

CHANCE IS A FINE THING

Fate took a hand in the decision to buy this Perthshire cottage, but everything about its revamp has been carefully planned and meticulously executed

Photography Neale Smith Art direction Gillian Welsh Words Catherine Coyle



Pat Renson believes in serendipity, especially when she looks back at the series of events that brought her to the Perthshire village of Auchterarder. The interior designer was at a point in her personal life where she was ready to move house; children growing up and leaving home, and a sharp focus on her career, had persuaded her to look further afield and, after a get-together with friends at Gleneagles, she saw in the surrounding area a buoyant and flourishing location in which to set up home.

"I believe it was a set of coincidences that brought me here," she smiles. "Friends kept telling me what an up-and-coming area this was. I also had a lot of clients here, all of whom loved the town. My daughters got jobs at the local equestrian centre. It all seemed to fall into place."

She started searching for property in the village, with a tight budget and an even tighter wish list. For the first time in her life, she was seeking a property that would fulfil her own requirements. The house she found – a detached cottage on a main road – ticked all the boxes and, after a spell living in it to get a feel for the space, she began to make her mark.

"The previous owners had had the essentials done, putting in central heating and the bathroom, and having the place rewired," she says. ▶

DETAILS

What A refurbished detached cottage
Where Auchterarder, Perthshire
Interior designer Pat Renson Interiors



[Left] The kitchen is by Sculleries of Stockbridge. [Right] Ralph Lauren wallpaper works in harmony with the striped upholstered armchair. [Previous pages] Pat worked with local landscaper Derek Conway on the garden design, where substantial outdoor furniture has given her what is effectively another room. Inside, the flooring is by Russwood, with contemporary pendant lights by Buster & Punch



Her designer's eye had spotted a lot of potential that was ripe for unearthing, and she was soon figuring out how to reconfigure the layout to better suit her needs, starting at the top. The attic hadn't been touched for 60 years but Pat knew this could be an impressive space that would add both value and character. "At some point in the past someone had put up partitions in the attic to create storage cupboards. There had also been a fire there some years ago. When I moved in, it was a warren of rooms with creepy wallpaper that was still charred from the fire. You had to duck to get into the space. But I knew it could be something special."

She got rid of the false walls and opened up the space,

inserting Velux windows to instantly increase the amount of light coming in, but leaving the staircase in place so there would be no need to apply for building consent.

The top floor is now like a self-contained loft apartment, with a kingsize bed at one end and a TV snug at the other. Pale oak flooring from Russwood bounces the light from the Velux windows around the room.

Pat employed an oversized mirror as a show-stopping headboard and then had one of her specialists build the

bed to fit. Piet Hein Eek's Scrapwood wallpaper gives the loft a contemporary rustic edge, helped by oversized wall sconces flanking the bed.

Down a level, the bedrooms speak of the designer's personal style. "Family and friends think that I have quite masculine style," she says. Certainly her preference is for 'no frills', but that doesn't preclude her house from feeling homely and comfortable. On the contrary, the bedrooms are pared back but they are also deeply

luxurious. In the master suite, for example, Zoffany wallpaper offsets the detail found in the beautiful fabrics – Larsen linen and Mark Alexander voile on the windows, and Mulberry cushions on the bed – and the original artworks by Gail Pope.

Pat took inspiration from her daughter Sam, herself a contemporary artist, in the guest bedroom. "Art is an important part of my life," says the designer. "It is such a central part of any home, but it's always very ▶



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specific to the person who owns it, because it can evoke a memory or an emotion in them or just a general ‘love this’ feeling. As such, it will always work because it is specific to the owner.

“I don’t buy art as an investment,” she adds. “I buy a picture because there is something about it that brings something into my life and I like it. It’s as simple as that. Generally the colours and style fit the interior, which is important to me.”

