

# Creative expression

*A historic house in a Sussex village has been given a new lease of life with colour, pattern and eclectic flair, thanks to the bold skill and vision of its owner*

FEATURE SHARON PARSONS  
PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD GADSBY

The sitting room is a kaleidoscope of rich, jewel-like colours, with walls painted in Calke Green by Farrow & Ball. The ottoman is upholstered in Patola Indigo from The Pure Edit. Most of the furniture in the sitting room has been found at vintage and reclamation stores, or are family treasures, such as the carved oak cabinet behind the sofa. 'I lean towards old furniture more and more, and love darker woods, like walnut and oak – they have a sense of permanence about them that is reassuring,' Amy says. The green and terracotta table lamp was once an urn that Amy turned into a lamp base, adding a vibrant shade from Pooky.





**ABOVE LEFT** Jago, the family goldendoodle, relaxes in front of the woodburner in the cosy sitting room. The garland across the fireplace is from East End Press, and the nautical painting above it was inherited from a family member. **ABOVE RIGHT** The classic four-bedroom Victorian cottage with its original red-tiled roof is typical of Sussex vernacular design, and was once the village store. The exterior paintwork is Grey Stone by Little Greene. A rustic, self-contained lodge for holiday lets sits neatly in the pretty garden. **BELOW** The hand-built kitchen was in situ when the family moved in, but Amy repainted the units in Drop Cloth and the island in Off-Black, both by Farrow & Ball. The brass wall lights from Corston add a smart industrial touch, while the runner from Ardingly antiques fair softens the scheme.

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uch as we all hope to find the home of our dreams when house hunting, in most cases, a compromise is called for. Some requirements, however, are non-negotiable. This was certainly the case for Amy Maynard and her former husband, Charlie, when, in 2015, they decided that with two young children (aged three, and 11 months) it was time to leave London. 'I grew up in Sussex, and we wanted to be closer to family,' explains Amy, an interior designer, 'so it made sense to relocate there.' The challenge was to find a house that fulfilled their brief – but exacting – checklist: a characterful period property, in good condition, with ample space for a growing family, in a village. Crucially, in order to fulfil Amy's long-held ambition to create a hideaway for short-term holiday lets, the property needed a generous garden with an outbuilding suitable for conversion.

With all this in mind, the couple set about their search, and eventually found an 18th-century property in a pretty village near Romney Marsh. Amy admits it wasn't exactly love at first sight. 'It wasn't the prettiest,' she says, as she recalls the decorative mock-Tudor frontage. 'But we thought we could do something to improve that, and, most importantly, everything else turned out to be really promising.'

The house had a rich history, which gave it a resounding sense of place: in the 18th century, it had been the village store – a crucial amenity that would have been used by everyone who lived in the area, says Amy. 'The actual shop was at the front and, incredibly, the hefty iron safe – far too heavy to move – is still in its original position in what is now the hallway.'

Viewing the house that day, Amy was further reassured. The owner was a skilled craftsman and had not only hand-built the kitchen, but had also kept the house in good repair, supplementing the original beams on the ground floor with matching ones. Amy and Charlie were charmed by the fact that he'd carved a little bumble bee in one, along with a tiny dachshund in another. 'It showed such care,' Amy says.

Most importantly, however, was what lay beyond the back door: a dilapidated outbuilding,

ripe for conversion. 'It was the deciding factor,' Amy recalls. 'We wasted no time in making an offer and, as soon as we'd moved in, we started to put plans in place to create the little lodge I had in mind.' However, bringing that to fruition took a long time with planning permission and logistics to overcome. Three years after they'd got the keys, they were finally able to welcome their first paying guests.

In the meantime, the four-bedroom house has gently evolved. A few key changes were quickly instigated: 'We sanded the oak parquet floor in the kitchen and hall to remove the dark stain that had been applied years before, and treated all the beams so that they were lighter and more uniform in tone,' Amy says. She also updated the kitchen and the bathroom by repainting the existing units and updating the tiles. 'The aim was to give all the rooms a little more warmth and personality with texture, colour and pattern,' she explains.

