



MARCH 2019 \$4.75

INSPIRATION

Twenty years ago, Lucy and Ernest van Vredenburg made the decision to move from London back to the east coast where they had both grown up. They couldn't believe their luck when they found a historic hall between Chelmsford and Colchester for sale. The manor house of 16th-century origins had been extended in the 18th century to include a red-brick, wisteria-clad façade. 'We knew as soon as we entered the drive that this was the house for us,' says Lucy. Although in need of work, the property still felt like the most idyllic spot to raise a young family.

Fast forward the years and Lucy has worked her interior design skills on restoring the tired hall and developing the layout into a stylish yet robust home, suited to relaxed family living with the couple's four children, Isabella, 22, twins Eliza and Saskia, 20, and Hugo, 15. 'The house is incredibly light and is one of those properties that both feels cosy with just two people at home and roomy enough to accommodate large numbers,' says Lucy.

'The big kitchen in the original part of the house overlooking the gardens had been divided up into a smaller kitchen and separate scullery. We knocked through to create one large open-plan room, with a Shaker-style kitchen and dining area that we use during the winter.'

In the summer, the family use the informal dining room in the new extension, reached by a zinc-covered walkway that connects this section of the house with a light-filled converted building. During these months, this addition comes alive when full-length windows and doors are flung open to enjoy the pool and garden views.

The top two floors of the manor have also been rejigged to create more suitable rooms and to provide an office for Lucy's growing interior design practice. For the scheme here, she has kept backdrops neutral, while texture and colour are added with wallpaper, accessories and fabrics. Antiques and art abound, with many of the older pieces inherited from Ernest's Dutch relatives; but over time a softer palette of time-worn painted furniture and modern art has been introduced. 'The house has evolved with us as a family,' she says. 'There is something special about acting as custodians of this wonderful building. I love that we are preserving it for generations to come.'



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DINING AREA
Linking to the kitchen in
the original part of the
house, this space cleverly
combines modern and
antique pieces.
Dining table, Augustus
Brandt. **Swedish chairs,**
Brownrigg. **Painting,**
Shirin Tabeshfar.

