



A COTTAGE IN TOWN

A large, quiet garden hidden away in central London is the setting for an imaginatively decorated family home. By Arabella Fitzmaurice

In the heart of SW1, set in one-and-a-half acres of wooded garden, lies one of London's best kept secrets. Just a stone's throw from a noisy thoroughfare, yet completely hidden from view down a short alley-way, stand three mid-nineteenth-century, two-storey, white, detached cottages. You simply would not know of their existence, nor would you find them without detailed instructions. 'We could easily be in the country,' says interior decorator Charlotte Lane Fox, who, with her husband Bruce Ellis, bought one of the cottages a little over two years ago. 'We honestly do wake up every morning to the sound of the birds.' Not even the clumsiest lorry interrupts the tranquillity that surrounds this tiny oasis.

Obviously, the main attractions were the situation and the garden. 'We had decided to buy the house almost before we went upstairs,' recalls Charlotte. Making it habitable was far less straightforward. It had been lived in by the garden designer John Codrington since the Forties, and after his death had stood empty for five years before going on the market. Sadly, a simple face-lift was out of the question: the house had to be almost completely rebuilt. In fact the dining-room is the only room that is still as it was. 'The surveyor wouldn't touch it,' Charlotte adds. 'Almost everybody told us we were mad to get involved in such an undertaking but, however many sleepless nights there were, we did not for a minute think it wasn't worth it.' It took six months to rebuild the house, and a further six for the plaster to dry out, before the decoration could be started.

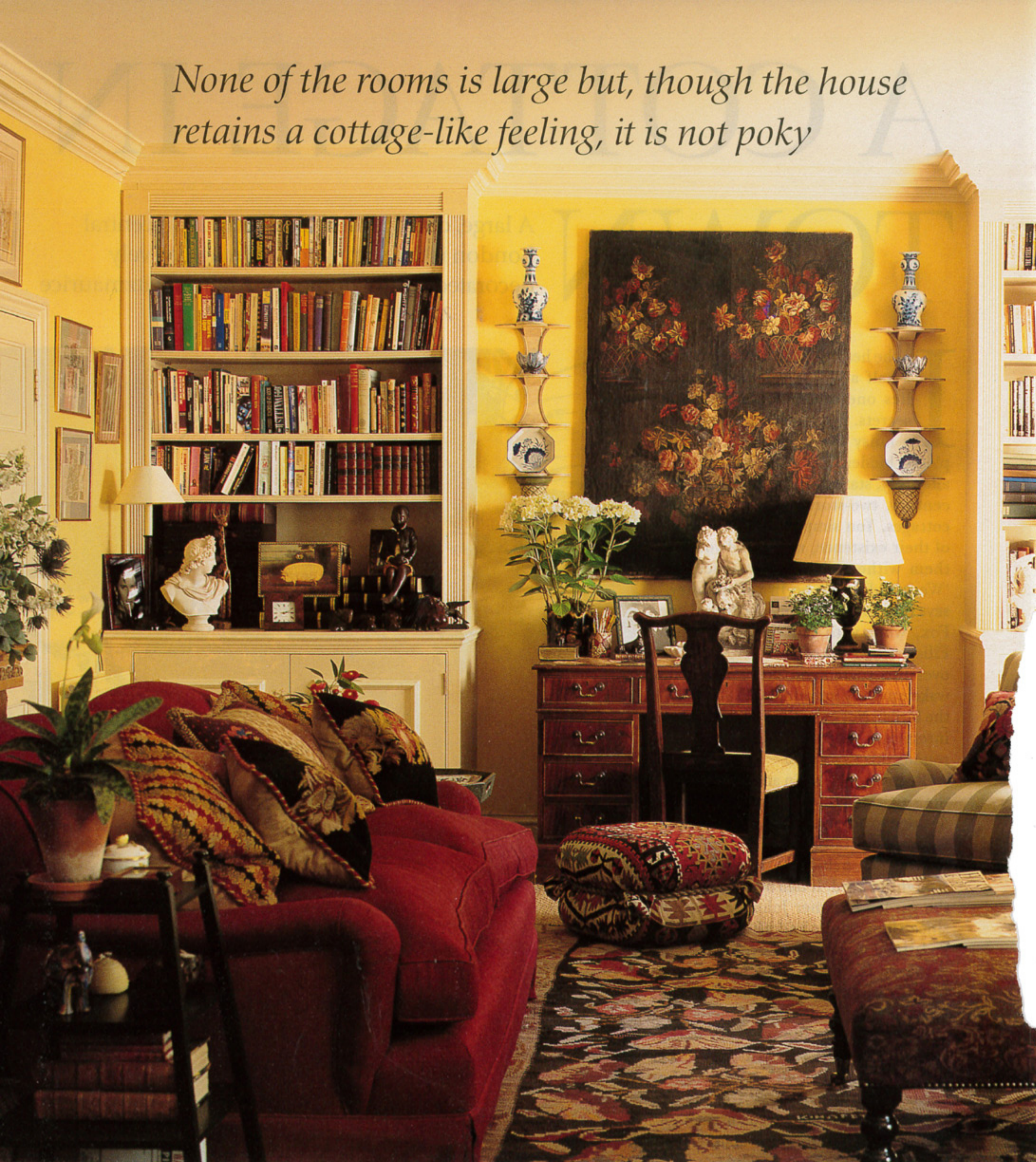
The house has three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a hall, a kitchen, a dining-room, a conservatory, a downstairs loo and a comfortable drawing-room.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES MERRELL. LOCATIONS EDITOR: LAVINIA BOLTON

