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Déjà vu
in a house
of
art
history...



TEXT BY VALERIE COTTLE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MOGGY



FOR ANYONE interested in the history of art to enter this, one of the most distinguished of the Island's 'stately homes', is a little disconcerting. You haven't been here before, or certainly not since the present owner moved in, and yet at every turn there are curiously familiar sights.

Can that really be a Van Dyck portrait of Charles I hanging in the hall? Have you not seen that lovely Pre-Raphaelite 'Pandora' by John William Waterhouse, hanging over the

drawing room fireplace, somewhere before? Isn't that Claude Lorrain's 'Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba' next to it, and John William Godward's 'Tambourine Girl' on the wall opposite? And up in the master bedroom, surely that's François Gérard's 'Cupid kissing Psyche'?

Well, yes and no.

The present owner is a keen art enthusiast, and in fact a patron of Manchester City Art Gallery. As such he is

The drawing room art collection includes superb quality copies of Claude Lorrain's 'Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba' (left) and John William Waterhouse's 'Pandora' (over fireplace). The doorway in the corner of the room leads to the library - it had previously been blocked up, and the Village Workshop made a new mahogany door for it

The master bedroom (far right) is papered in handpainted paper from Cole's 'Chandos' collection and has a copy of Gérard's 'Cupid Kissing Psyche' hanging on the wall. Its mirrored en suite bathroom (right) echoes the gothic theme. One of the guest rooms (below) is papered in a soft cherry-pink Toile de Jouy by Nobilis



Local tradesmen and decorators worked here for a full year

entitled to borrow from their collection and has an enchanting portrait, 'Summer', by the minor but delightful artist T. Martine Ronaldson, hanging in his bedroom.

But almost every other painting in the house is a copy of something quite famous; some bought at auction or from dealers, others, like the Lorrain, and a Canaletto in the dining-room, specially commissioned. 'Older paintings are all out of copyright,' he explains, 'so all you have to do is get the owner's permission to have very good quality photographs taken of them.' The rest is up to the talented copyists, who are working all over the world. Some of the best copies here came from Studio Canales in Spain, and were bought through Bonham's in London.

You know that the Van Dyck and the Lorrain are in the National Gallery, the Gérard in the Louvre, but this could, you think, be the original 'Pandora', which you know is in private hands. It is of remarkably fine quality, and you only feel convinced that it isn't the original when you sit in front

of it with Christopher Wood's book 'Victorian Painting' in your hands. He uses Waterhouse's 'Pandora' on his front cover, and there are just the subtlest of differences between the one on the wall and the one on the book.

After the owner bought this house he had local tradesmen, craftsmen and decorators working in it for a full year, to create exactly the setting he wanted for his life and his art collection. Steve Dimelior of House & Home in Douglas played an important part, not only in supplying all the soft furnishings but also in introducing and coordinating the skills of all the other people who worked on it.

Before moving to the Isle of Man the owner had lived for 20 years in an equally grand house in Lancashire. Not only did his furniture fit very well in here, but he decided that he would feel instantly 'at home' if he had some of the decoration of the old house exactly reproduced in the new. This is exactly what has been done, particularly in the drawing-room. Here Steve has hung cream and terracotta curtains in 'Floral Urn', from Zoffany with an edging from their Trimmings collection, and in the dining-room next door Tiju Silk by Osborne & Little, in a rich brick-red colour with a gold thread running through it.

Carpeting throughout these ground floor rooms is pale ivory by Ryalux; in the



drawing room sofas and chairs have ivory covers and the walls have been double-lined and then washed in a soft cream, colour-matched by Sanderson to the curtain fabric. The only piece of furniture acquired on the Island is a large and lavish gilded console table, to the left of the fireplace, which was bought from Chrystal's salerooms in Ramsey.

There is so much colour in the paintings here that there was really no need for any more in the furnishings, but there is a handsome set of pierced brass screens and irons in the fireplace, and an extra glint of luxury has been added by a gold-and-terracotta stencilled border on the ceiling. It was designed and cut by Mary Pollard, who works part-time for House & Home, and applied by expert decorator Tony Ashcroft whose team did the painting and papering throughout the house.

The dining-room has been papered with a hand-print from Alexander Beauchamp's Damask Collection – an interesting local connection, since the firm's founder Karen Beauchamp lived and worked in the Isle of Man at the beginning of her highly successful career. She has recently taken over the long-established wallpaper firm of Cole's.

