

# TIME FOR A CHANGE

*Extending a country cottage into a graceful family home sparked a new career as an interior designer for Claire Orders*

*Orangery*

An antique Chesterfield sofa, upholstered in a striking floral fabric, brings the outside in. **Sofa**, upholstered in Persian Pomegranate, GP&J Baker. Yellow **throw**, Tom Lane. Bagsie **sofa**, Loaf





**Staircase**

'I wanted to get every detail right, from the oak handrail to the elegant cast iron balusters,' says Claire. **Handrail and balusters**, Bespoke Handrails & Staircases



**AT HOME WITH**

**Owners** Claire Orders, an interior designer who runs Claire Orders Interiors, and her husband David, a derivative strategist. They live here with their children Oliver, seven, and Joshua, five.

**House** An extended and renovated five-bedroom house, formerly a two-up, two-down cottage, built in 1895.

Moving from London to Essex was already a significant life change for Claire Orders and her family, but factor in a major house renovation and, ultimately, a new career in interior design, and it's clear that the classic town-to-country shift delivered more than she and husband David could ever have dreamed of.

It all began in 2015, soon after the birth of their first child, when Claire was becoming increasingly disenchanted with living in London and began hankering after her roots in Essex.

'Although we were really pleased with the Victorian semi-detached house we'd renovated in Greenwich, when Oliver came along our lives changed significantly,' explains Claire. 'We needed a bigger garden and more space. I also felt a strong pull to be closer to my family.'

Unfortunately, trying to buy a house near Chelmsford wasn't as straightforward as Claire and David had envisaged, and they were pipped to the post twice, missing out on two family-sized period properties. They were determined to find another Victorian home to make their own, so when a dated two-up, two-down 19th-century cottage came on to the market, Claire knew she could reimagine and extend the property sympathetically to create a beautiful, bespoke home. 'Although the original cottage was definitely too small for us, it was attractive and had >

***Dining area***

A large, contemporary pendant light makes a statement above the dining table. Diner 125 **pendant light** in weathered brass, Original BTC. Suffolk **sideboard** in Charcoal, Neptune. Vintage Album Vilmorin **prints**, eBay







**Kitchen**

A Roman blind in a vintage-inspired floral fabric is a pretty touch. Roman blind in Josephine linen in Charcoal, Olive & Daisy



**Dining area**

Antique maps of Essex and south east London are a charming addition in this relaxed corner. **Armchair**, upholstered in Jura Stripe in Charcoal, Ian Mankin



**Hallway**

A striped cushion was made for the antique chair in this cosy corner. An antique Swedish Mora clock adds interest. **Cushion** in Live It Up fabric in Smoke by Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr Cloth

good bones, as well as a generous plot offering tremendous scope,' Claire explains.

Driving through the countryside on a sunny day in June 2015, with Oliver snoozing in his car seat, Claire was intrigued when she reached her destination. 'The cottage was charming and in a tranquil location, just off a leafy lane and surrounded by fields,' she says.

Her renovation instincts went into overdrive as she could see there was vast potential to extend at both the back and side of the property. Stepping inside, she was enchanted by its charm and period features, and couldn't wait to share her thoughts with David.

'I'd renovated six properties previously, so I realised that a major project lay ahead, but I couldn't bear to walk away from this bijou Victorian find,' Claire admits. 'I was bubbling over with ideas to renovate the existing cottage, but I knew I had to introduce the additions and changes sensitively. My idea was to knock down the 1970s extension at the back, move the staircase, reconfigure the layout and build a new extension, part of which would include a two-storey section,' she explains.

After a second viewing, the couple sold their London house and, after clinching the deal on the Essex cottage, moved nearby into rental accommodation. Crossing paths with architectural designer and surveyor Jim Little, of A&P Designs, proved extremely >

***Kitchen***

Antique brass pendant lights, originally sourced from a gentlemen's club in Berlin, were Claire's first purchase for this home. **Pendant lights**, TallBoy Interiors. Suffolk **kitchen units** in Charcoal and Quartz **worktops**, all Neptune



## ESSEX COTTAGE

### *Main bedroom*

The walls and ceiling were painted dark blue to create an enveloping retreat. **Walls and ceiling** painted in Hague Blue, Farrow & Ball. **Curtains** in Ashfield fabric, Linwood



“I WAS IN MY ELEMENT, LAYERING EACH SPACE TO GIVE IT DEPTH, WARMTH AND INTEREST”

### *En suite*

Having watched *The Holiday*, starring Cameron Diaz, Claire had her heart set on a roll top bath that would fit neatly into this space. Tubby Tub **bath**, Albion Bath Company