OPPOSITE In the drawing-room, a small statue from Talisman stands on the table. The lamp is from Vaughan. ABOVE When not filled with Bruce's plants, the conservatory is used in the summer months for entertaining. The table and chairs come from Marston & Langinger

None of the rooms is large but, though the house retains a cottage-like feeling, it is not poky



LEFT The drawing-room with its ornaments, photographs, books and different-coloured fabrics is amiably cluttered but not chaotic, with warm, yellow-painted walls for light and simplicity. TOP The sofa comes from George Smith. It is covered in Colefax and Fowler's 'Chelwood Weave'. The cushions are from Vaughan. The antique Aubusson bell-pulls are from Peta Smythe. ABOVE Near the entrance to the drawing-room, a chest of drawers from Graham Carr is flanked by blue-and-white pots on wall brackets. RIGHT This small, paved area is used in summer for entertaining

outside.' Bruce, who before the couple were married had his own three-bedroom house, was happy to give Charlotte *carte blanche*; they even organized a street sale of everything from his previous home, and sold the lot, right down to lamp shades and pillowcases.

None of the rooms is large but, though the house manages to retain an overall cottage-like feeling, it is not poky. Much of this can be attributed to Charlotte's knowledge as a decorator, and to her impeccable taste.

As the daughter of interior designer Prue Lane Fox and landscape gardener

Martin, Charlotte has been surrounded by artists and designers all her life; and good taste is in her genes. Having worked at Colefax and Fowler for two years after school; she joined her mother's company, Prue Lane Fox, seven years ago for a summer holiday and has never left. Now she runs the

company, with her mother theoretically putting in fewer hours, though in practice they are both kept busy, with sometimes as many as forty clients on the go at once.

'The cottage is 100 per cent us,' Charlotte explains. 'I do all the inside, and Bruce has complete control of the

This photo: The trompe l'oeil cupboard in the drawing room, created by furniture designer and artist Graham Carr, is framed by symmetrical wall lights and art. English antique furnishings mixed with pieces of Indian art draw the room together.

Opposite: The Victorian-Era London home of Charlotte Lane Fox and Bruce Ellis is surrounded by charming gardens.





OPPOSITE The dining-room walls are hand-painted by Paul MacDonnell; the chair fabric is from Jason D'Souza.

The large bookshelf unit displays a collection of china from William Yeoward. The dining-table is from the Parsons Table Co.

INSET The glass centre-piece on the table is from Renwick & Clarke. *RIGHT* The small entrance hall has a wallpaper from Brunschwig & Fils. The curtain fabric is from At Nicholas Haslam.

