



A family AFFAIR

Antique finds and belongings inherited from relatives creates a fusion of nostalgic and new memories in Melanie and Charles Cartwright's home

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ABOVE Double doors bring grandeur to the sitting room. The large Feraghan rug is one of Melanie's favourite pieces. The books are all classics and antique, which Melanie arranged with colour in mind. **FACING PAGE** The dining room still had its original striped Edwardian wallpaper when the family moved in, which unfortunately couldn't be saved. In homage, Melanie wallpapered the room in Farrow & Ball's Rosslyn wallpaper.

Melanie and Charles Cartwright's house is a family home in the truest sense, filled with inherited furniture and art from two previous generations.

'We were able to take on the contents of Charles's parents' dining room as the timing coincided with our move and having more space,' says Melanie. 'It's almost all Irish Victorian mahogany furniture originally from Charles's grandparents on both sides. The chairs are particularly special because his great-grandfather upholstered them – we've been very pleased to keep everything in the family.'

The couple were also given some large portraits, bought from Irish country house sales in the 1950s, as well as Worcester porcelain from Melanie's grandfather, and lots of classic books. 'There's something quite lovely about picking up a jug or a book and thinking one of our relatives once handled and used this piece, just like I do,' says Melanie. 'I love having things around us that I know have been loved, and really cared for and enjoyed by generations before.'

One of Melanie's most treasured possessions is a Feraghan rug from Persia, which sits beneath the

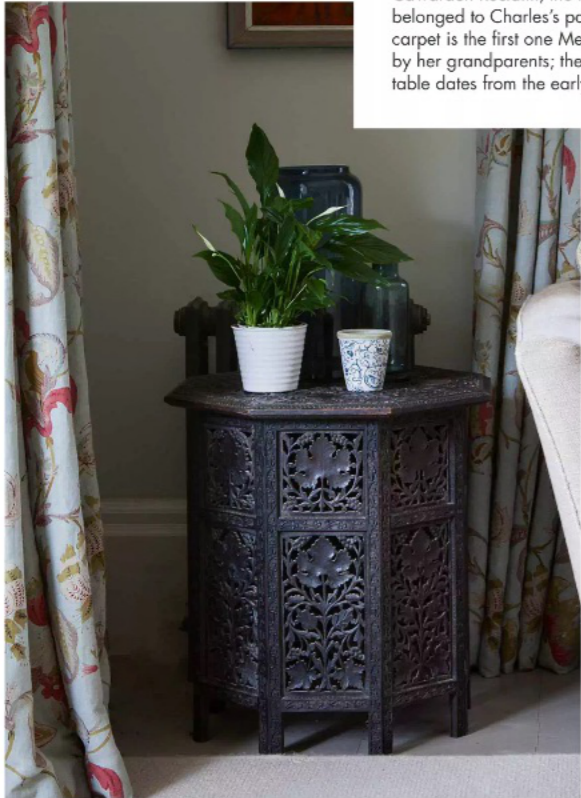
writing desk in the sitting room. Rugs like this were popular from the 1870s onwards and there was a revival of interest in them in the early 20th century, around the time the couple's house was built.

'My grandparents gave me this rug and it sparked a special passion for them,' says Melanie, adding that she was then inspired to buy a few more at auction. 'I love the natural wool dyes and the horticultural motifs, and even the worn ones have aged very gracefully.' The rugs were also a good way to make the rooms in their new home feel furnished, she says, as when the couple first moved in, they didn't have the furniture to fill them.

Melanie and Charles moved from a former chapel conversion to their substantial Edwardian country home in 2012 when their children, Alex, now 25, and Jessica, now 27, were teenagers. Built for a retired naval officer in 1905, the house had been untouched for years and the couple fell in love with all the original features. 'It was as though the house had been asleep and was waiting to be brought back to life,' recalls Melanie. 'The fireplaces were tiled in gorgeous jewelled colours, and the stone and wood floors had a worn, lived-in feel. The joinery and detailing isn't as fussy as the Victorian era and is closer in style to classic Georgian design, but without the price tag.' Large rooms with high ceilings and plenty of light appealed to Melanie and Charles ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The gilt-framed painting is an inherited piece from Charles's parents; the porch has its original terracotta quarry floor tiles. Similar reclaimed tiles can be found at Cawarden Reclaim; the Irish Victorian writing desk belonged to Charles's parents and the Feraghan carpet is the first one Melanie owned, given to her by her grandparents; the octagonal Anglo-Indian table dates from the early 20th century.



