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Cultured pearl

Designer Paolo Moschino transformed this fisherman's cottage in north Cornwall for his clients, raising the ceilings, reconfiguring the layout and creating a light-filled, fresh interior inspired by the colours of the sea

TEXT ROS BYAM SHAW | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY | LOCATIONS EDITOR LAVINIA BOLTON

This is the story of an ugly duckling that grew into a swan. In truth, 'ugly' is hardly fair – it never did seem a kind description for a cygnet. But, like so many fairy stories, it is the tale of a transformation; a house that was small and humble, then blossomed to become capacious and worthy of celebration in a glossy magazine.

The owners bought the house 35 years ago, although they had known it for much longer. In a fabulous position, tucked into the lee of a small promontory, sitting just above one end of a perfect bay on the north Cornwall coast, it was built as a fisherman's cottage. When the story begins it belonged to a family with three daughters. 'They were great friends of my mother,' explains one of the owners, 'and she used to visit them from London. She often flew down in a private plane with another friend who was a pilot.' Black-and-white photographs now hanging in the downstairs cloakroom capture the moment when the tiny aircraft got stuck in mud in fields above the cottage and

they had to push it out before take-off. Other photographs show the friends on the beach, clambering across rocks, or sitting on the garden wall; they are young, glamorous and a little windswept. 'I knew the cottage through my mother,' the owner continues, 'and when the sisters decided to sell, we asked if we could buy it.'

For years it was their holiday cottage – a summer den, its window sills dotted with shells and pebbles, its floors gritty with sand, its tiny bedrooms, kitchen and sitting room just big enough for a family of four who spent most of their time outdoors. Then there were grandchildren, and more buckets and spades, wetsuits and wellington boots. Meanwhile, the owners had bought a much larger, grander house on the south Cornwall coast (see *House & Garden*, April 2005). More recently, they decided that three houses – one in London, two in Cornwall – were one too many.

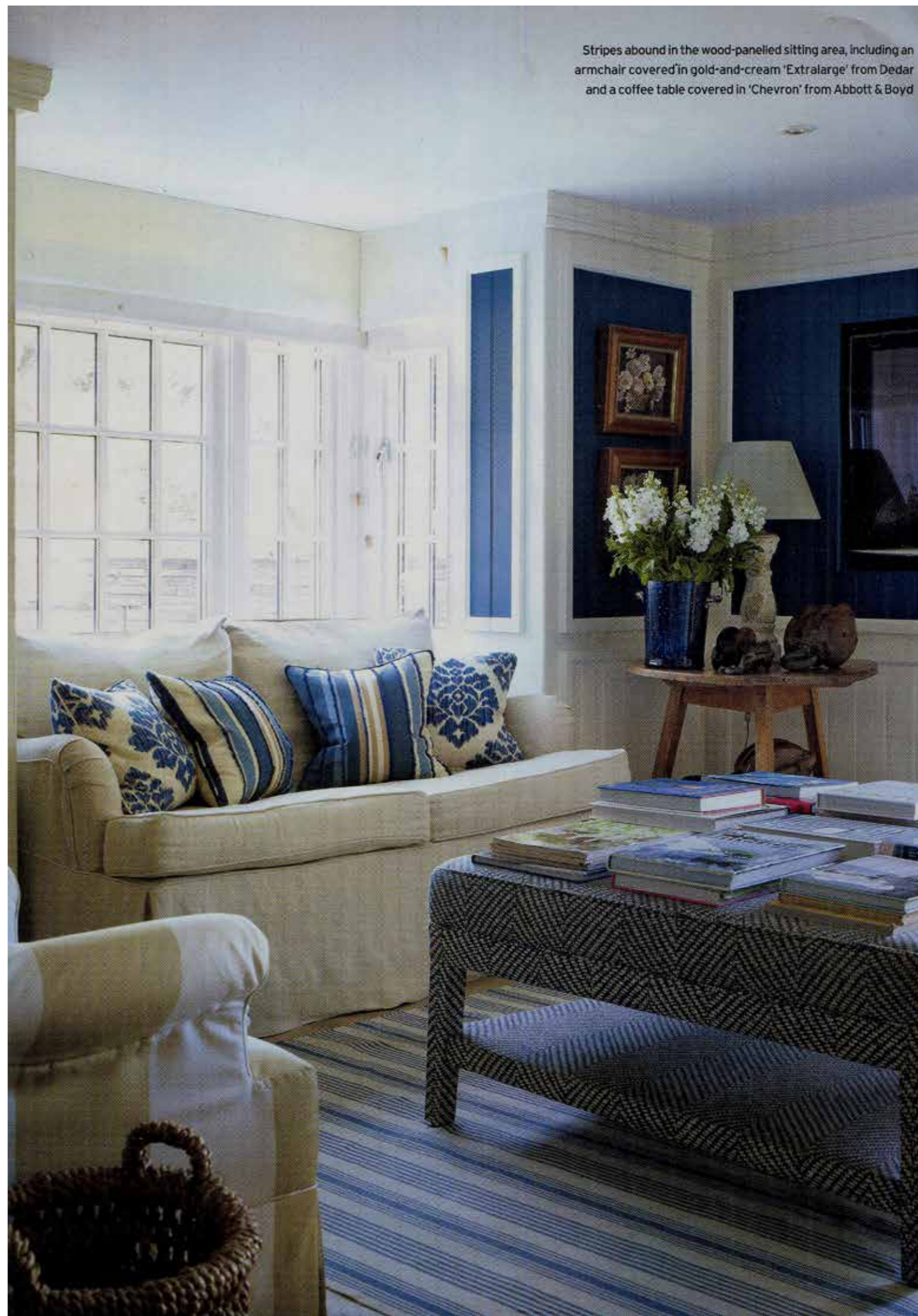
'We were terribly sad to leave the bigger house in Cornwall,' the owner explains. 'It

