

The sitting room is a restful, elegant space, with curtains in a Zoffany fabric and a pair of Haresfield sofas by Sofas & Stuff. The landscape painting is by Paul Brown. The coffee table was bought at The Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair.

# Balanced APPROACH

Louise Carlisle drew together influences from near and far when redesigning her handsome home surrounded by Sussex countryside

FEATURE JO LEEVERS PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH



**LEFT** A view into the kitchen from the dining room, conveniently located next door. The kitchen island has capacious drawers, perfect for storing kitchen linens and utensils.

**BELOW LEFT** The handsome property has a Georgian core with Victorian additions. The gardens have been redesigned to make the most of the house's setting and grandeur.



Louise Carlisle has always appreciated the intrinsically English character of her family's home, which is tucked away in a quiet corner of the Sussex countryside. The house dates from the Georgian era but was added to in Victorian times and when it came to redesigning all its rooms, she was careful to honour its heritage.

However, when it came to creating the newest addition to the house and grounds – a pool with a pool house – it was an opportunity for Louise to look further afield for inspiration. “As a family, we’ve always loved holidays in the Hamptons,” she says. “I wanted to recall the relaxed feel of those interiors but within an English setting, surrounded by our long lawns and open fields.” With crisp whites, clean blues and natural textures, her pool house design elegantly combines the best of English and East Coast styles.

This most recent project reflects Louise's overarching approach to the redesign of this house. An interior designer by trade, her schemes are rooted in a

building's architecture, with the addition of her own subtle twists, drawing on a variety of influences. “As I was decorating this home, I became aware that it would be all too easy to slip into a solely traditional look,” she says. “Naturally, I wanted to follow the history of the house, but I didn't want it to end up feeling like a museum. So, alongside respecting the architecture, I decided to add some more innovative focal points.”

An example of this includes Louise indulging her love of bright colours in the recently redesigned guest suite on the top floor of the house. Here, the walls and a sofa zing with the zesty greens of Christopher Farr's bold Carnival pattern, gently toned down by softer plaids and vintage pieces. “Some guest bedrooms can look a little dull and safe,” she says. “But I saw this suite as an opportunity to design with a freer hand than in the rooms we use every day. I think it's a nice change for guests to stay in a space that feels uplifting.” ▶

**ABOVE** The kitchen is by Plain English, with units painted in Lead 117 by Little Greene, a refined shade of grey that suits the setting. The glass pendants are from Tinsmiths.

**LEFT** A seating area in the kitchen adds a dash of warm colour with its soft leather upholstery.



In the dining room, the evocative Kew Gardens wallpaper – a digitally remastered version by Georgia Horton of a 1920s Sanderson block print – negates the need for any other art on the walls. Louise had four original French dining chairs copied to create additional chairs for the dining table.



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On the lower floors, Louise has worked a similar alchemy, sprinkling the spaces with modern accents and subtle flashes of colour. “This house has a very traditional base and doesn’t shout ‘colour’, but each space actually includes some quite strong shades,” she explains. “For example, there are touches of orange and pink in the study, and yellow and green in the sitting room.”

Fabrics have been a key part of this redesign and are used to introduce pattern and colour, or to echo a shade used elsewhere in a room. They also add depth and texture. Louise’s favourite fabric houses include Tissus d’Hélène, Romo, Turnell & Gigon, GP & J Baker and Madeline Weinrib. But regardless of their provenance, Louise is always in favour of using fabrics generously, particularly in bedrooms. “I adore the way that American designers are never

parsimonious and the way they give their interiors a luxurious, expensive feel,” she says. “Curtains always have deep folds and beds are layered with plump cushions. This fosters an air of comfort and relaxation in a bedroom.”

It took six years for Louise to infuse this house with fresh character and upgrade the spaces. The entire lower ground floor was renovated, electrics and plumbing were replaced and seven fireplaces were reinstated throughout the house. One of the seven bedrooms was sacrificed to create a large dressing room with a bath. Outside, Louise oversaw a redesign of the gardens and the construction of a coach house, which provided a further guest suite and an office where Louise runs her design business, Oyster Interiors. “When we bought this house, it was set in a field with no drive and the ▶

**ABOVE LEFT**  
The boldly striped ottoman in the study is by Oyster Interiors and the curtains are in a Turnell & Gigon fabric. A fabric from Tissus d’Hélène covers the lampshade.

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
The house’s central landing makes a fine spot for the family’s vizsla, Marlowe, to keep a restful eye on proceedings.



only outbuilding was a dreary 1970s-style garage," Louise remembers. "Now the exterior and gardens reflect the architecture of the house."

One of Louise's most impressive schemes is the dining room, which is papered in a replica of an original 1920s block-printed pattern by Sanderson depicting Kew Gardens. This pattern is part of a set of vintage wallpapers that were rediscovered by the wallpaper designer Georgia Horton. "It's so beautiful it functions as a work of art – I'd never dream of hanging anything else on the walls," Louise says.

Two years ago, a domestic disaster struck when the large chandelier and the ceiling rose in the dining room crashed onto the table, scattering plaster and debris. "Luckily we were not at home, but the damage was pretty spectacular," says Louise. As the chandelier needed to be re-hung from a joist, the ceiling had to be reconstructed and replastered. This meant the precious Sanderson wallpaper – which had survived unscathed – had to be protected. "A wooden frame was constructed inside the room and the plasterers ▶

**ABOVE** In the serene master bedroom, Louise designed the canopy and the velvet headboard, adding a carved pelmet as an innovative focal point. The densely folded curtains are in a fabric from Mark Alexander and the chairs are from William Yeoward.

**LEFT** Louise used a Christopher Farr wallpaper in the guest suite, inspired by Kit Kemp's colourful redesign of the Haymarket Hotel in London.

In the family bathroom, antiques feature prominently and include an antique sofa from The Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair. The mirror and sconces are from Maison Artefact. The walls are painted in Canvas by Fired Earth.



*‘Now the exterior and gardens reflect the architecture of the house’*

**ABOVE** A generous swimming pool by Guncast and the pool house are handsome additions to this family home.

**RIGHT, ABOVE & BELOW**

Louise relaxing on the comfortable seating beside the pool with Marlowe, the family’s vizsla. The outdoor furniture is by Westminster Outdoor Living.

Louise has created a base for her interior design business in the coach house. The fabric lampshades are from Pooky and the wing chair is from Martin D Johnson.

worked inside it, ensuring no damage was done to the wallpaper,” says Louise.

Today, the dining room is back to its former glory and remains Louise’s favourite room. “The overall impression is one of calm, yet even in here there are touches of colour,” she points out. “There are softer blues in a Swedish antique clock and hand-blown glassware, whilst bottle-green velvet upholstery adds a splash of vibrant colour.” As Louise says, it is colour that does not shout but subtly lifts a scheme. Whether she is balancing colours in a dining room or creating a new pool house from scratch, it is this skilful drawing together of different eras and styles that characterises Louise’s approach.

Due to the nature of her job, Louise confesses that her home will never feel completely finished. “I’m not one to be swayed by trends, so I wouldn’t update a room on a whim,” she says. “But I’ll always see small ways in which a room could be more polished – with the addition of a new lamp, or by re-covering an antique chair, for example. It’s the curse of an interior designer that you never feel that you’re ‘done’. But it does mean that you’re always open to new ideas, which can only be a good thing.” ■