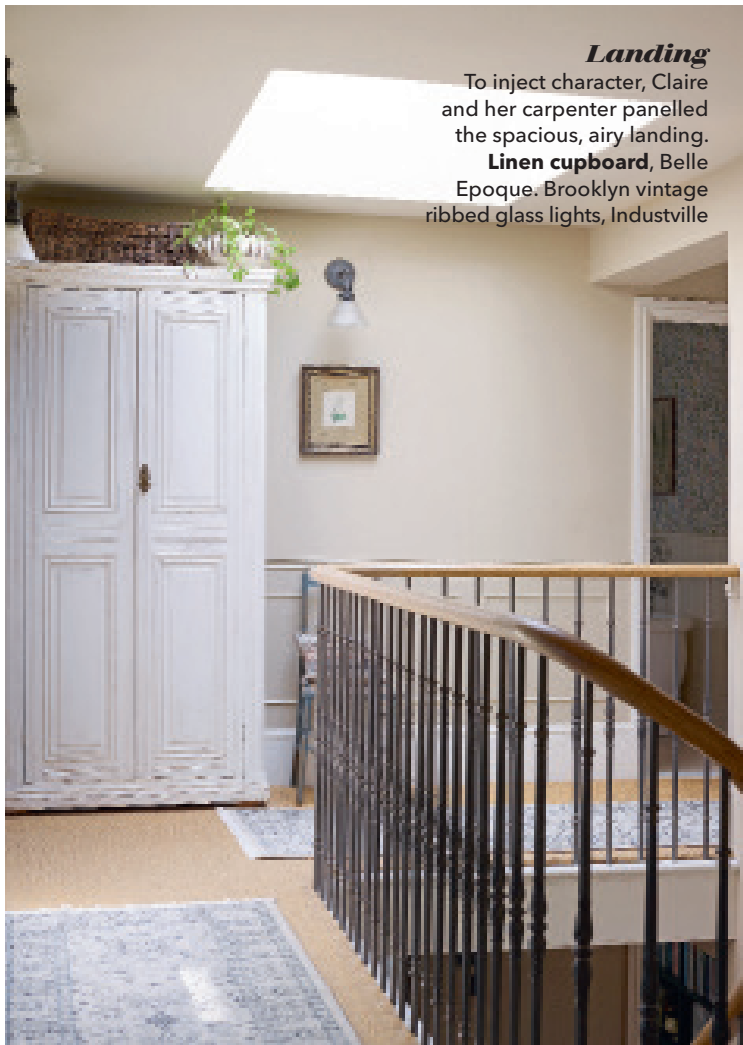


### *Main bedroom*

The wooden frame of the French-style bed and bedside table add warmth and texture. **Bed and bedside table**, both Feather & Black







**Landing**

To inject character, Claire and her carpenter panelled the spacious, airy landing. **Linen cupboard**, Belle Epoque. Brooklyn vintage ribbed glass lights, Industville



**Guest bedroom**

Floral prints have been teamed with smart stripes. **Prints**, Agapanthus Interiors. Broad Stripe **wallpaper**, Farrow & Ball. **Quilt**, IB Laursen.

fortuitous. 'Jim was brilliant and shared my vision of seamlessly blending the old cottage with the new additions, ever mindful of respecting the integrity of the original building,' says Claire.

Having finalised details, plans were submitted to and approved by Chelmsford County Council and building work started in April 2016, a month after their younger son, Joshua, was born. 'Juggling the demands of being both project manager and mum was interesting, but I love a challenge,' Claire confides.

From the outset, attention to detail was key and Claire went to great lengths to make sure materials were reused to honour the cottage's heritage. Bricks from the original house were saved and repurposed, and she sourced reclaimed slate and parquet flooring for the project. She went the extra mile to ensure every aspect of the new extension blended beautifully with the original cottage. Wooden sash windows were made for both the new part of the house and to replace the rotten ones in the cottage, bringing a cohesion to the exterior.

As the project took shape, Claire focused on creating a stylish yet very comfortable, welcoming home with a 'modern country house feel', influenced by contemporary hotels such as The Pig and Babington House.

Gleaning inspiration from cherished antiques, favourite fabrics, wallpapers and her countryside >



**Cloakroom**

Characterful tongue-and-groove panelling has been painted to complement this **wallpaper** with its bold thistle design. **Panelling** painted in Calke Green, Farrow & Ball. Thistle **wallpaper**, Cole & Son





**Family bathroom**  
Interior designer Claire knew this beautiful, nature-inspired wallpaper would look stunning above the panelling. **Flora wallpaper**, Borastapeter. **Bath**, Heritage Bathrooms.



**Guest bedroom**  
Another enchanting wallpaper was the starting point for this pretty scheme. **Daisy wallpaper** in Manilla/Coral, Morris & Co. **Bed**, Feather & Black. **Bedside table**, Scumble Goosie

**ON OUR DOORSTEP**

**Visit...** 'RHS Hyde Hall ([rhs.org.uk](https://rhs.org.uk)) boasts wonderful views of the Essex countryside. We always enjoy our family trips here, and it's regarded as one of the most beautiful gardens in the east of England.'

**Shop at...** 'Abigail's Delicatessen & Lifestyle ([abigails.co.uk](https://abigails.co.uk)) in Ingatestone. The deli and lifestyle boutique are two family-run businesses, offering delicious food and beautiful, attractively displayed homewares and gift ideas.'

**Eat at...** 'Galvin Green Man ([galvinrestaurants.com](https://galvinrestaurants.com)), close to Great Waltham, it's run by Michelin-starred chef brothers, Chris and Jeff Galvin. The Green Man has recently been awarded The Best Pub in Essex County and The Best Pub in Great Britain 2021.'

surroundings, Claire was able to thoughtfully give each room its own identity. Pretty sprigged wallpaper decorates the bathrooms; vibrant blue and red brightens the orangery sitting room; and a deep blue tone flows from the kitchen to the main bedroom.

'I'm drawn to colour, pattern, texture and natural materials, and was in my element, layering each space to give it depth, warmth and interest,' Claire says. By June 2017, she had put the finishing touches to her timeless, elegant schemes and the family moved into their lovingly designed home.

That Christmas, Claire was encouraged to start her own interior design business, following a visit from Jim and his wife Penny. 'I'll never forget seeing Jim's expression when I took him on a little tour of our completed home,' Claire reveals. 'He was really impressed and, very kindly, told me that I had such flair for design that I ought to help other people.'

In May 2018, this idea came to fruition and Claire Orders Interiors was launched. Claire hasn't looked back since. 'As well as creating a home we all love, this project was the catalyst for a long-held dream,' she says. 'It has been life-changing. When people come to the house for a visit and say they can't tell the difference between the old cottage and the new additions, it makes our journey feel even more worthwhile and incredibly special.'

FEATURE JANET MCMEEKIN PHOTOGRAPHS RACHAEL SMITH