



ABOVE The sitting room provides a masterclass in combining colour and pattern to achieve a comfortable, timeless scheme. The classic Knole sofa and wingback chair from Sarah's old home are made extra inviting with cushions in a variety of fabrics that settle happily into their new space. The maritime art framing the antique mirror was inherited from Jonathan's cousin: the larger paintings are by Thomas Butterworth (1768–1842), while the two below are the work of RS Thomas (1787–1853). **FACING PAGE** The bookshelves and window seat at one end of the sitting room were made by King Cabinet Makers in Lewes, and painted in Farrow & Ball's Card Room Green.



A fresh perspective

Downsizing takes careful consideration, but Sarah Jempson has created a comfortable new home for herself and husband Jonathan by combining their most-loved antiques and collections with new ideas and stylish finishes

FEATURE SHARON PARSONS PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD GADSBY



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here's more than a touch of serendipity in Sarah Jempton's life. Take, for instance, the early Victorian round rosewood table in her sitting room. 'My first

husband bought this for £8 at a London auction almost 60 years ago, but swapped it with my brother for an air rifle,' she recalls cheerfully. 'The table then set off all over the world with him and his wife before it finally ended up in their new house nearby, where they simply didn't have room for it... So, it has finally come back home to me, just as it was meant to.'

A similar brush with fate can be applied to the mellow 18th-century Sussex farmhouse that she and husband Jonathan now call home. 'We were already familiar with this house because, many years ago, it belonged to people we knew,' she says. 'Our children would come here to play with theirs. We always thought it was so pretty, but never imagined that one day we would actually live here.' Sarah and Jonathan had lived in their previous house for 46 years and had adored it, but it had become too big for the two of them. 'It felt very much that the time had come to make a change,' says Sarah.

Their much-loved old home sold in just three days and, by August 2021, the farmhouse had become theirs. There was a lot to get on with. Sadly, no original characteristics remain inside the property. 'It's such a shame, but any internal features that may once have been here are long gone,' Sarah says. 'This meant we had to consider ways to inject some character, as well as make some of the recent additions more sympathetic.'

The couple's biggest concern about downsizing, though, was how to fit all the things they'd collected and treasured over the years into a much smaller space so that it felt comfortable but not over-cluttered. 'We did have to be fairly decisive when we moved – I got rid of over 1,000 books, for instance! But there are some things that will always be part of our lives, and absolutely had to stay,' says Sarah.

These much-loved pieces include everything from family heirlooms to artworks and collections amassed over the years. 'I get my love of antiques from my mother, I think,' says Sarah. 'She was especially fond of good English furniture, such as mid-to-late 18th-century oak and mahogany. But it wasn't until I got a little older that I learnt to appreciate their qualities.'

She laughs as she recalls that when she and Jonathan first met, he had no interest in antiques

at all. 'He'd furnished his entire bungalow with things that he'd picked up in a junk shop one afternoon,' she laughs. 'In the early days, when we had a young family, we made do with a lot of inexpensive pine, and it was some years before we could afford to replace it with more substantial items,' she continues. 'Some people – unfairly, in my opinion – call these antiques 'brown furniture', but I think there's something very special about beautiful, well-crafted pieces that have stood the test of time, and have their own unique stories.'

A case in point is the late 18th-century walnut desk (pictured, right). 'This was my first serious investment,' Sarah says. 'My lovely mother-in-law generously gave me some money for my birthday, and I went to the bank and borrowed some more so that I could buy it. It's still my favourite piece, and I love sitting at it, imagining all of the people who have done the same over the centuries.'

It was in those early days that Sarah also began to collect smaller items that appealed to her. There's the sparkling collection of Victorian silver and glass bottles and containers now arranged on a shelf in the family bathroom for instance, and the Tunbridge ware – little boxes made of inlaid wood – which are displayed on various surfaces in the sitting room. 'I am a bit of a magpie when it comes to collections,' she admits. 'I'm drawn to all sorts of different things, although if I'm trying to track down something in particular, I can get a bit obsessed, leaving no stone unturned!'

Once the essential work had been completed, Sarah could finally turn her attention to the decoration, calling on interior designer Amy Maynard to help her achieve the look and feel she wanted. 'We've worked together on projects before, and Amy knows my tastes very well,' she says. 'She fully understood the need to incorporate our furniture, artworks, rugs and so on into this new space, but also came up with clever suggestions to reinvigorate the overall scheme with beautiful colours, fabrics and finishes. It really was a collaborative process as we worked through our ideas together.'

'It's funny,' reflects Sarah. 'When the house was being renovated, I would walk through the rooms every day, carrying so many ideas around in my head as I imagined how it would eventually look: comfortable and familiar in many ways, but with a fresh new spin. It's like the next chapter in our lives, and I'm so happy we've done it.' ■



This 18th-century walnut bureau was Sarah's first 'brown furniture' purchase, and is still her favourite piece. She embroidered the padded seat of the 19th-century mahogany chair. The little bone boat in the glass case on top was made during the Napoleonic Wars, while the painting above it – artist unknown – was bought at auction.

The late 18th-century mahogany corner cupboard once belonged to Sarah's mother, while the much-loved and well-travelled rosewood table is used to display just some of Sarah's collection of Tunbridge ware – inlaid wood often made into boxes. The beautiful fabric used for the curtains is Palampore Blossom in Indian Pink from Scane.



ABOVE The far end of the kitchen provides an informal dining area with the 19th-century oak gate-legged table, inherited from Sarah's mother. Behind it sits an oak dresser base, above which are contemporary paintings of the couple's old garden: the one to the left is by Keith Bennett, and the two to the right are by Louis Turpin. The sculpture of Sarah's head is by artist and sculptor Sheena Austen – there is also one of Jonathan in the formal dining room. **BELOW** The kitchen was made by Portrait Kitchens in Rye. The glossy tiles behind the hob are Emerald Green by Naturally Of Earth Ltd – they complement Sarah's collection of Bordallo Pinheiro plates above.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT The hall is given a dash of colour with the Hampton stair runner by Roger Oates. The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Blue Gray with woodwork in Pigeon; the family bathroom is the new home for Sarah's collection of Victorian silver and glass bottles and containers; the little cupboard was especially made to house Sarah's 55-year-old Belling warming cabinet. 'I had it painted bright red to bring a bit of colour into the room,' she says. The painting above it is by the Dutch artist Hermanus Koekoek, while the Staffordshire figurines came from her mother's home; the bespoke wallpaper is by Kate Linforth and the quilt is an antique find.



This cosy bedroom with walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Calamine, and complemented with cherry red and raspberry shades, has been furnished entirely with items from the couple's old house. 'Just combining pieces in a different way can deliver a refreshing new look,' says Sarah.

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