

DECOR | GARDEN | TRAVEL

2018

H**o**d

home by design[®] magazine

THE BEDROOM ISSUE
four suite designs





personal & practical

A Daring Interior Designer Updates Her
Classic English Home in an Unexpected Way

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On the edge

of the English Yorkshire countryside in the Victorian spa town of Ilkley, Ann Marie Cousins cast a colorful spell on the fully renovated 3,700-square-foot residence she shares with her husband David and their three children—Isla, Shay, and Cara. There, the interior designer and owner of AMC Design gets to experiment with brilliant ideas that her clients may be hesitant to try until they see her remarkable results.

Cousins began with a great canvas. Though the circa-1897 dwelling is considered late Victorian, she says there are few examples of Victoriana decorative styles. “If anything, it’s more like an early Arts and Crafts or Edwardian house in style. Elegant and simple lines abound,” says the designer, who left London a decade ago.

A major renovation was required. “Although the house had been well maintained and retained many of its original features, it had not been properly updated, and it wasn’t very family-friendly when we bought it in 2011,” explains Cousins. “My personal design philosophy is to create interiors with personality and life, which are practical. So color and texture are important to me and storage is key.”

“I start off by thinking about the space in abstract; not browsing suppliers, but just thinking about how I want it to look,” says Cousins, who suggests adding at least one element that you really love or makes you smile when you see it.

That’s what happened in the sitting room, which originally featured a safe, neutral color that gave Cousins no joy. When she had the sofa reupholstered with an elegant peacock fabric, selecting the pink wall color was a natural step. Though she admits to having some initial doubts, Cousins knew she’d made the right decision when it was done.

Now the sitting room has become her favorite space. “It makes me smile when I go in there,” she says. “I love that the pink walls are juxtaposed with a Barcelona stool and chair and the skull artwork, which stops it all from being cloying and too cheesy.”

The drawing room, which functions as a quiet, TV-free space for adults, was also painted a paler shade at one point. “As it is a north-facing room, it felt cold and unwelcoming. I wanted it to feel like a [traditional English] gentleman’s club, but it was hard to find a navy that was dark enough,” she says. “In the end I chose a color more commonly used on front doors, and I love the effect achieved.” The designer took the dramatic shade one step further by using it (instead of traditional white) on the period plasterwork and baseboards.

Because she loves to entertain, Cousins appreciates the fact that their spacious house can easily accommodate family and friends. “Even in bad weather, the children can play with their friends in the playroom or their bedrooms, while the adults socialize in the kitchen,” she says.

At first, she thought people would either love or hate the mostly neutral kitchen because it has more industrial elements than one might expect from a family house in the countryside, such as exposed brickwork, cement floors, and stainless-steel



THIS PAGE FROM TOP:
The colorful English countryside home of designer Ann Marie Cousins features a vibrant dining room and playroom. Both spaces showcase Cousins’s amazing ability to blend elements in a completely refreshing way.







OPPOSITE: Color and texture are essential to the designer who likes to mix styles and price points as she did in her sitting room that features pink walls and a sofa covered in a peacock fabric. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pops of yellow illuminate the mostly neutral kitchen with an industrial look. In the fully renovated en suite bathroom, a smaller version of the chandelier in the master bedroom provides continuity. The soothing master bedroom includes pink pillows that perk up the visually quiet environment.

countertops. “I love it and I love how it is really family friendly by day, but a great space for adults to hang out with a glass of wine in the evening,” she says.

Her personal retreat also features more hushed tones than the rest of the house. For the master bedroom, dressing room, and en suite bath, she wanted the feel of a luxurious hotel suite for the designated adult space where she and her husband can relax. “Sometimes I’ll sit and have a cup of tea in our room after the children have gone to bed, and just wind down after a busy day,” she says. “The pink flowers and cushions give a jolt of color and keep it interesting without distracting from the soothing ambience.”

Installing the same chandelier in different sizes in the master bedroom and bathroom keeps a visual connection between the private spaces where the walls are painted the same soft color throughout. “By

keeping a close eye on my original vision, I make sure my choices remain cohesive,” says Cousins.

In their son’s bedroom, a rocket bed becomes the ultimate conversation piece. “It was an Ikea hack (Ikea Kura), which I designed for my space-mad son,” she says. “It was made by a local joiner using flexible plywood, and incorporates lighting inside the rocket and a blackboard and storage in the lower section.”

Though she’s willing to take decorating risks, Cousins still keeps an eye on the future with the practical side of her creations that are as fun as they are functional. “In the playroom, I wanted a gender-neutral color scheme that wasn’t too babyish,” she says. “The map wallpaper was a perfect way to introduce color and interest without fear of it falling out of favor too quickly. I figured it will last until the children are teens and the room can evolve around it.” ■