

*The*

# ENGLISH HOME



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## COUNTRY STYLE

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# FAIRY TALE FOLLY

A once lacklustre 19th-century cottage has been lovingly transformed by Viscount and Viscountess Newport into a vibrant, captivating retreat

FEATURE JANET MCMEEKIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID CURRAN / UNIQUE HOMESTAYS

Set within ancient woodlands, on an estate steeped in bucolic history, lies a fairytale cottage that is just as magical and inviting inside as its whimsical, pretty pink exterior suggests. “Charlotte’s Folly is now a beautiful, unique hideaway, nestled in a tranquil rural location on the Shropshire-Staffordshire border,” reveals Viscountess Eliza Newport, who, together with her husband, Viscount Alexander Newport, breathed new life into the charming abode. “Staying here feels as though you have stepped away from everyday life and strolled straight into a romantic storybook. When I walk in, I instantly feel more relaxed and totally immersed in the fun, jewel-coloured schemes that have been thoughtfully conceived to create a soothing sense of joyful escapism.”

Back in November 2021, the cottage on the 12,000-acre Bradford Estates in Shropshire was a far cry from being an uplifting home-from-home. Very dated, the property was coming to the end of a tenancy and, as its custodians, Eliza and Alexander felt that a complete refurbishment was essential to stand it in good stead for the future. “Traced back to the Domesday Book and peppered with follies, the estates benefit from the peaceful

LEFT Eliza was keen to reinstate the cottage’s former pink exterior and sampled dozens of rosy shades before finally settling upon a rich combination of several blush tones. Once painted, the exterior was also given a pink limewash to inject more texture and character to the facade.





ABOVE Tiles from Grestec add impact in the reconfigured kitchen which has cabinets painted in Yonder and a freestanding island in Eating Room Red, both Farrow & Ball. The ironmongery is from Mark Lewis, while the tap is from Perrin & Rowe.

White Sitch lake, designed in the 19th century by John Webb, and have been visited by a variety of dignitaries including the former Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli,” says Eliza.

Built in 1886, the cottage is named after Lady Charlotte Bridgeman, who was the daughter of the 2nd Earl of Bradford and kept an illustrated diary of her life at nearby Weston Park. This included details of passing the folly in her horse-drawn carriage while en route to White Sitch lake with her sister, Lady Lucy Bridgeman. “I loved reading Lady Charlotte’s amazing diary entries of her life here, and was determined to honour her life as a keen photographer and watercolourist by transforming the folly into a breathtaking, colourful home,” Eliza explains.

To bring her vision to fruition, Eliza, who has a background in property development, knew exactly

who to contact. “I felt that interior designer Emma Ainscough’s fresh schemes, bursting with pattern, vibrancy and creativity, aligned with exactly what I envisaged for Charlotte’s Folly,” she says.

Having met Eliza at the drab cottage, which had been pebble-dashed in the 1960s, Emma embraced the challenge of transforming the dark, dated property. “Emma understood that my vision for the cottage was about enjoying experiences and making special memories in a delightful environment that really captures the imagination,” says Eliza.

The duo liaised closely on the project and Emma interpreted Eliza’s effervescent brief into a raft of inspiring, stimulating ideas and moodboards to make the cottage’s interiors exciting and contemporary. She also worked with heritage architect Sean Pemble to decide how best to reconfigure the spaces by removing



*‘I wanted to honour keen photographer and watercolourist Lady Charlotte by transforming the folly into a breathtaking, colourful home’*

walls and creating arches to make the ground-floor rooms feel brighter and flow better. “It was fantastic to be involved right at the start to choose paints, wallpapers, flooring, tiles and fabrics,” Emma says. “Eliza and I both agreed that bolder schemes and quirky touches would be ideal.”

The renovation began in January 2022, using the Bradford Estates’ building team. One of the biggest decisions during the six-month project was how to redesign the kitchen. “As it wasn’t a large space, the kitchen was reconfigured to become more symmetrical, including one run of units with a backdrop of punchy chequerboard tiles, plus a central island,” says Emma.

“I repurposed an adjacent room, creating a pantry to house the sizeable essential appliances, such as the fridge-freezer, dishwasher and washing machine. I like the idea that after a long lunch or dinner party the mess can be hidden in the pantry and dealt with later if need be.”

Cleverly injecting the interiors with striking designs that subtly lead the eye through from one space to another, Emma and Eliza were mindful of working with the period features and quirks of the cottage to accentuate its singular character. “The blue bedroom was very long and thin, so to fit a superking bed in the space I suggested dividing the room to create a ▶

ABOVE Viscount Alexander and Viscountess Eliza Newport, who live near Charlotte’s Folly with their Cocker Spaniel, Daisy. The cottage is available to hire through [uniquehomestays.com](https://uniquehomestays.com)





Hamilton Weston's Brown Paper Stripe in Off-White creates a warm and striking backdrop in the dining room and the dried-flower installation by Claire Wyon of Myrtle Fox & Maud adds to the theatrical feel. The wavy-edged terracotta pendant lights hung above the dining table, which was sourced from Lorfords Antiques, are from Straw London.



*'My vision for the cottage was about enjoying experiences and making special memories in an environment that really captures the imagination'*

split-level nook area," Emma reveals. "Wallpaper made it feel even more cossetting, and the tented ceiling was the finishing touch. Guests can go through the archway and climb into bed from the end, rather than walking around the side as usual. It's something fun and different, which was the goal for the whole cottage." Each of the three luxurious bedrooms now has its own identity. "Creating a different look in each space means that every guest feels they have a special bedroom, no matter which one they're staying in," Emma adds.

The exterior of Charlotte's Folly was not left untouched and, as well as updating the rotten, lattice-style windows, an out-of-keeping window at the front of the house was replaced with partially-glazed double doors leading out from the sitting room. The garden, which was landscaped by Tig Cameron-Goodman, features a shingle path, drawing the eye towards the huge poplar trees and swing in the distance. Introducing white, scalloped barge boards on the gable roof ends was an inspired idea that has

**ABOVE** In the sitting room, cushions from Eldorado The Studio, are teamed with a cream bouclé Grace sofa from Arlo & Jacob. The antique coffee table is from Dorian Caffot de Fawes and the wall lights are from Nocturne Workshop. **RIGHT** Emma sourced the table and chairs from Lichen Garden Antiques, and the striped tablecloth from Zara Home.







*‘Staying here feels as though you have strolled straight into a romantic storybook’*

enhanced the cottage’s appearance and added to its fairy tale gingerbread-house ambience.

Both Eliza and Alexander are thrilled at how Charlotte’s Folly, which is available for holiday lets through Unique Homestays, has evolved. “We absolutely adore the cottage and love our stays here,” says Eliza. “The feedback from our guests has been so rewarding, too. Alexander and I look forward to restoring more properties on the estates, and can only hope that Lady Charlotte would have agreed that the new-look folly is incredibly special and the perfect place to unwind.” ■

**ABOVE** Creating a cosy nook for the bed, Emma designed the decorative arch painted in Farrow & Ball’s Bay Area Blue and chose Howe’s Folies Bergères Blue Ribbon wallpaper. The lighting is from Vaughan Designs and the cushions are from Katy Takla.

**LEFT** Emma let her imagination run wild in this eaves bedroom, enlivening it with Creeping Toadflax wallpaper from Living Quarters on the walls and ceilings. The woodwork has been painted in Edward Bulmer’s Pea Green.