One of the most ambitious innovations in this house was the complete re-building of the library. This was planned by Steve Dimelor and Paul Bloom, whose Village

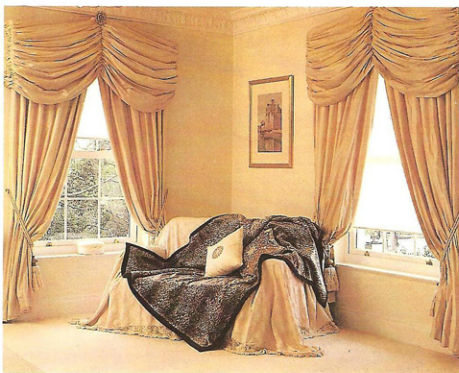
Workshop in Laxey carried out the work. A doorway from the drawing-room, which had been blocked off, had to be re-opened, and the door was replaced by a fine new one in mahogany. A canopy ceiling has been created, four columns with Corinthian capitals have been inserted, and the room has been shelved and panelled throughout in Brazilian mahogany.

There are many more rooms downstairs, although the house is not quite as big as it looks from the outside. Village Workshop also panelled a study in Douglas fir, and there is a games room which Steve Dimelor has lined in dark red felt from Lewis & Wood, with curtains in a joky playing-card pattern from the new V & A Collection. There are two kitchens, the original one which still has a huge open fireplace and a long oak table in it – wonderful at Christmas time – and a more modern one with a large and comfortable breakfast-room adjoining it. Here Village Workshop built glass-fronted cabinets, paintwork is in Zoffany crimson and cream, and there are curtains in cream, red and buff in Baker's Malmaison design.

Corridors leading to these back quarters used to be dark and rather dismal, but they have been painted a fresh, sunny yellow, floored with crisp black-and-white chequerboard Original Style tiles, and very cleverly lit with down-lighting creating soft washes of illumination. The owner has a

A magnificent illustration of the levels of skill now available in the Isle of Man

Previous page; the elaborate plasterwork and carved pine fireplace of the drawing room (top) are complemented by curtains in blue and gold damask from Crowson's Palais Royale collection. On the landing dainty gilt chairs stand between theatrically swagged double cross-over curtains in Sanderson's Lymington damask. In the marble-floored hallway Monkwell's black 'Ruskin' velvet is married with gold silk from James Brindley and bullion fringe by Phoenix in an asymmetrical design. This page: the curtains in the master bedroom (right) have a remarkably subtle mix of two closely-toning James Brindley silks; the crocheted cotton throw is by Thomas Frederick, the mock fur throw James Brindley's 'Snow Leopard', backed with fake moleskin. The cream silk cushion is from Sanderson's 'Morocco' range, and the other was made from an Indian wedding dress by Jo Edwards of London (all from the House & Home Design Shop in Onchan)



Accustomed to large houses, Stephen Dimelor is not afraid to use theatrical effects and dramatic accessories



An unusual window treatment in the dining room, where Osborne & Little's acanthus design 'Tijou' in gold and red has been cut on the bias to drape like a sarong above curtains of plain red James Brindley silk

theatrical effects and dramatic accessories. The owner of this house designed it himself, and the curtain treatments Stephen has created perfectly complement the rooms.

Amongst the most innovative are to be seen as soon as you enter the black-and-white marble floored porch, where convex gilt mirrors on either side of the front door are flanked by windows asymmetrically curtained in black and gold. A heavy single fall of Monkwell's black 'Ruskin' velvet is backed by golden James Brindley silk, the tail above it trimmed with a small black bullion fringe by Phoenix; the curtain pole has a gilded finial to match the antique mirror.