'I have quite eclectic taste and have never strictly followed a particular look or style,' Amy says of how she's decorated her home. 'If I like something, I tend to buy it, confident it will go somewhere.' Likewise, she advises her clients to establish a starting point and build from there. 'If you overthink a scheme, it can all get a bit 'design by numbers', and it will lose its spontaneity,' she says, pointing out that things can always be changed. 'Moving furniture that doesn't fit from one room to another can be surprisingly successful,' she adds, as can repainting the colour of the walls if the shade isn't right. Amy takes the same no nonsense approach when she tackles her upcycling projects: from painting vivid green stripes on a reclaimed sofa to transforming a cabinet in chinoiserie style, or re-covering old lampshades with vintage ribbon.

These personal additions give her home its character, an inspiring example of what can be achieved by following your instincts: old and new furniture sit happily together, layered with rich colours, unique finds and eye-catching displays. Not that the house is 'finished' by any means, she says. 'It's evolving all the time. I like nothing more than pottering around in antiques markets or vintage stores – you never know what you might find!'



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The light and airy kitchen and dining space runs across the back of the house and is very much the hub of the home, where all the family and their friends regularly gather. Industrial metal chairs provide a shot of colour, and work well with the classic oak furniture. The harbour artwork by John Owen is framed by attractive wicker baskets.

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**ABOVE LEFT** The hall and landing are painted in Oval Room Blue by Farrow & Ball, and Amy's basketware collection, amassed over the years, adds life to the stairwell. Some pieces have been sprayed bright red, a colour that Amy has used throughout the house to unify the various schemes. **ABOVE RIGHT** A vivid green side table on the landing is home to a collection of pretty trinket boxes. The Matthew Williamson bobbin lampbase was an eBay find, spruced up with a lampshade that Amy cleverly customised with lengths of ribbon. **BELOW** The serene guest room is painted in a soft dove grey. A classic iron-framed bed from Feather & Black and a Lloyd Loom nursing chair lend some old-fashioned charm. The fern-print cushion is from Oka, and similar bedspreads are available from Cologne & Cotton.





**ABOVE LEFT** The main bedroom is painted in Card Room Green by Farrow & Ball. The decorative bedhead in simple ticking stripes is from John Lewis, and the bed is dressed with pretty linens, including a rectangular cushion from Wicklowood, and a quilt found on Etsy. **ABOVE RIGHT** Amy painted the reclaimed chest of drawers a deep red and then rubbed it with black wax to resemble a chinoiserie bureau. The lampshade is from Bloomsbury Revisited. **BELOW LEFT** Amy gave the en suite bathroom a lift by painting the walls and panelling in Blue Gray by Farrow & Ball and adding chequerboard floor tiles. The painting above the bath is by Karl Terry. **BELOW RIGHT** Amy's son Theo's bedroom features a tent-framed nook for cosy bedtime reading, and walls painted in India Yellow from Farrow & Ball. The throw is from TK Maxx.



GET THE LOOK

## BOLD & BRIGHT

*Favour a mix of vintage and modern pieces in glistening jewel tones for a home that's organic, layered and wonderfully welcoming*

COMPILED BY KIRSTY LYONS



**1** Woven rattan wall plaques, £75 for three, Next **2** Freya table lamp, £69, with 10in pleated ikat lampshade, £35, both Graham & Green **3** 1940s green French glass demijohn, £160.77, Etsy **4** Classic stripe wool rug, 160 x 230cm, £310, Rugviva **5** Flowers in a stoneware pot oil on canvas, £145, Pretty Blue Floral at The Hoarde **6** 19th-century crested gilt gesso mirror, £795, LCT Home at Decorative Collective **7** Oval Room Blue, £64 per 2.5l Modern Emulsion, Farrow & Ball **8** 1950s PEL tubular upholstered metal dining chair, £75, Merchant & Found at The Hoarde **9** Large vintage enamel bread bin, £75, Taliesin Antiques at Antiques Boutique **10** Alice dressing table, £595, Graham & Green **11** Thoroton footstool in Linwood Small Prints III – Smocked in Riviera, from £499, Vale Footstools **12** Lanhydrock three-seater sofa in Signature Plain Chutney fabric, £4,638, Sofas & Stuff **13** Vintage and old kilim cushion cover, £135, 1stDibs **14** Areca cushion cover in Putting Green, £54.17, Oka