The Robbie Burns portrait was bought by Charles's father from an Irish country house sale in the Fifties. Charles's paternal grandfather lived in a big house overlooking Belfast Lough and ran a foundry. He made the 1860s mahogany table there. The embroidered seats on the chairs were done by his other grandfather whilst in the navy. The Victorian Irish sideboard is from a similar period and came from Charles's mother's side of the family.



This part of the kitchen was the original butler's pantry and, like the rest of the house, still had its original fireplace. Old chapel chairs are from Bridport Vintage Market and the Suffolk table is from Neptune. New French doors open up to the garden.

Melanie is a regular visitor to auction houses near her home. She describes her antiques knowledge as 'self-taught', initiated when she studied art history

but with few changes since the 1940s some careful modernisation was required. After opening up the kitchen and putting French doors across the back, the couple reworked the former maids' rooms on the top floor into a bedroom, den and a bathroom for their children. When the builders had gone, they took their time to decorate and furnish while they got used to the size and scale of the rooms.

Melanie is a regular visitor to auction houses near her home, such as Lawrences at Crewkerne, Duke's in Dorchester and Bearnnes Hampton & Littlewood in Exeter. She describes her antiques knowledge as 'self-taught', initiated from her student days when she studied art history. Unsurprisingly, one of the first antiques for the house that caught her eye was another Feraghan rug. 'We'd inherited a decorative Baroque painting that we'd hung in the entrance hallway and, when I saw this rug, I knew the pale blue, raspberry-pink and greens would pick out the colours beautifully.'

Melanie, who is now a garden designer, put together a scheme inspired by her love of gardens and the property's rural setting. She took the blues, pinks and greens from the hallway a little further, using the palette to create a gentle background rhythm of colour throughout the house. 'Often our skies have a green-blue hue to them and so I put this colour with shades of natural greens and soft browns, and added warmth with raspberry and dusky reds,' she explains. 'I do this with my garden designs as it draws out the green.'

Although the house is largely finished, she still looks for items to add to her collections at local auctions and is often guided by colour – a vase, a rug, a painting that could add another decorative layer to a room or an element of intrigue. Recently she made a bid on some old books. 'I thought the spines were so beautiful and the colours would look lovely on the shelves in the sitting room,' she says. 'Though I only buy the Edwardian and Victorian classics I love, I also enjoy the thought of ▶

TOP RIGHT Melanie and Charles kept as many original features as possible like the sash window and window seat. The AGA is reconditioned but one of the early models that came out in the 1930s. The splashback uses Posterity by Marlborough Tiles from Lyme Bay Tiles. **RIGHT** Melanie chose Neptune's Suffolk kitchen after being inspired by the Shaker kitchen at Castle Drogo, owned by the National Trust, and built at a similar time to her home. The island is painted in Farrow & Ball's Inchyra Blue.





Melanie made the headboard and cushion using Voyage's Cervino fabric in Opal. Jim Lawrence brass wall lights have lampshades made by TMO Lighting. The mahogany bedside tables were drawer pedestals from an old desk from Lombard Antiques.

sharing the pleasure of reading them with their previous owners.' Over the years, the couple have gradually found and bought the furniture they needed at auctions and antiques markets, though Melanie was careful not to turn her home into a museum. She took inspiration from local designer Ben Pentreath, who has a talent for blending antiques with vintage and contemporary pieces in a natural, layered effect.

The key to making disparate pieces work together is about choosing similar materials or looking for things with a shared quality of design and workmanship, she explains, whether it's a new linen cushion or an old antique rug. 'For me, that commonality creates the harmony to combining different periods,' she says.

The latest addition to the couple's home is a charming shepherd's hut in the garden. It was modelled on how Melanie imagines farmer Gabriel Oak, from Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, might have lived. When the hut isn't being rented out, Melanie likes to escape here to read and enjoy the views across their meadows. 'I like the fact our home isn't just one style or from one era and that it feels lived in,' says Melanie. 'It's lovely to think our heirlooms haven't just helped to shape our family home but also homes for great-granny, granny and grandma. We're very lucky to still have this family history with us and can pass these pieces on to our children.' [To book a stay in the hut, visit classic.co.uk](#)



ABOVE Melanie discovered this painting in Abingdon House Antiques and has placed it above the bed to create a headboard effect. The bedside tables are from McBains Antiques Centre. **BELOW** Stargazy Sky was built by Cowley Shepherds Huts and can be rented through Classic Cottages.



The table is from Bridport Vintage Market and the Lewis & Wood Oxus curtains are second-hand from The Curtain Trader.



In the spacious en suite, the freestanding bath is positioned to enjoy views of the countryside.

