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FINDING CORNWALL

THIS HANDSOME COUNTRY HOUSE IN CORNWALL WAS RECENTLY DECORATED BY AN ITALIAN-BORN DESIGNER MORE USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH CHIC LONDON FLATS

BOTH PICTURES Paolo Moschino created a simple, classical backdrop in the drawing room by painting the walls with trompe-l'oeil panelling, staining and polishing the floorboards and surmounting the three tall windows with painted architectural pediments. Silk curtains are in 'Brittany Stripe' by Nicholas Haslam. The sofa is covered in 'Linvell' (caramel), a linen velvet also by Nicholas Haslam



ABOVE The view from a first-floor bedroom stretches up the estuary (left). The owners and architect Peter Sutton created a new and significantly enlarged entrance hall (right), installing a sweeping staircase with wooden treads painted by Dawn Reader with a stone-finish effect. The lantern is from Richard Taylor

Edward VII managed to find it, so did Paolo Moschino, Jane Taylor and Martin Lane Fox. But the sign to the village is in such small script, it seems designed to ensure you miss it. The lane winds and rolls through the Cornish countryside, and there is not a house to be seen. Grass is pushing its way up through old Tarmac when, halfway down a hill, you are greeted by the perfect view: a river estuary, an ancient church tower, and a cluster of masts bobbing in a tiny harbour. On your right overlooking it all is the old vicarage, a house with a façade of unexpected grandeur, neat as a pin, its 21 sash windows bright with new paint.

Presumably Edward VII chose to holiday in this village precisely because it is so remote. But it does seem odd that a place too small to appear on the road map should have housed its vicar so handsomely. The house was built in 1740 and extended in 1800. Subsequently bits were knocked down and other bits added. By the late twentieth century, behind the strict classical symmetry of its façade, the layout of the house had become chaotic. All the bedrooms were on different levels, the main entrance was at the side and the only divisions that made architectural sense were those defining the trio of well-proportioned reception rooms at the front.

The current owners first spotted the house while exploring

the county during a trip to their holiday home on the north coast of Cornwall. They were instantly struck by its imposing frontage, and the beauty of its position. To their amazement they discovered that it belonged to friends of friends. They arranged to visit the house and boldly asked if they could have first refusal were it ever sold. Two years later they bought it and embarked on the huge project of restoration, remodelling and landscaping.

One of their first calls was to Paolo Moschino, a designer they had previously met and whose work they greatly admired. Paolo says he was initially appalled by the five-hour drive from London. 'I had no idea where Cornwall was,' he admits. 'But when I saw the house, the sun was shining and we had a picnic on the lawn – I fell in love. I felt it was a happy house and I knew at once what had to be done. For the next year-and-a-half I drove down to Cornwall regularly.'

Paolo's vision for the house was to create an appropriately splendid interior to reflect the dignity of the Georgian façade, and 'to bring back the glory of the eighteenth century'. A team was assembled: architect Peter Sutton of Harrison Sutton Partnership; building contractors Farnham Brothers; and garden designer Martin Lane Fox; Jane Taylor worked on the kitchen and Gibson Music wired the house for sound.

'Today, the house has wonderful space and light,' says Paolo,



The dining room has a strongly Gustavian feeling, with putty-coloured walls and pale-painted eighteenth- and nineteenth-century furniture, including dining chairs from Talisman Antiques. A chandelier from Nicholas Haslam hangs above the table and a set of mercury-glass candlesticks. In the eighteenth-century painted bookcase is the owners' collection of shell plates, which inspired the frieze painted with shells in the cornice



THIS PAGE Jane Taylor (tel: 020-7795 0955) designed the kitchen (above left and right). Busts in niches and classical engravings hung formally in rows stand out against panelling painted 'Tarlatan' by The Paint Library. The bespoke wooden table, made by Talisman Antiques (tel: 01747-824423), is laid with bold, cobalt-blue tableware from France. Off the hall (below) is the library (opposite)



'but when the owners first bought it, many of the rooms were too small – and it needed a grand entrance.' Accordingly, they and Peter Sutton pulled apart offices, larders and several bedrooms, pushing up the ceiling to create a decent-size hall.

Three years on from that first picnic on the lawn, the house has been transformed from shabbiness to the kind of chic normally associated with the smartest London postcodes – not houses down grassy lanes. The front door is now at the centre of what was the rear façade and opens into a double-height hall worthy of a modest stately home. To the left a staircase curves up to a galleried landing, while straight ahead glossy mahogany double doors stand open, revealing that perfect view through the middle window of three – the reason Paolo kept the drawing room walls and curtains so pale, 'so that your eye is drawn outside'.

Not that there isn't plenty to keep your eyes fully occupied inside. The Georgian 'glory' of the house has been restored wherever possible and imported when necessary. Cornices and doors in the three front reception rooms are original, as are floorboards, which were taken up and meticulously numbered before being re-laid.

Each of these main rooms has a luxurious, lavish period feel and its own distinctive character; the dining room is elegantly grey and Gustavian, glittering with a giant crystal chandelier, with light reflected from a huge panel of mirror where the fireplace once stood. The drawing room, with its trompe-l'oeil panelling in shades of dove and ivory, is slightly more



ABOVE In the library, 'Roma' sofas from Nicholas Haslam have cushions covered in 'Peonies' chintz by Hodsoll McKenzie. Walls painted 'Elizabethan Red' from The Paint Library, sang-de-boeuf ceramics and red and black lacquer – including the 'Como' lacquered coffee table from Nicholas Haslam – add to the effect of richness. Above louvred cupboards are dark painted bookcases; the interiors of the bookshelves are lacquered Chinese red