was beautiful and had the most wonderful views. However, the views from here are even better, and we knew that the house itself could be improved.'

At this point in the story, we meet the knight in shining armour, in the person of decorator Paolo Moschino. Paolo had decorated the other house in Cornwall and then their house in London. 'If anyone can make somewhere fabulous, it is Paolo,' say the owners. As for Paolo, these are favourite clients. 'My brief was to make the cottage as special as possible. It needed to be bigger, lighter, fresh and a little bit modern. They missed the other house, so I wanted to make this one divine, as compensation.'

Planning permission was obtained to extend the footprint and change the internal layout. Extra height was gained downstairs by digging down to lower the floors. Upstairs, ceilings were raised into the pitch of the roof and up nearly to its apex above the staircase and landing, creating a generous space where light

ABOVE This fisherman's cottage (centre) was decorated with a nautical theme throughout. In the open-plan living space, which opens off the entrance hall (left), the striped rug was bought in Morocco, while an armchair (right) is covered in 'Ashbury Stripe' from Turnell & Gigon



Stripes abound in the wood-panelled sitting area, including an armchair covered in gold-and-cream 'Extralarge' from Dedar and a coffee table covered in 'Chevron' from Abbott & Boyd



pours down through skylights. The ground floor has been reconfigured so that rooms flow one into another. Turn right from the staircase hall and front door and you are in the drawing room, with its bay window looking out onto the glittering denim blue of the sea; walk through this room into the study area and you are in the big, open-plan kitchen, dining and living space, the rear wall of which has been built into the

land that rises behind. Leave this room by its second door and you are back in the hall. Windows at the rear of the house on the ground floor look on to a garden scooped out of the low hillside that protects it from the worst of the weather, its sides reinforced with the thin slabs of slate so characteristic of Cornish architecture. Windows at the side of the house look across the lawn and a low wall to sand,

rocks, and water. Upstairs, the views are even more spectacular, especially from the main bedroom, where sea and sky fill the window. 'The sea is never the same,' says one of the owners. 'It changes colour and mood almost by the hour. The garden is so sheltered that we can sit outside even in winter, but when there is a storm, the sea-spray mists the window and the lawn is white with foam.'



