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JUNE 2007
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SUMMER
ENTERTAINING
- PRETTY,
SIMPLE AND
DELICIOUS



ALL PICTURES The Orangery, with its dome and lantern, was originally a central feature of gardens designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. It is surrounded by rich and colourful planting, including yellow day lilies, mauve geraniums and banks of pink roses. The house's elevated position offers splendid views over the surrounding Devon countryside and towards the sea





BOMBE SURPRISE

BELYING THE MELLOW COLOUR OF ITS STONE EXTERIOR, THE INTERIOR OF THIS DOMED COURTYARD HOUSE HAS BEEN DECORATED IN STRONG AND DISTINCTIVELY MODERN COLOURS

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'I hope you enjoy our paradise,' says the message from Anne, Lady Field. 'We won't be there, but our gardener, Arthur Hassler, will show you round. We call him Saint Arthur.'

Sir Malcolm and Lady Field's patch of heaven is at the very edge of the two-hours-by-train circle that Londoners draw around their town address when house-hunting for a weekend retreat. Pulled west by his love of Cornwall, Malcolm concentrated on the section of the circle that sliced through Devon. Having been ruthlessly gazumped once, he asked to see any properties in the area that his estate agent thought might come on the market in the near future. 'This was one of the first he suggested I should visit. There was a magical moment as I turned a corner in the drive and saw the church, with the sea in the distance, and thought "this is really rather good".'

Malcolm's description may be more understated than that of his wife but, as a first-time visitor, you find yourself agreeing with both. The approach to the house branches off a country road down a long drive, past sloping fields and wonderful views. At the dumpy thirteenth-century church, you climb up the hill, curving through landscaped grounds dotted with towering cedars, and more recently planted larches, rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias. There are no pearly gates but when the house appears round a final bend, raised on a terrace with a small dome at its centre, it is like that moment when a conjuror draws a beautiful white dove from a glossy top hat – magical. As for the setting, looking down from the terrace is like having the very best row of seats in a giant's amphitheatre. With a lush garden in the foreground, the sea as a backdrop, and an arc of fields and trees in between, this is about as close to an earthly paradise as a landscape gets.

For a modest, single-storey building, the architecture packs a lot of punch with its dome and lantern, its finials, its *oeil-de-boeuf* window and perfect symmetry. The history of the house is not entirely clear. What is certain is that it was once a central feature of the gardens designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to complement a Robert Adam house, which burnt down in the nineteenth century. Although the building has long been known as 'The Orangery', the dome room has a hollow floor and may once have housed a fashionable eighteenth-century plunge bath. There are springs in the hill behind the house and records exist of ornamental cascades.

The original dome room and its flanking wings were extended in the last century to make the building habitable, arranged round a central courtyard. Malcolm and Anne added one room, now their informal sitting room, to mirror the bedroom and bathroom extension on the opposite side of the courtyard. Now, if you look



down at the house from the hillside above, the symmetry of the façade is matched by that of the walls and roofs behind it. Inside, the kitchen, inner hall, main bedroom and the small library all open on to the courtyard, which is lime-washed in the softest pink and filled with potted palms and climbing plants. Sitting here for an alfresco meal, you have a breathtaking vista through french windows, across the dome room and down to the sea.

Since her marriage, Anne says she has 'turned with alacrity to what I have always wanted to do, which is paint and sculpt.' Her studio, in the gardens above the house, was designed by architect Charles Morris with glass walls on both sides so that she can immerse herself in the beauty of that same view. The space has proved inspiring: she has already had two successful exhibitions.