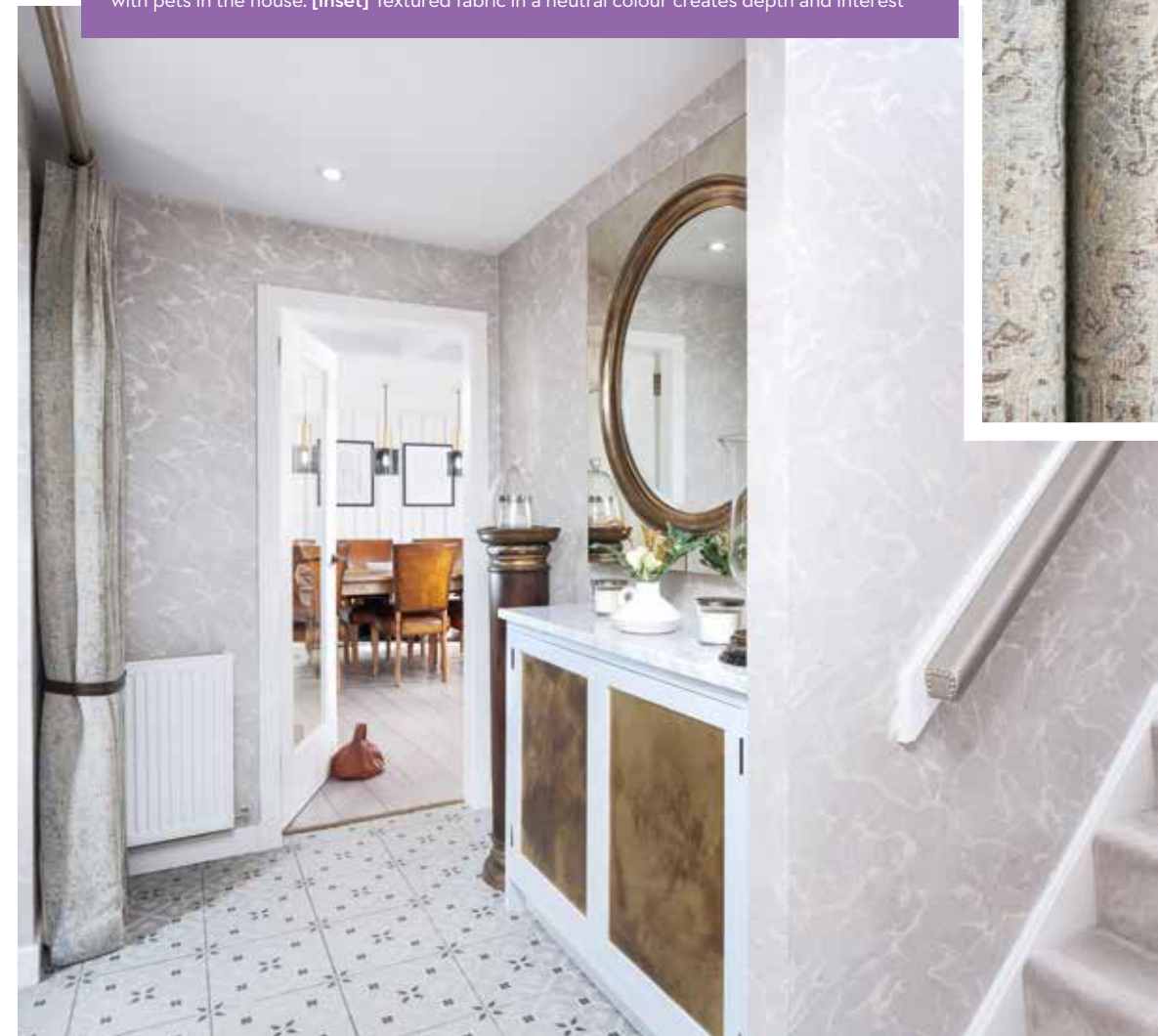
It was the gentle hues of one of Sam’s paintings that helped to steer Pat when it came to devising the guest room’s scheme, with Carl Robinson’s Venetian plaster-effect wallpaper in white working in harmony with the picture. The curtains, in Zoffany’s new Water Iris fabric,

