





The 18th-century screen on the left is made from pieces of Chinese export wallpaper stuck on panels. Around the table are 1820s klismos chairs and those in the manner of George Bullock

MASTER OF THE HUNT

Antique dealer and interior consultant Edward Hurst tracked down his house, in Dorset, at a meet with the hounds in its top yard. While his wife, Jane, takes the reins in the garden, he sources the 'suitably unusual' wares to go within. Jasper Conran, for one, was quick to pick up the scent. Text and photography: Tim Beddow



This page, clockwise from top: in the sitting room, to the left, an original 18th-century French 'sleeping chair' stands before a Chinese export cabinet for the Indian subcontinent, with its Mogul-inspired stand; Edward bought the 18th-century bust from antique dealer Geoffrey Stead; in the hall he replaced modern oak floorboards with encaustic tiles. An early 19th-century map of Dorset hangs on the wall



This page, clockwise from top: the sycamore-topped kitchen table is surrounded by 19th-century West Country stickback chairs; Edward designed the lean-to, towering above a profusion of grasses and herbs planted by Jane, and had it made locally by a blacksmith; he bought the dog painting, *Tim*, about 30 years ago. On the back Edward later saw the painter/owner's words: 'please do not sell'



MUCH HAS CHANGED in the lives of Edward and Jane Hurst since their house appeared in this magazine in December 2006. For Edward, an antique dealer and previously confirmed man of letters, has had to embrace – or perhaps that’s too strong a word for it – the digital age. These days an iPad and BlackBerry have to be on hand at all times.

This, he explains, has been driven entirely by his clients’ insistence on him being constantly available. ‘I have become very speedy on the keypad,’ he says smilingly, as if half expecting a reward. Jane, meanwhile, has forsaken ceramics for landscape gardening, creating ravishing naturalistic borders, which, thanks to skilful use of perennials, dazzle throughout the year.

As a result of the aforementioned piece, Edward has also expanded into ‘interior consulting’, though ‘I cannot call myself a designer or decorator,’ he says. Such work is about providing clients with an extension of his own vision rather than serving up outré schemes based on the latest fashions. But more on that later.

Oh, and they have moved house. Phew.

Although less than ten leagues west of Coombe Bissett, where they originally lived, the area north of the market town of Blandford Forum was unfamiliar to Edward, despite his zigzagging across the country in search of treasure every week. But when he first saw the place one winter’s day in 2008, while at a meet with the hounds in its top yard, ‘I realised it was exactly the house I had wanted since I was

eight,’ he explains. Its position, size, outbuildings and yards had been in his mind’s eye, yet he had come across it quite by chance. Even better, the soil was greensand: for Jane, the ultimate.

The timing was right, for at Coombe Bissett Edward says he had more or less come to a halt. ‘There was really nothing more to do with it,’ and Jane wanted more space to experiment with planting. ‘So my heart sank,’ says Edward, ‘when I was told its sale was imminent.’ The then owner, a farmer, said to come back only when he had the cash. ‘We threw our house on the market the next day and it sold within a month,’ he says. Edward then came back. Fortunately, the prospective buyers were prevaricating. ‘We struck a deal over a pork pie and a bottle of claret in the kitchen,’ he says. If only buying a house was always so civilised.

For Edward the house’s beauty lies in the fact that ‘nothing terrible had happened to the interior. Previous owners had been gentle, thankfully, and not knocked down walls to make big rooms.’ The original part – now the snug/office – dates back to 1720 and it was extended outwards and upwards, ‘so by 1820 when the smart façade was erected the core was encased in three periods of building’.

Edward’s approach to every interior, whether for himself or a client, is careful and measured, and there’ll be plenty of experimentation with colour washes before commitment. It is this, he has discovered, combined with the quality of paintings and furniture he sources, that



Top: in the foreground of the study, the old farm office, an 1830s English stool sits next to an armchair (1840) with its original kelim cover.

Above: circling a hunting print in one corner is a series of semi-abstract Dorset landscapes by artist Liz Newby Vincent, bought by Jane. Opposite: a mountain rabbit, which Edward says had been stuffed ‘so badly it made me laugh’, perches by the entrance





This page, clockwise from top: Edward and Jane's son, Tom, also has the collecting bug, as can be seen in his jam-packed room; the east façade was built in the 1820s to give the house a more cohesive appearance; a 1760 Chippendale-style saddle-seat chair sits in the first-floor corridor. Opposite: above the bath hangs a mezzotint of *The Ladies Waldegrave*, after the original painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1780





sets him apart. 'It is a curious combination of luck, hard work, contacts and knowledge,' he admits, 'and it always gives me great joy to find the right thing, however simple, for the right place.'

The story of Edward and Jane's house caught the eye of Jasper Conran soon after he had bought an early Georgian manor nearby, Ven House (*WoI* Oct 2011), and led to a terrific collaboration. 'Edward has a magician's knack of conjuring up tales of the furniture and objects he has found, combined with an academic's sure knowledge of his subject, which all goes to make time spent in his company a wonderful experience,' says Jasper. 'I live in dread of the house ever being finished.'

This, in turn, led to Edward assisting Lord Shaftesbury with his restoration of the neglected family estate at Wimborne St Giles (*WoI* Aug 2012) and recently, with Patrick Kinmonth, at Evgeny Lebedev's house in Hampton Court (*WoI* Oct 2014).

'It was a huge springboard for me, helping Jasper,' explains Edward. He is fortunate, of course, that his clients respect and seek his advice mainly because they have seen what he's done in his own house. You wouldn't find Edward painting a Georgian entrance hall fluorescent pink, however tempting the commission.

Some of the contents of Coombe Bissett were sold to its new owners, and other pieces went via his 'by invite only' warehouse (a converted chicken shed) near Salisbury. 'I knew I would have fun doing it again here,' says Edward. The hunt –

for him almost the most exciting part of any job – was on for suitably unusual pieces. 'The criteria is still as strict as ever, if not more so now,' he says. And if not always in perfect condition, what he selects should at least be in a state that he can imperceptibly revive it. Little needed to be done to the house, apart from mend some holes in the roof and reinstate chimneys.

It has taken nearly five years for him to feel satisfied that the colours ('always slightly quirky,' he says, 'away from current fashion'), paintings, rugs and furniture are what and where they should be. Of course, it is ongoing. His painter, Karen Naismith Robertson, 'is a genius with colour, grinding up her own pigments, and is the only person I know who can accurately match an (existing) colour to a paintwash'.

While Edward manages the interior aspects of their life, Jane's role is equally happily defined. 'Edward is master of what goes on in the house,' she says. 'I am mistress in the garden.' There is overlap, of course. Edward recalls his nervousness about whether Jane would approve of a stone bust he brought back to the house recently and was very relieved when she did. It now sits in their living room.

But when all is done, dusted and in place, with 'nothing more to do', I just wonder whether Edward will long once more for another house of his childhood dreams that he may happen across. Only time will tell. But I hope so ■

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Top: in the spare bedroom a George II statuary-marble cistern sits on its mahogany stand at the foot of an 1880 brass bed. Opposite: Edward and Jane's room features an 18th-century bed with its original iron rail and pagoda top, which still has pieces of fabric attached. Above: a painting by Edward Handley-Read of shoes on a table (1932) hangs on the wall, beyond a curtain from Tissus d'Hélène