THIS PAGE The octagonal dome room, which may have incorporated a plunge bath in the eighteenth century, is now an airy dining area (top), painted dusky pink. Carefully selected furniture, such as this mirror (above left), echoes the shape of the ornate architectural details (above right). **OPPOSITE** The enclosed courtyard, situated in the centre of the building, contains potted palms and climbing plants, and a table and chairs for alfresco dining





Before her most recent incarnation, Lady Field was better known as decorator Annie Charlton, with a shop in Pimlico Road. In the Nineties, she and neighbouring decorator Jane Churchill presented a television programme on decorating, called *Finishing Touches*. While Malcolm has concentrated on the garden, which has been redesigned with the help of Georgia Langton, his wife has redecorated the house. 'Its previous owner was the decorator and textile designer Michael Szell,' she says, 'and it was swagged and draped and tented to the nines.' Her own taste is less heavy on fabric but rich in textured colour. The walls of the new sitting room are lined with royal-blue felt, while the capacious sofa is raspberry red and the chimneypiece is painted glossy strawberry. An even bolder, pillar-box red warms the main bathroom, an inner room that

is lit from above, which Anne thinks would be 'drearily cold in cream'.

Although other rooms are more subdued, including the four bedrooms, and the drawing room that occupies one of the front wings, there is nothing 'dreary' or 'cold' about any of them. One bedroom has been painted with a charming chinoiserie design, while the main bedroom has hand-painted stripes in cream and blue.

Anne's message of welcome went on to say that the church, the ice house and the lake were also worth seeing, and that Arthur must not forget to show me 'the loo'. This is no ordinary house of convenience, but a composting lavatory, imported from Canada and sited in a shed near the studio. Here Anne has used colour with abandon, painting the interior in bright blocks of red, yellow, green, blue and purple.

As for the gardener's nickname, it soon becomes apparent why he deserves it. Not only is Arthur Hassler's tour all inclusive and informative, it seems that he can also mend an engine, serve at table, drive a digger, paint a wall, dredge a lake, and mount a sculpture, as well as tending Sir Malcolm and Lady Field's private Eden □

OPPOSITE The spare bedroom has a hand-painted chinoiserie pagoda on the wall behind the bed that draws the eye up to the high ceiling. **THIS PAGE** CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The library is lined with watercolours and books. Sunlight spills into the inner hall from the courtyard. The walls of the bathroom echo the vibrant colour of the kilim rug. Anne paints in a glass-walled studio by architect Charles Morris that offers spectacular views down to the sea



Bombe surprise (page 162)



SOURCE: **Limewash**

For traditional, eco-friendly limewash, Annie heads to **Francesca's Paints** (tel: 020-7228 7694; www.francescaspaint.com). The company sells 146 hand-mixed colours, but also has a bespoke service, experimenting in front of you to create precisely the shade you need. Annie often mixes a colour in watercolour and asks Francesca's Paints to copy it, but you can take anything as your swatch and the company will match it. Limewash costs £51.70 for five litres.

SPECIALIST: **Pebble mosaicist**

Outside her studio, Annie Field wanted to create her own mosaic but soon realised she did not have the expertise. Luckily, she found mosaicist **Hilary Shand** (tel: 01962-852482; www.gardenmosaics.co.uk), 'who was great and went to so much trouble'. Hilary charges £200 per day, and also makes small, off-the-peg designs (above).



DECORATING DEVICE: **Mirror glass**

Annie uses mirrors everywhere to bounce light into the interiors. In this bedroom, for example, which was previously quite dark, Annie has hung Venetian mirrors, framed pictures, on either side of the bed. Tindle Lighting (tel: 020-7384 1400; www.tindlelighting.co.uk) is a good source for new mirrors: prices range from £60 to £1,000. The vintage, mirror-glass chest of drawers came from Valerie Wade (tel: 020-7228 1400; www.valeriewade.com), which usually has pretty, mirror-glass pieces in stock.



EXPERT: **Paint effects**

Nicholas Bolton (tel: 07961-356311) is a London-based artist and creator of bespoke painted finishes: iridescent walls, gilding, murals, faux stone - 'basically anything that involves a brush', he concludes. 'He is fantastically good,' says Annie Field, and he has worked throughout her house, painting wall finishes and furniture. The bathroom, for example, was painted a 'hot' red to lessen the 'subterranean dinginess' of this windowless room.