INSET BELOW One end of the kitchen is devoted to a small table surrounded by naïve paintings. Here Charlotte does her writing. The wallpaper is from Les Olivades



The impression throughout the house is of quintessential Englishness

Charlotte and Bruce collected much of the furniture themselves; other pieces were wedding presents. The impression throughout the house is of quintessential Englishness, and comfort prevails in every room.

The drawing-room is full of ornaments, photographs, books and plants,

yet nowhere does it appear overcrowded. 'I love clutter,' Charlotte admits - 'but I loathe mess.' Warm, yellow-painted walls keep the room light and cheerful, and the fabrics, though seemingly random, are in complete harmony with each other. The fireplace is plaster, painted by the



ABOVE In the main bedroom, an antique French chest of drawers from No. 12 Cale Street supports Charlotte's collection of Halcyon Days eggs. Colefax and Fowler's 'Sibyl Sprig' is used to cover a chair, INSET LEFT

specialist painter Paul MacDonnell to resemble stone; it would have cost ten times as much if it were real, and the effect is almost identical. Similarly, the walls in the dining-room were hand-painted, since Charlotte, who knew exactly what she wanted, could not find the equivalent in wallpaper.

The functional kitchen has cabinets made by Wild Designs and painted by Paul MacDonnell. It is a long, quite narrow and windowless room with one end forming a little enclave where Charlotte writes her letters. It is modelled on a Provençal kitchen, and feels adequately spacious and light.



TOP The bedspread in the main bedroom is from Chelsea Textiles. ABOVE A bathroom has Colefax and Fowler's 'Liseron' wallpaper. RIGHT Jane Churchill fabrics in a guest-bedroom



The three bedrooms and the guest-bathroom all lead off a small landing on the first floor. The bathroom, which is decorated with a Colefax and Fowler wallpaper, and tiles by Jane Churchill, receives natural light from a skylight.

Jane Churchill's fabrics have been used in the single bedroom; in the double room hang curtains in 'Marco Polo' fabric by Percheron - 'my one big extravagance'. The bedrooms all have spectacular views of the garden. Overnight visitors are a regular feature, such is the level of comfort. 'They like to lie in bed and look at the church spire among the trees,' says Charlotte.

The main bedroom is a cosy haven dedicated to Charlotte's and Bruce's more personal belongings. A stunning lacquer mirror stands on the chest of drawers, above a collection of Halcyon Days eggs.

For Charlotte and Bruce, their life, aside from their baby Matilda and their dog Frankie, is their home; the love they lavish on it is reflected in every aspect. 'Some people spend money on holidays and expensive cars,' says Bruce. 'For us, every penny we have is dedicated to this house.' The dividends are obvious □

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Designers & Contributors



In this month's Design Solutions (page 89), **ANDREW WILSON** looks at outdoor lighting and ways of adding a touch of fantasy to the garden. He draws on his expertise in the field of garden design, accumulated first at Manchester Polytechnic where he gained a diploma in Landscape Architecture, and, more recently, in his work as a freelance garden designer and director of garden design studies at London's Inch-

bald School of Design. Andrew has also written several books, the latest of which, *The Creative Water Gardener*, was published by Cassell in 1994.

STEVEN WHEELER is a highly respected food writer who entered journalism after a ten-year period cooking professionally throughout Europe. He is excited by dynamic flavours and is well known for his ability to create simple and delicious food. Steven contributes regularly to the national food pages and has written many books, including *The Ultimate Mushroom Book* (co-author, the mushroom hunter Peter Jordan), which was recently published by Lorenz Books at £16.95. On page 159, he prepares some delicious informal suppers.

Design is undoubtedly in **CHARLOTTE LANE FOX's** blood. Her mother, Prue, is a well known interior designer; her father, Martin, is a landscape gardener. That she has inherited their good taste is well shown on page 106, where her imaginatively decorated London home is revealed. Charlotte began her design career working for Colefax and Fowler. Seven years ago she joined her mother's firm for a holiday job, and has stayed ever since. She describes her style as 'personal, affordable and mainly traditional' and has decorated 'just about everything apart from a boat and a plane'. She can be contacted on 0171-244 0292.



JAMES MERRELL