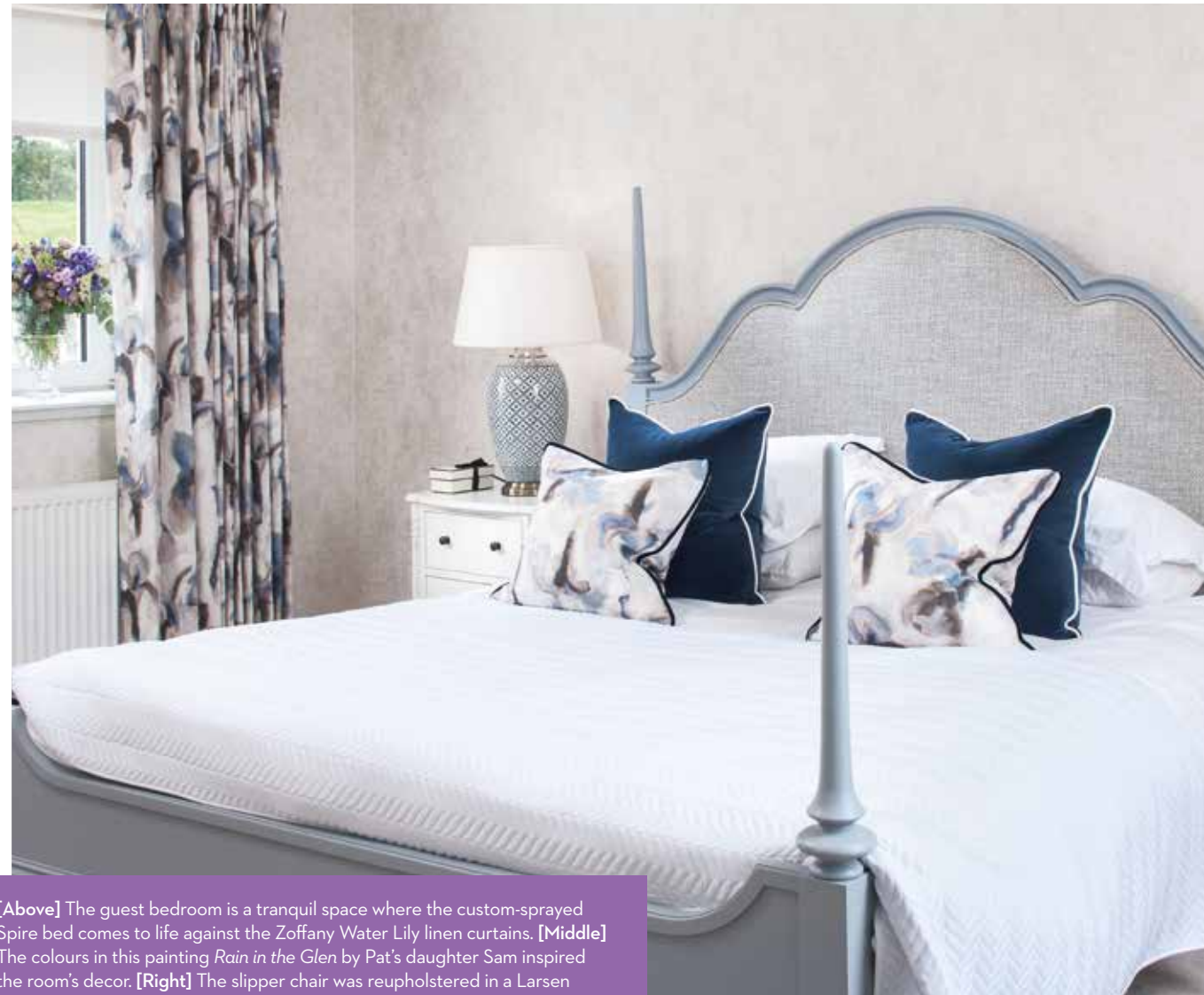
complete the tranquil atmosphere.

“I don’t believe that you can teach someone how to be creative. You can give them the ingredients but it’s up to them what they do with those ingredients.” Kit Kemp, she continues, is a huge inspiration. In her previous career in retail, Pat worked closely with Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop. When they’d meet up in London to discuss work, Roddick would insist Pat visit some of Kemp’s early projects, such as the Charlotte Street Hotel. “Kit Kemp was never formally trained, but the way she mixes old and new, layering textures and colours and patterns – it’s incredible.”

A rejig of the existing layout was essential in the bathroom. But that wasn’t a problem – it’s one of the ▶

[Left] A painting by Kim Canale blends with the tones Pat has used in the sitting room. The sofas were reupholstered with a Designers Guild fabric. The side tables by the Libra Company. [Right] Tiles (from Original Style) are an unusual choice for the hallway floor, but it makes sense with pets in the house. [Inset] Textured fabric in a neutral colour creates depth and interest





[Above] The guest bedroom is a tranquil space where the custom-sprayed Spire bed comes to life against the Zoffany Water Lily linen curtains. [Middle] The colours in this painting *Rain in the Glen* by Pat's daughter Sam inspired the room's decor. [Right] The slipper chair was reupholstered in a Larsen fabric with contrasting charcoal velvet piping. [Bottom right] A detail of the headboard, which is covered in Larsen linen to match the chair

rooms in any house that Pat loves to lavish with attention. The tight floor space has been maximised by moving the bath (an opulent freestanding nickel-finish tub from the Hurlingham Bath Company) to sit under the window. The frosted panes were replaced with plain glass to increase the natural light entering the room and to access the views across the hills. A touch of glamour is found in the glass-legged console sink by Imperial Bathrooms, while Eichholtz's black leather mirror frame and wall lights are decadent without being fussy.