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A collection of old pitchers is displayed in the dining area. A nineteenth-century clock hangs above the kitchen sink. Decorative details, such as the model boat and stone lighthouses in the drawing room (below centre and right) were inspired by the coastal setting (below left). THIS PAGE Fossils, bought locally, are dotted around the drawing room, which has its original chimneypiece



THIS PAGE A nineteenth-century bust, brought from the owners' former house in Cornwall, overlooks the staircase, while porcelain scallop shells found in Italy hang opposite. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the main bedroom, the portrait of Lord Robert Manners is part of the owners' collection of nineteenth-century prints. A cabin-style berth makes the most of limited space in a spare room. The garden is enclosed by a slate wall, which also reinforces its steeply sloping sides (below left). In this spare room, the striped walls are in colours custom-mixed by paint specialist Dawn Reader

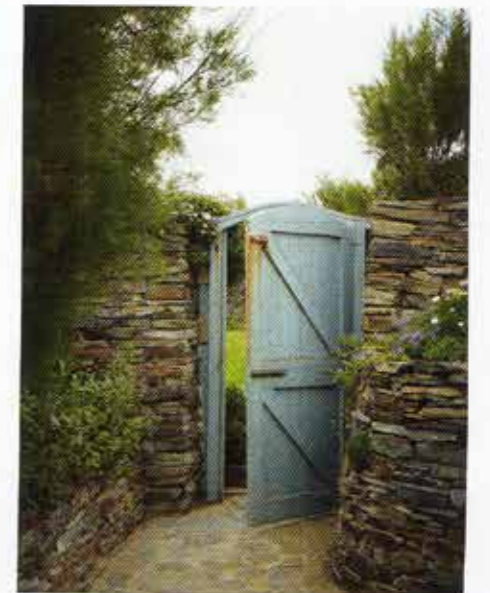


Paolo took his cue for the decoration from the sea, and had the subtle navy blue of the panelling in the study and dining area specially mixed to match the inscrutable blue of the water in winter. The colour scheme for the whole house plays on crisp, nautical combinations of blue and white, and gives the interiors a continuity that contributes to the sense of spaciousness. The theme is carried through

in decorative details, from the galleons that sail across a chair upholstered in toile de Jouy to the serpentine-stone lighthouse lamps on the drawing-room window sill, and the jolly group of painted wooden sailors leaning as if braced against the wind on a side table. A recent purchase is a giant sculpture of a whelk by Michael Cooper on the raised lawn outside the front door. The makeover is complete

and the owners are thrilled. 'Paolo is so clever. We spend six months of the year here, and couldn't be more delighted with it.' So the story has a happy ending. And a moral, which is that location is always more important than anything else. That, and a good decorator □

Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam; 020-7730 8623; www.nicholashaslam.com



— the — Knowledge

*Inspired by the houses in this issue,
Emily Tobin gives directions on how to achieve similar style*

TABLE LAMPS

The pretty shell-shape table lamps are from Nicholas Haslam (020-7730 8623; www.nicholashaslam.com) and are available in a silver or plaster finish. They measure 18 x 20cm (base diameter) without the shade and cost £560 each.



RUG

Blue striped rugs are a recurring theme throughout the house. Paolo sourced these from Morocco, but if you are looking for something similar a little closer to home, try Roger Oates (01531-632718; www.rogeroates.com), which stocks a good range of runners and rugs in a similar palette. The 'Oxford Flax' measures 180 x 80cm and costs £175.



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PAINT

In the sitting room, Paolo Moschino has opted for a rich cobalt blue, a strong shade that is echoed in much of the furniture and the soft furnishings. The paint is 'Drawing Room Blue' from Farrow & Ball (01202-876141; www.farrow-ball.com). It costs £34.50 for a 2.5-litre tin of emulsion.



FABRIC

The soft blue fabric on the headboard and cushions in the main bedroom is from the Baker Lifestyle range at G P & J Baker (01202-266700; www.gpandjbaker.com). It is called 'Kenwyn' and costs £49 per metre.

