch of grass rather than an urban concrete patio," Fiona recalls. "We craved green fields and open spaces – we'd lived in London for 12 years and it was time for a change."

However, with both their jobs based in the city, they needed to find a place within commuting distance with good transport links. They settled on the area around Reading in Berkshire with its fast train service into Paddington, and when they came across a handsome Georgian property, complete with walled garden, just 20 minutes from the station, it fitted the bill perfectly. The most distinguished of a cluster of old properties on the edge of a village by the Thames near Pangbourne, the listed house had been built on the ruins of a 13th-century Benedictine abbey by a merchant in 1750 and split into two separate residences in the 1950s.

When the couple bought it in October 2008, the plan was to rent it out for a time while they transitioned into their new rural life, so they

prioritised the rooms most in need of renovation to get it ready for tenants. Fortunately, working as an interior designer at Todhunter Earle Interiors for several years had given Fiona the necessary skills to transform the rather tired property. Floorboards were stripped, then lightened with lye and treated with white oil for a pale Scandinavian look, complemented with a palette of muted off-whites by Farrow & Ball throughout to accentuate the wonderful light in the house.

Three months of renovations later, with prospective tenants lined up, Fiona realised she wasn't keen to relinquish her new house to strangers – she wanted to live there herself! So they rented out their London flat instead and made their move to the country when Chloë was 16 months old. But, having decided to make it their home, various other elements then needed to be sorted out in order to get it just the way they wanted.

Arranged over three floors, it has an unusual layout, with the lower ground floor half underground as it is built into a slope. Damp was an issue, so they tanked the walls to keep moisture from seeping through, then created a shower room, study, wine cellar and guest bedroom on this level. Although the kitchen had been freshened up, and its Eighties stencilling covered with a coat of paint in the initial refurbishment, it was 30 years old and showing its age: the family lived with it for a

“I love the
idea of a
curated
history of
my life via
objects”




“I mix
new
pieces
with
antique
finds as
I don’t
want the
house to
look like
a show
home
– or a
museum”





couple of years until, after selling their London flat, they could afford to replace it with an elegant white-painted design by Harvey Jones.

By the same token, they were able at last to remove the Jacuzzi in the main bathroom on the top floor, where a free-standing bath from William Holland – an extravagance beyond reach until Fiona found one on ebay – now stands in its place. Although she favours a clean, unfussy look, she is by no means a minimalist. “I like good design and would describe my style as modern classic,” she says. Calm greys and whites create a cool, calm scheme throughout, with fascinating antique finds and elegant rustic pieces, such as the painted Gustavian-influenced chairs in the dining room, balancing more contemporary elements.

“You have to consider the age of the house and be respectful of its character when designing,” Fiona explains, “while making the space work for your needs.” In creating a stylish yet relaxed, comfortable home for her family, she has fulfilled her own brief perfectly. 

 Visit johnstonparkeinteriors.com or call 07801 521000.

OPPOSITE The calming grey of Paint & Paper Library’s Lead III picks up on the cool hues of a favourite painting, found years ago in an antiques shop, and the Calacatta marble worktop in the kitchen **THIS PAGE**. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Fiona loves the flickering light of tea lights and candles – in the dining room, silvered-glass votives are grouped together on a bevelled piece of mirror to enhance the effect; empty vintage gilt frames make a

stylish statement above a metal demi-lune table on which a few carefully curated finds are displayed; in the main bedroom, walls in Sanderson’s New Silver are the perfect foil for a bespoke upholstered headboard by The Chairman & Son in London and a mix of velvet cushions in rich blue and dusky pink; the warm natural tones of the wooden doors and original panelling on the ceiling of the hallway add depth and texture to the pale decorating scheme