



THE DETAILS

WHAT'S THE STYLE?

A 19th-century three-bed cottage

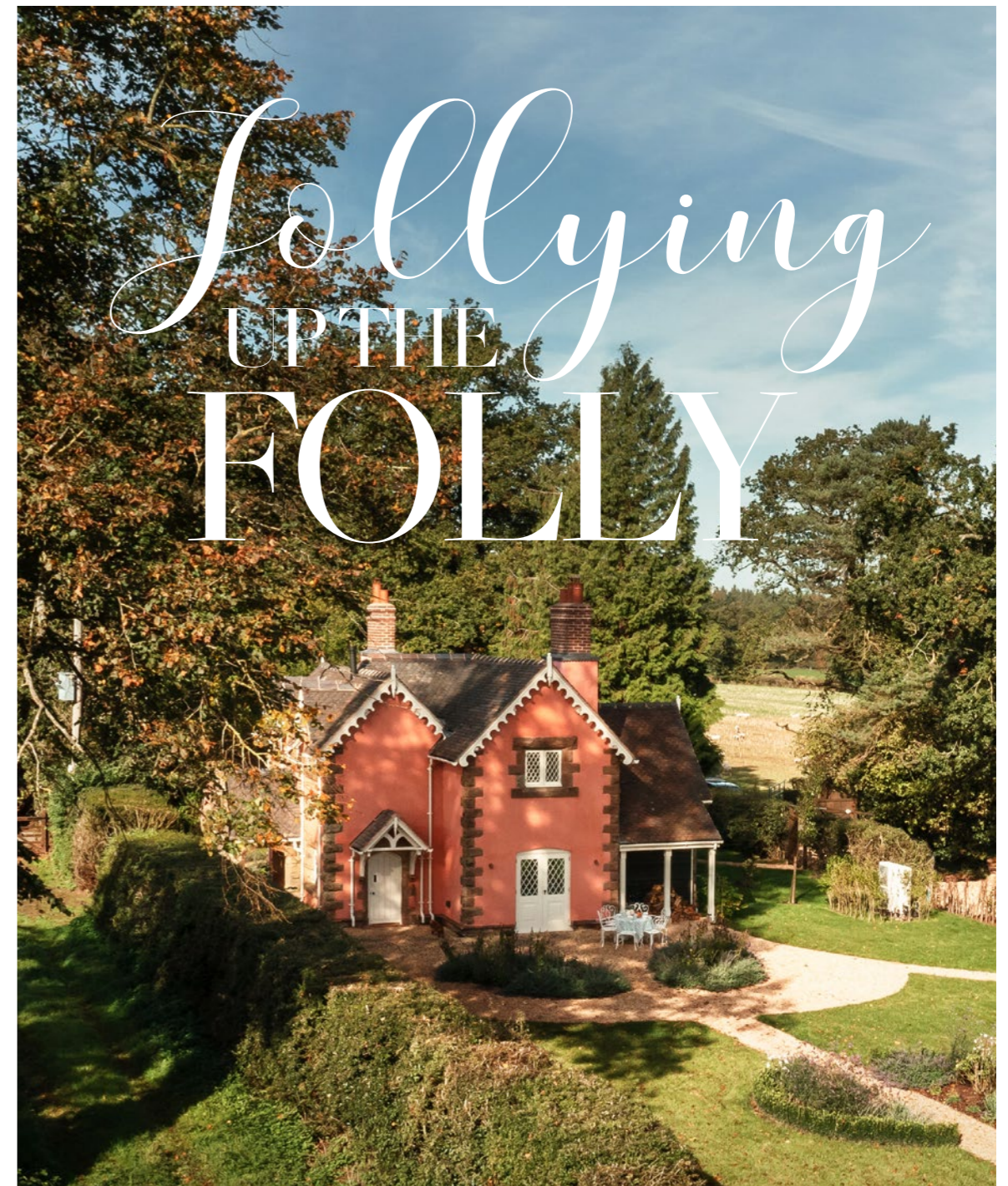
WHERE IS IT?

*Bradford Estates, on the
Shropshire/Staffordshire border*

WHO LIVES HERE?

*Eliza and Alexander Newport, who
manage the estate, and their
cocker spaniel Daisy*

HOME INSPIRATION



A neglected cottage on a private estate has been transformed into a fantastical retreat full of jewel-box colours and playful pattern

WORDS BY CARA LASKARIS PHOTOGRAPHS BY UNIQUE HOMESTAYS



There's a sense of magic about Charlotte's Folly, with its gingerbread bargeboarding, Gothic arched doors and interiors that evoke a children's storybook. You half-expect to catch a glimpse of Mrs Tiggly-Winkle or Little Red Riding Hood, basket in hand, wandering among the lavender-edged paths. Tucked into woodland within the large Bradford Estates surrounding Weston Park, seat of the Earls of Bradford, the estate cottage is named after the Victorian earl's daughter, Lady Charlotte Bridgeman. Documented in her diaries as a favourite stop-off on days out hunting, painting watercolours or ice skating on the nearby White Sitch (a picturesque reservoir), the cottage had fallen into a state of disrepair in recent decades. But when the estate's current custodians, Alexander and Eliza Newport, stumbled across the neglected cottage on a walk in the surrounding woodland during lockdown, it captured their imaginations.