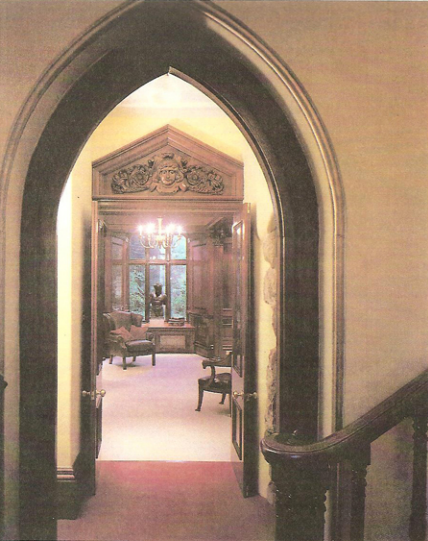
The drawing room, which runs the full depth of the house and has windows on three sides, has elaborate plasterwork in classical style and a carved pine fireplace with an antique gilt overmantel mirror. The gold has been picked up in the rich fabric chosen for the curtains, where it is teamed with dark blue in a traditional damask from Crowson's Palais Royale collection. The curtain

design involves a single swag to show off the large-scale motif of the fabric, and tails lined with a plain gold glazed chintz. To do justice to these sumptuous fabrics, the tie-backs take the form of gilded pineapples.

An Indian silk rug showing a hunting scene in this room also came from the House & Home Design Shop, and for the photograph on page 19 we dressed the sofas with their Kandola silk cushions; the small dark blue ones are embroidered in gold with bees and signs of the zodiac, and all are lined and interlined for a perfect finish.

In the formal dining room Osborne & Little's lovely acanthus design 'Tijou' in gold and red (if you see 'Shakespeare in Love' again, look out for it cut into a beautifully rich bodice). Here it has been cut on the bias to drape almost like a sarong above curtains of plain red James Brindley silk.

At the heart of the house is an entirely surprising room, a heavily beamed snug with a wood-burning stove set into a large stone fireplace. It is a complete contrast to the cool



taste for classical-style statuary, some pieces bought from antique shops, others quality reproductions from sources such as Anthony Redmile in London. One piece stands on up-lit shelving to provide an interesting focal point at the turn of a corridor leading to the kitchen area.

Upstairs – the two staircases and landings are warmed with red carpeting, and a suit of armour stands on the gallery above the main hall – there are eight bedrooms, all en suite, and decorated in different styles. The master bedroom is calm, cool and spacious, decorated with handprinted 'Phoenix' wallpaper from Cole's Chandos collection. The curtains have been made by House & Home in an antique-style linen velvet by Romo, with a gold-threaded Rheims trimming from Suzanne Houle's Les Passementeries collection. Above them are fixed gilded pelmets from Hang-Ups Window Accessories, also the source of curtain poles and finials elsewhere in the house.

After a full year's work by numerous local tradesmen, this magnificent home is now finished and completely to its owner's taste. The entire project has been carried out to the highest possible standards and is a magnificent illustration of the levels of skill and expertise in this area now available in the Isle of Man.

View from the hall into the library (left), entirely panelled in Brazilian mahogany by Laxey's Village Workshop. The carving above the doorway was sourced in England and polished to match the panelling

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DECORATOR Tony Ashcroft, 17 Hilltop Rise, Douglas (tel. 612529)

STENCIL DESIGNS by Mary Pollard, c/o House & Home Design Studio.

JOINERY AND PANELLING by the Village Workshop, Glen Road, Laxey (tel. 861094)

ORNAMENTAL MOULDINGS by Orac Décor, sourced by House & Home and installed by Steve Whitehead of Profile (tel. 851716, mobile tel. 498001)

FLOOR TILING by Original Style, sourced from Pacesetter, Harris Terrace, Douglas (tel. 622045) and laid by Simon Trenholme (mobile tel. 493044)