On the ground floor, the more formal sitting room is elegant while still feeling snug and enticing. Isle Mill fabric curtains and Designers Guild Vintage Damask wallpaper are a foil to Kim Canale's dramatic painting. A bespoke sofa in Designers Guild velvet and antique

mirror tables by the Libra Company keep the scheme balanced, effortlessly straddling the line between classic and modern furnishings.

"I only viewed the house twice before I put in an offer," Pat recalls. "The first time it was dark and raining and I wasn't too keen, but the second time was during the day and the light, bright ambience sold it to me.

"The house was affordable as well – and I don't like to miss a bargain," the designer admits. "I have never bought 'conformist' properties – every house I've ever purchased and refurbished has been rural and run-down, or previously used for something else, or in an unusual spot. I don't know if I would enjoy living in the middle of a load of other houses. The unexpected qualities of this house, which I've enhanced, were always there but no one

saw them."

Pat knew that she would be spending some of her time working from home and that, with visiting family and dogs, it made sense for the house to have a better connection with the back garden, away from the road at the front of the property. She designed the garden herself and worked with local landscape gardener Derek Conway to pull together the urban-styled space. What was previously a characterless, empty yard is now used, and enjoyed, all the time. She has been clever with it; aware that the footprint was limited, she has created defined areas to make it multifunctional and give the impression that there's more to it than there really is. On the raised decking section, oversized furniture and large storm lanterns make it feel like an outdoor living ▶



room. Down a step is paving, where mature planting and accents of colour act as way of enclosing this part of the garden. Oak planters were purchased online and left outside to weather before being put to use as raised beds, providing definition and adding vertical elements that again distract the eye from the limited space on the ground.

The views from the back are beautiful and it feels rural, even though it's in town. It also gets the sun for a large part of the day, which inspired another alteration to the house. The old back door in the kitchen was replaced with new aluminium-framed French doors by Garden Rooms at Creative, and the layout of the kitchen itself was changed to make the most of the new windows.

"I opened up the kitchen to make it more sociable – we're a family that likes to sit around the table and chat, eat and drink, so changing the flow of the downstairs and optimising the space was definitely the right decision."

Not a fan of cupboards, Pat approached Sculleries of Stockbridge to design and install a kitchen that would marry her love of modern lines with traditional elements. The larder units, hand-painted in a grey-blue tone from Designers Guild, are simple and discreet, and brass door hardware by Buster & Punch lends a modern edge. The newly extended breakfast bar is topped with a rich ▶



[Clockwise from top right] Up in the attic, the bespoke bed fits its nook perfectly, with a wicker box serving as an ottoman; the antique chair was found in skip years ago and has been repaired and restored; Piet Hein Eek's Scrapwood wallpaper has the appearance of tongue and groove; the staircase has remained in its original position, with rooflights inserted to maximise natural light; the leather suitcases were purchased at auction and serve as additional storage





[Above] The bathroom layout has been altered to maximise the floor space, with the nickel Hurlingham Bath Company tub taking prime position beneath the window. [Left] the console sink is by Imperial Bathrooms. [Top left] The leather-framed mirror and wall lights are by Eichholtz

Carrara marble from F Jones Ltd, with a smart brass panel inserted at the front to keep it feeling fresh.

“I think it reflects my personality,” says Pat of the room. “It’s contemporary but relaxed.” The kitchen table shows signs of years of use (as well it might – she has had it since her children were tiny), but it works brilliantly with vintage leather dining chairs. Ralph Lauren’s classic striped wallpaper and a trio of industrial Original BTC pendant lights from Chelsea Harbour mean there’s no danger of this becoming a typical country kitchen. “I’m always adding and updating

the rooms – as a designer, I can’t help it,” laughs Pat.

The wood-burner in the dining area was a necessary addition; coming here from a large farmhouse equipped with an Aga, she felt it was essential to have a focal point around which everyone could gather. “I like nice things but I’m not precious. Marble will mark and brass will tarnish. They’re just commodities. I like the Prada-Primark mix – it gives character to a home,” she laughs. “The fabrics I use are natural and wear well over time. I think my style is classic and won’t date. I don’t go for trendy.” ■