



GARDEN (*this page*)
Designed by Charles Harman, the **garden dining table** and custom bench. **Cushions** are in a mix of fabrics from Christopher Farr Cloth

KITCHEN (*opposite*)
Irregularly sized wood **panelling** is painted in Farrow & Ball's 'Purbeck Stone'. Emma designed the oak table and bench, with **cushions** in pretty prints by Fermeoie



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THE FULL ENGLISH

With its mix of clean lines and natural textures, the townhouse of interior designer Emma Sims-Hilditch pays homage to its London setting, while serving as a reminder of her rural roots



SITTING ROOM
(left) Walls in Farrow & Ball's 'Manor House Gray' set off an 'Olivia' sofa by Neptune and an antique armchair from Brownrigg. The chimneypiece is from Jamb

DINING ROOM
(below left) An oak 'Balmoral' table by Neptune is teamed with antique chairs from Lorforads



KITCHEN
(opposite top) Bespoke cabinets blend elements of the 'Suffolk' and 'Henley' ranges by Neptune. The 'Kimmeridge Limestone' floor tiles are by Artisans of Devizes

CINEMA ROOM
(opposite bottom) Walls are painted in 'Paprika' by Neptune. The sofa, designed by Sims Hilditch is covered in Lewis & Wood's 'Kemble' linen. A cinema screen is concealed in the bulkhead over the window. A 'Sally' armchair and an 'Edwards' oak table, both by Flamant, are paired with a Vaughan 'Farnham Floor Lamp'

New English' is how Emma Sims-Hilditch describes the style of her recently renovated London house, and it is an apt appraisal. The deceptively capacious terrace delivers much

of the relaxed country-house aesthetic that is synonymous with the interior designer, but with a twist. Florals are in natural colourways and juxtaposed with ceilings clad in washed oak, sisal rugs sit on chevron parquet and generous Crittall windows are dressed with soft linens. Ox-blood red walls or a turquoise blue sofa deliver unexpectedly bold colour accents. This is how Emma does country in the city.

'I enjoy taking English style as my cue and bringing it gently up to date,' she explains. 'It's about using classic detailing in a fresh, contemporary context.' A London house was not originally part of the plan for Emma and her husband John, co-founder of the British furniture brand Neptune. The couple left the capital nearly 30 years ago for a derelict, old Cotswold stone schoolhouse with an attached barn in Wiltshire, from which they grew their respective businesses. But with three grown-up children – Daisy, Betty and Billy – now gravitating towards city living, it made sense to complement their main home with a town-house where the family could gather.

Inevitably, the couple's initial plan just to undertake a simple cosmetic update went awry. 'The house was lovely, but the spatial planning, furniture placement and room layout were not working for us,' says Emma. 'In our profession, it can be hard to live with someone else's design decisions.' So the building was stripped back to bare brick, leaving only the façade and supporting walls intact. The basement was excavated further and rearranged to accommodate a cinema-cum-sitting room, utility room and spare bedroom. Ceilings were heightened throughout, and inner walls knocked down and reinstated to create adjoining bathrooms for the remaining three bedrooms on the first and second floors. With a keen eye for structural engineering, John had the staircase rebuilt to make sure the treads and risers were uniform.

But this is not a house that has had all its period quirks evened out. The couple have played with floor levels and roof pitches, so that each space feels like a surprise, whether stepping up into an unexpectedly lofty-eaved bedroom or down into a generous kitchen from the tight proportions of a classic Victorian hallway. Sleek steel-framed windows and doors throughout add a modernising note. 'They make a strong architectural statement





MAIN BEDROOM (left and below left) The **headboard** is upholstered in 'Halki' vintage **linen** by GP & J Baker. A **painting** of Venice by Daisy Sims-Hilditch hangs on a wall lined in 'Carnival' **wallpaper** from Christopher Farr Cloth. The '**York Desk Lamp**' is by Vaughan. Crittall **doors** lead into the bathroom, where a 'Cheshire' **bath** from Victoria & Albert stands on 'Bridghampton Marble' hexagon mosaic **tiles** from Fired Earth



SPARE ROOM (opposite) Rustic '**Cranbrook Rough Boarding Shiplap**' from Neptune was used to give the sloping ceiling a false pitch. **Curtains** and **cushions** are in Rapture & Wright's 'Baya' ochre linen. The 'Castlefield' stripe mustard **throw** and 'George' **headboard** are by Neptune

in a house with an otherwise very traditional structure,' explains Emma.

This sense of marrying the rustic and the modern is typical of the designer's approach. 'When we're at home in Wiltshire, we're always outside, whether walking or gardening,' she says. 'I felt driven to create a connection with nature here, too.' Where their rural barn conversion features exposed stone, iron handrails and stone steps, here walls are papered with a mix of gentle botanicals or clad in painted tongue-and-groove, while oak handrails and cabinetry introduce warmth and texture.

But this house also represents something of a creative departure. 'Designing it felt like a new beginning,' reflects Emma. 'It marked a transition in my career. Suddenly, I had a desperate urge to experiment with pattern and be braver with colour.' A case in point is the large-scale 'Carnival' wallpaper by Michael Szell from Christopher Farr Cloth in the main bedroom. Its dramatic design is offset by a neutral scalloped headboard and the graphic lines of the metal doors opening into the bathroom. In the lower-ground-floor sitting room, burgundy walls provide an urban contrast to rustic oak-cladding. A hand-blocked Marthe Armitage wallpaper in the kitchen offers a crisp backdrop to a Swedish Mora clock.

This country-city appeal takes its cue not just from classic English schemes but also from further afield. 'Historic cities like Antwerp are always an inspiration, as are hotelier Jocelyne Sibuet's relaxed Provençal interiors,' Emma says. The family's skiing trips to Switzerland are echoed in the chalet-style wooden elements, while her love of Belgian design is evident in clean silhouettes and raw textures.

An unexpected boon of this renovation lies in the building's resulting versatility. It has also proved a breeding ground for new ideas ('We have refined the perfect fitted wardrobe design now, from shelf arrangement to inset lighting') and also prompted a different way of living and working. Early on in the project, Emma and her mother paid a visit to a small design-led hotel in Ghent - The Verhaegen - which also functions as a home, office and shopfront for its owners. 'We haven't taken the concept quite that far, as nothing here is for sale,' says Emma. 'But I was inspired by that modern, multi-platform environment.' The house is now used for hosting clients, members of the Sims Hilditch design team regularly stay overnight and - most importantly - the children drop in and out. Much like Emma's modern-country approach, it is an arrangement that is both infinitely appealing and subtly forward-thinking □

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