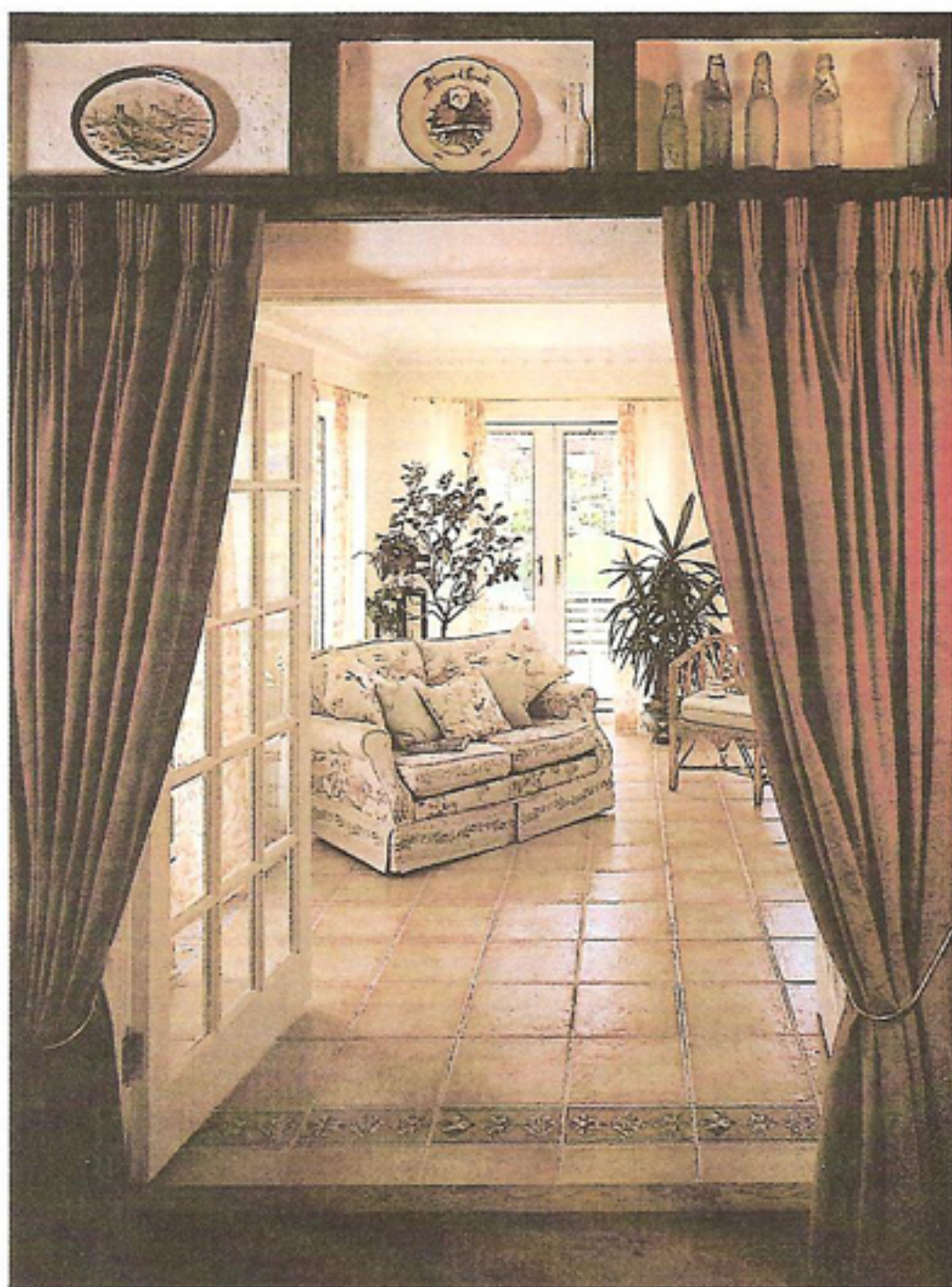
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elegance of the other rooms and is, not surprisingly, where the owners spend most of their time during the winter months. It leads out into a sun room with French windows in three walls, all of which can be opened to create cool breezes on hot summer days. The doors from the snug are hung with heavy Sanderson 'Pebble' chenille, but the sunroom is curtained in airy Sanderson muslin.

The curtains in the master bedroom are a triumph of subtle



sophistication, using two closely related shades of peach James Brindley silk to create a double bustle effect, the pleating held in place by invisible tapes to centre on a gold-painted rosette.

Stephen Dimelor moved to the Island in 1996 and has run the House & Home Design Shop with his partner Andy Davies for the past 18 months. They offer a wide range of fabrics, including favourites from Osborne & Little, Jab, Jane Churchill and Andrew Martin. The Design Shop is the Island's Sanderson specialist, offering their paints as well as Zoffany & Coles and Farrow & Ball. Their accessories range includes Peggy Wilkins table linen and L'Occitane fragrances, all labelled in Braille.

Heavy Sanderson 'Pebble' chenille with a pinch-pleat heading guards the way from the beamed winter snug into the airy sunroom; here French windows are curtained with plain white edged with Sanderson's 'Sans Souci' coloured muslin, to tone with the terracotta tiled floor

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