



In a discreet corner of the kitchen a second sink makes a handy place for rinsing tableware before placing it in the dishwasher.



Best of ALL WORLDS

A strong, collaborative relationship between client and interior designer was the vital ingredient in the creation of this perfect weekend retreat

FEATURE AND STYLING JILL SHEARER PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES BALSTON



MAIN The bespoke kitchen by TJ Joinery is painted in Hardwick White by Farrow & Ball.

The lights above the island are by Eichholtz

LEFT Topiary plants in terracotta planters line the sunken courtyard, whilst some 200 recessed lights create a magical place to sit on a warm summer's evening.



By his own admission, Andrew Oakwell is not an easy man to please. "I have very firm views," he states. So finding the right location and choosing an interior design to work with on his weekend home was never going to be a matter of browsing through the telephone directory or wandering into a local interior design studio.

With his primary home in central London, being within commutable distance was key to Andrew, and although he wanted somewhere peaceful and secluded he did not want what he would describe as "a house in a field": somewhere without any neighbours. With characteristic persistence, he tracked down the perfect edge-of-village spot – tucked away down a quiet lane, within reach of the excellent village pub and restaurant.

When he saw the house it was far from being the light-filled, elegant, comfortable haven it is today but Andrew was attracted by its setting and the honey-coloured Cotswold-stone buildings that ▶

ABOVE The upholstered bar stools are covered in Velvet Ancient Tartan by Mulberry, and introduce a soft, luxurious element to the kitchen.

LEFT Sliding doors join the dining room and garden seamlessly when fully opened.

Forming a link between the kitchen and the sitting room, the dining room not only has sliding doors onto the garden but also has beautiful antique mirrors on the back wall to further enhance the feeling of light. The bird-cage chandeliers are by Alexander & Pearl.





ABOVE The curtain fabric in the sitting room - also used for some of the cushions - is Marlena Plum by William Yeoward, and the lamps are from Artemis Home.

LEFT Two day beds by India Jane in the snug make a cosy place to sit and watch television. The plaid throws are by Johnstons of Elgin and the fabric for the curtains and the cushions on the day beds is Montjoy Sage by Mulberry.

RIGHT A wonderful place to display artefacts, the bespoke bookshelves were made by a local joiner.





wrapped themselves around a sunny courtyard. "I liked the approach," he recalls. "The house didn't reveal itself until I got out of my car and walked down the steps – there was a wonderful 'secret garden' feel that I found very attractive."

Once the purchase was complete, Andrew set about drawing up plans to transform the property – which had been divided into two separate dwellings – into a single house, and to add a separate garage. "I knew what I wanted to achieve, so I commissioned a builder to build the garage, telling him that if I was happy with his work, I would give him the contract for the house." Fortunately, the build went smoothly, and the builder swiftly moved on to work on the house.

Although he had his own ideas about the space, Andrew engaged an interior design firm that he had worked with before on a London property to create self-contained guest accommodation in the garage building. "They did a competent job," he explains, "but I quickly realised that they were better suited to slick London apartments than to a country house, and

I was keen to respect the age and the architecture of the original building." Having seen the work of interior design company, Alexander James he felt it combined the sympathetic warmth and elegance that he wanted in his country home, and when he met one of its designers, Natalie, they hit it off immediately. "The relationship between designer and client is all-important," he explains. "It's a bit like your hairdresser: you need to get on on a personal level in order to work with them professionally."

Although the house had already started to take shape as a single property when Natalie came on board – Andrew had by then linked the two halves of the house with a light-filled dining room – her brief was to unite it all visually and create a series of spaces that flowed. She came up with a scheme that breathed warmth and light into the house and she introduced colour, pattern and texture to create a comfortable, flexible living space that would work equally well whether Andrew wanted to have a houseful of guests or a quiet weekend by himself. ▶

ABOVE
A double-aspect fireplace gives the sitting room and entrance hall a warm glow at the same time when lit. The walls are painted in Stony Ground by Farrow & Ball, and the coffee table is by Hanbel.



Generous window treatments add a luxurious feel

ABOVE Kirkby Laser fabric by Romo creates a luxurious padded wall in place of a headboard in the master bedroom. The walls are painted in Charleston Gray by Farrow & Ball and the fabric of the bespoke quilted bedspread is Kashmir Linen in blue by Zoffany.

RIGHT The French armchairs in the bedroom are by Wychwood Designs, and are upholstered in Hebrides linen in blue by Design Forum.

Although Andrew knew the type of style he wanted, Natalie had strong views on how the interiors should look and persuaded him to add some bold wallpapers and dashes of warm, vibrant colour. "Sometimes I was right, and sometimes I was wrong," Andrew admits. "But Natalie always had the courage to tell me when she thought I was wrong. We never fell out, though; it was the perfect working relationship."

The scheme works perfectly: dramatic, sculptural lighting prevents the ceiling height from feeling impersonal whilst generous window treatments add a luxurious feel. "The important thing that Natalie got right from the beginning was the scale," recalls Andrew. "When the lights for the sitting room arrived on site, the builders all thought they were far too big – but they're perfect. Anything smaller would just have got lost."

The final stage was completing the garden. Walls were built to contain the courtyard and a line of spruce trees were felled to let in more light. As well as having an irrigation system installed to keep the garden watered during the week, Natalie created an exterior lighting scheme with some 200 recessed lights in the terrace and steps. "It's magical at night," Andrew enthuses. "This summer will be the first time I will properly be able to use it, and I'm really looking forward to entertaining out there." ■