Dragging the property, untouched since the 1960s, into the 21st century while maintaining its historic charm was not without its challenges. The dining room, now a striped

floral fantasy, was so packed with boxes that the windows had completely disappeared, and extensive structural work was needed, including a new roof and load-bearing steel braces.

In keeping with Alexander and Eliza's ethos across the estate, where they are introducing regenerative farming methods, sustainability was at the heart of the renovation. A joiner painstakingly recreated every 19th-century lattice window by hand with energy-efficient double glazing, and the couple installed an air-source heat pump and underfloor heating to future-proof the property. Replacing tired pebbledash walls with a pink limewash exterior was the cherry on the cake. "I thought a bright colour would bring a sense of playfulness and fun that reflected the cottage's history," Eliza explains.

When it came to the interiors, she and Alexander were eager to collaborate with an up-and-coming designer who could bring their own flair and imagination to the project. Emma Ainscough - who describes her aesthetic as "eclectic, playful and with an element of surprise" - was an inspired choice. "I thought Emma's style was perfect," Eliza recalls. "It's steeped in classic, cottage-inspired design but with a level of ▶

THIS PAGE The pink exterior and chequerboard kitchen wall bring fun to Alexander and Eliza's cottage **OPPOSITE** Striped wallpaper contrasts with the fluted-edge lamps in the dining room. The dried flower arrangement sits in a built-in wall trough



"We wanted to keep a sense of whimsy and magic... for it to feel otherworldly"



modernity." Her brief: create an impact. "I was given a blank canvas," Emma says. "Alexander and Eliza wanted to use a lot of colour, pattern and personality; they really embraced my more-is-more approach." Instead of using pale, neutral interiors to enlarge a small, dark space, Emma leaned into the cottage's compact proportions to carve out nooks in rich colour and pattern - from bold brown stripes in the narrow dining room to a chequerboard kitchen wall.

"Architecturally, we opened up the layout on the ground floor so it felt less enclosed and dark," she explains. "I wanted each room to have its own unique style, with different vignettes that would draw people in, while keeping the flow of the whole house." Arched openings between the living room, kitchen and dining room have turned the ground floor into a sociable space, where conversation can carry through from the kitchen counter to guests on the sofa. More neutral areas, such as the living space painted in Farrow & Ball's Slipper Satin, are a palate cleanser, directing the gaze through arches and doorways to the cottage's more flamboyant vistas.

The layout upstairs remains closer to its original incarnation, but with Emma's signature playful touches. Most notably, the long bedroom was carved in two to create a dressing area and a theatrical alcove bed complete with curtains, canopy and hanging star pendant - the stuff of dreams, and Eliza's favourite part of the cottage. "You can

close the curtains and be in your own world," she says. "Getting back into bed in the morning with coffee, a croissant and a book and closing the curtains feels like a moment of magic."

Emma embraced the quirky architecture upstairs to create interest. "Much of it was in the eaves, with plaster curving up to the ceiling. I played on that, for example in the green bedroom where I wrapped wallpaper up from the walls and over the ceiling for a cosy cottage feel." Eliza and Alexander were also keen to incorporate log burners and pattern throughout the three bedrooms "to keep a sense of whimsy. We wanted it to feel otherworldly".

Charlotte's Folly is certainly not short on flights of fancy: how many cottages can claim an all-pink utility room or a permanent dried flower installation spanning the width of the dining room? By allowing a young designer to unleash their full creativity, Eliza and Alexander have brought a little piece of fantasy to rural Shropshire. "Sometimes it feels like it can't be real," Eliza says, "just like a fairytale."

TO RENT Charlotte's Folly, visit uniquehomestays.com.

OPPOSITE Double doors, framed by antique French chairs in velvet from The Hackney Draper, bring light into the living area **THIS PAGE** Wallpapered ceilings give a cosy feel. The antique bed in the guest room was given a velvet panel and a ticking skirt was added to a dressing table and stool from Ebay ▶

5 WAYS TO BE BOLD IN SMALL SPACES

1 GO FOR DEEP, RICH COLOURS AND PATTERNS – they can actually make a room feel bigger and give it more depth if you choose the right shade.

2 LIMIT YOUR PALETTE to avoid overwhelming a smaller room. Build up colour tonally by picking out shades from a patterned wallpaper or fabric to use in furniture, window dressings and accessories.

3 USE PATTERN IN A BEDROOM with a pitching roof by wrapping it round walls and ceilings to create the style of a cottage.

4 CARRY A CONTINUITY OF STYLE and tone throughout the rooms, especially if you are using lots of colour, by having a consistent look and incorporating some elements of the same shade.

5 MIX PATTERN WITH SOME PLAIN TEXTURES, such as rustic wood or a soft throw, to balance it out and add a warm feel.



The pinstripe bathroom and theatrical alcove bed are the stuff of dreams