

THE ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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ANGLO FILE



*India Hicks and
David Flint Wood's
charming Oxfordshire
manse is bedecked
with family treasures*

TEXT BY DAVID FLINT WOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIGUEL FLORES-VIANNA STYLED BY CAROLINA IRVING



ABOVE THE LIBRARY'S VINTAGE TELEPHONE, DECOUPAGED WITH COMICS. LEFT DOMINO'S BEDROOM; DAVID HICKS FABRICS; HEIRLOOM BRIDESMAIDS' DRESSES. BELOW LEFT A GARDEN VIEW. BELOW RIGHT AN ALEXANDER CALDER WORK ATOP AN ANTIQUE FRENCH SECRETARY. OPPOSITE CONRAD, WESLEY, DOMINO, DAVID, FELIX, AMORY, AND INDIA.





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India said of the house, "there's going
to have to be a lot of compromise."



ABOVE INDIA'S PARENTS, DAVID HICKS AND LADY PAMELA MOUNTBATTEN, WED IN 1960. RIGHT LADY PAMELA WITH INDIA AND DOMINO. OPPOSITE THE EARL AND COUNTESS MOUNTBATTEN OF BURMA, IN 1952, WITH DAUGHTER LADY PAMELA. BELOW THE SITTING ROOM'S JANSEN CHAIRS BELONGED TO HICKS'S GRANDMOTHER EDWINA MOUNTBATTEN; 1960S BATHING CAPS ARE HOUSED IN AN ACRYLIC CASE.



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lthough India and I have lived in the West Indies for more than 20 years, time finally came to have a home in our native England. Our children had grown up barefoot, chasing snakes up coconut trees and playing pirate with machetes, so we decided to civilize them with British sports and Anglocentric history. What British mother's heart does not soar when her son can

recite the batting order—"divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived"—of Henry VIII's wives?

For a decade we crisscrossed the Atlantic, trying to make sure that hardly a weekend went by without the boys' seeing at least one of us. During this time we had been guests in Oxfordshire of India's mother, Lady Pamela Hicks, widow of David, the celebrated decorator. But even she—survivor of the Blitz, the Partition of India, and acts of terrorism—could not be expected to endure Romneys and Raeburns swept off walls by indoor rugby matches, or tea trays shattered by cricket balls knocked through windows by malodorous, rampaging teens.

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India was lucky enough to have some farmland near (but not too near) her mother, at the edge of the village where our boys had been christened. We had permission from the authorities to take down two 1970s farmworkers' cottages and build our idea of a house, with a small garden alongside large fields.

"If we are going to make this work," India said to me at that stage, "there is going to have to be a lot of compromise." The cold hand of fear gripped my heart as I had a flashback to a meeting 25 years earlier in my past life as an advertising man. A rather fierce client had asked me during a stressful creative pitch, "David do you know what compromise means?" I replied, "Yes, meeting in the middle." With the look of one of those animals that eat their children, she coldly countered, "No, it means doing things you don't want to do." Months after that, I left England and that particular career.

"So what is your idea of a house in the country?" Andrew Nichols, our architect, asked. Here we got lucky: India and I both wanted something traditional, probably white stucco, a cross between a Danish farmhouse and a Georgian rectory. As a shorthand description I said, "We'd like to live in a Merchant Ivory film like everybody else, I suppose."

We are also complete slaves to symmetry in architecture.

Aligning doors and windows is important as they create vistas that expand space. And living in the tropics has taught us that the breezes that pass through opposing windows and French doors will come in handy during England's two weeks of summer.

For the more predictable weather conditions, I was keen to have as many fireplaces as possible through the house. Whilst India loves nothing more than walking in biblical conditions of rain, sleet, and snow, I prefer to gaze upon inclement weather, sitting in the vicinity of crackling logs with a good book and a drink, so we had a Portland stone mantel made for the sitting room and a marble one for the study. I was very keen for another real fire in our bedroom, but India felt that clearing out an upstairs hearth would be a bore. Gingerly, I pointed out that it would be unusual for her to clean any hearth—we compromised with an artificial fire.

Though India grew up with vibrating palettes in every room, we tend to go with fairly neutral backgrounds and one keynote color, such as the orange Ultrasuede on my Louis XVI-style chairs. One of our sons' rooms has gunmetal-and-red-striped walls painted on the diagonal; our daughter's has a lit à la polonoise, covered in David Hicks's original Tumbling Rose print, that was inherited from the Hicks family's famous Albany set. Art often supplies the chance to add color, with Gerald Laing's *Baby Baby Wild Things* and Alexander Calder lithographs being good cases in point. My antique gouaches of Vesuvius erupting and the 18th-century still lifes, though, tend to find themselves "compromised" and lean against walls.

In the mixing of furniture that either I have collected or that India's parents had at Albany, we could not have been luckier—it all goes together. The first night the seven of us stayed in the house, it felt like home, though I am waiting for the moment when India realizes I've hung a very dark Danish interior painting by Niels Holstøe in our bedroom. I sense another opportunity for compromise in the air. **AD**



ABOVE OLD-FASHIONED ROSES FROM THE GARDEN; EDWINA HICKS FABRIC. RIGHT IAN MANKIN TICKING STRIPES A BEDROOM. OPPOSITE HANS WEGNER CHAIRS FROM THE CONRAN SHOP FLANK A CUSTOM-MADE BARRJOINERY TABLE IN THE KITCHEN; PABLO PICASSO OWNED ONE OF THE DAN MASKS.



ABOVE DOMINO AND RESLEY IN A FIELD. RIGHT HICKS SURVEYS RIOTOUS BORDER BY LANDSCAPE DESIGNER GUY THORNTON.





“We’d like to live in a Merchant Ivory film like everybody else, I suppose,” *David* told architect *Andrew Nichols*.