

INTRODUCTION	08
--------------	----

## *Our* COUNTRY HOMES

KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING	14
A WELL-KEPT SECRET	24
A HOME WITH HISTORY	38
BOATHOUSE BOLTHOLE	48
FIRST IMPRESSIONS	60
FULL FAMILY CIRCLE	70
A PEACEFUL PAST	82
ROOM AT THE INN	92
RISEN FROM THE ASHES	102
A FINE MENAGE	112
A BRIGHTER SHADE OF PALE	122
THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME	132
THE TRUE TEST OF TIME	142
TWISTS OF FATE	152
HAPPY HOMECOMING	162
ORIGINAL STYLE	174
SEASONS OF FRUITFULNESS	184
NATURE'S WAY	194
THE ART OF LIVING	204
A PERFECT PIGSTY	214
SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW	224
COUNTRY COLLECTIONS	236
ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS	246



# INTRODUCTION

*Wink Coville*

Today Brent and I photographed our last house, Heloise's stunning octagonal chapel, on a blue-skied day in May. We all agreed that, to us, it is in May that the English countryside puts on its most glorious display of all. Cow parsley froths in every verge, and hedgerows flaunt shades of green from acid to emerald. I mention this because it occurs to me that the sentiment that all the homeowners in this book share is a mutual and tireless appreciation of the natural world. While some are moved by a misty autumn morning and others by the smoke-scented chill of a midwinter night, all have a love of our magnificent rural landscapes throughout the seasons.

It was at this time of year that my family moved from London to the country. At that point, we would have bought any one of the many houses we viewed. We were bowled over by the sheer variety, and by the fact that they all had both stairs and a garden (unlike our previous Victorian conversion flats). To me they were all beautiful, and each had a unique character of its own.

Fourteen years on, I was equally impressionable while getting to know the twenty-three houses in this book. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be introduced to them, and to hear their stories. Each one became my new favourite. I found myself repeatedly redefining my previous understanding of country style and soon accepted that there is no one size to fit all. What it involves is, I think, an ability to recognise the unique essence of a house and to enhance it.

The majority of the houses in this book have a history, and their conscientious owners have taken great pains to restore the true character and preserve the heritage of their property. And in return these places offer sanctuary and comfort to their owners. There seems to be a common instinctive urge to simplify each home before adding the layers and personal choices that bind a house to its owner. Many times I was told of the joy people felt when pulling up old carpet to reveal original floorboards beneath. Several of our homeowners went even further in uncovering the bones of their homes, taking the walls back to their original state and insulating their houses with the natural materials that would have been used centuries ago. It shouldn't have surprised me at all to learn that once buildings had been returned to their original state, such nuisances as damp and mould vanished.





# KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING

*When the chance to move into her cherished childhood home arose, Alice Clark and her family wasted no time in moving from the capital to give their three daughters a country upbringing.*

When Alice Clark thinks back to her childhood, she remembers the fresh air and freedom. ‘My mother (an artist with five children needing some headspace) would open the doors each morning, and off us five siblings would set, only to return, filthy and famished, in time for tea.’

Alice’s own daughters were born in London. Alice was (and still is) headmistress of The Willow Nursery in Clapham, which she founded and continues to cherish. However, she felt an urgent draw to the country and often took Molly, Rose and Lily to their grandparents’ farmhouse. The little girls would unfurl in the newfound space and Alice knew that the country was the place for them. When her parents offered them the opportunity to move into the house and run the farm, it was an easy decision to make.

And so, after a decade in London, the family moved into Alice’s childhood home. While the house needed some work, Alice wanted the essence to remain unchanged. The colour and art that had surrounded the family were intrinsic to the house’s character, and Alice was adamant that these would never change. But the time had come to breathe in some new life. ‘I wanted to freshen the house up and give it a subtle makeover,’ Alice remembers.

She started with the kitchen, which three hundred years ago would have housed livestock. Its timeworn wooden stable wall and exposed beams recall the room’s past as a cowshed opening onto the farmyard. In her childhood the room had been divided into two, a kitchen and a separate playroom. Alice craved a lighter, fuller space where she could see the children playing and they could all gather round a large table. She had the dividing wall removed and two RSJs disguised under beams, then had the ceiling removed to reveal the original oak joists. A light and lovely kitchen has opened up with a large play area at one end. Alice also had a window enlarged to flood the room with light.



‘WOULD WE LIVE THROUGH

*another building project?’ asks Charlotte. ‘Possibly not with a baby getting into every nook and cranny. But when that wonderful golden evening light now floods not just over the garden but in through the windows too, even on a chilly winter day, we realise how much we have gained.’*













**'HAVING LIVED IN COTTAGES**

*until now, I craved high ceilings. This house had more generous dimensions anyway, but we kept the ceiling above the dining area double height to stretch up to the rafters.'*





**'ITS ATMOSPHERE**

*worked its magic on the children too. On their very first night here, toddler Oliver and baby Harry both slept soundly, not a bit unsettled by their new surroundings.'*



VINCENT PRIMEURS 77  
SOLFRUIT 04-M.I.N. RUNGIS

## H A P P Y   H O M E C O M I N G

*James Bell's parental home hit the housing market for barely a moment before he, along with his wife Amy and their two daughters, realised just how much they didn't want it to be lost to the family.*

On a balmy summer's day in 2004 Amy Culligan married James Bell in a marquee on the sweeping lawns of his stunning family home in the South Downs. James' mother's card to the newly-weds read 'Welcome Home.' 'It seemed curious at the time,' remembers Amy, 'because much as we loved his parents' home, living there ourselves had never occurred to us.'

When Amy had visited James' parents during their courtship, she had been fascinated by its history. Eight acres (a little over three hectares) of land had been given to a newlywed couple, the Whitfields, in 1849, and the proud Mr Whitfield had built the Gothic house on it for himself and his bride. He had designed the gracious rooms with their balanced proportions, high ceilings, wood panelling and ornate plasterwork, and these details proudly stood the test of time. The house had stayed in the Whitfield family for three generations, then changed hands several times during the 1900s. For a time post-war, it was used as a country club.

As a countryside lover Amy had also been truly taken by the position it holds in the foothills of the South Downs - so much so that once she and James had their own children, they had bought a house in a village nearby. 'We would probably have stayed there,' admits Amy, 'if my in-laws hadn't put the family house on the market. We felt such a bolt of sadness at the thought of the house leaving the family that we stretched in every direction to buy it.' She continues, 'We picked up where James' parents had left off, with the house and garden. Both were labours of love for them and likewise for us.'

The pair have worked tirelessly since moving in. 'We loved the essence of the place, and the character that my in-laws had brought, and just wanted to continue helping it evolve with the passing of time,' says Amy. 'Each generation lives slightly differently. When we arrived, the kitchen was more of a functional place, and the drawing room had been where the family gathered. We wanted the kitchen to be the family room.' They took out white MDF units, the dated electric cooker and a lino floor to replace them with a part farmhouse style, part French-style kitchen. Amy found Provençal-inspired blue and yellow tiles from a local dairy that was being sold and based the kitchen colour scheme round these - the summery yellow walls and cornflower blue cooker are a warm colour combination and together with a scrubbed oak table, chairs and dresser complete the welcoming farmhouse feel.





## 'THE VICTORIAN PROPORTIONS

*of the house require large pieces of furniture, great swathes of fabric in curtains, and big paintings to fill the wall space. We were lucky to inherit many lovely family heirlooms. Even if some are a little tired or faded, they are part of the house's story and sit comfortably within its old walls.'*

