

TRUE ROMANCE

Antiques, art, long-cherished pieces and a flock of free-roaming chickens restore period charm to a Grade II listed Georgian farmhouse in Surrey

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The gold abstract art in the drawing room is Leah's own work and ties in with the gold coffee table from Ruth & Joanna. The vase is from Oka and the Alex blanket in Sea Holly is from Artisan Homeware.





ABOVE The long vintage console is the perfect fit for the large entrance hall. Westeros reclaimed pine console from Sweetpea & Willow is similar. The antique mirror is from local antique shop, Bourne Mill Antiques.

ABOVE RIGHT Chickens roam freely – much to son Raef and daughter India's delight. The pillared porch was built to Leah's design by a stone company.

RIGHT Leah has turned what was a cold office space into a boot room with shelves and benches painted in Little Greene's Gauze Deep.



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Set on the edge of a market town, in the Surrey countryside, this Grade II listed Georgian house would not look out of place in a scene from a period drama, such are the handsome exterior and extensive grounds. Perhaps Leah Lane had this notion in mind when she decided a Georgian property was a must in the move from London with her husband, Rupert. "I am a hopeless romantic and grew up watching period dramas, I have seen them all, with *Pride and Prejudice* a favourite," she says. "I loved the idea of living in a Georgian house – the symmetry, high ceilings and beautiful detailing – and I was not going to settle for anything less."

Despite this, Leah nearly rejected this house after online photos showed an overgrown exterior. "I could not see the classic Georgian frontage," she recalls. "It seemed more like a cottage, with an unattractive Sixties porch and the tops of windows bricked-up."

However, Leah and Rupert had a tough wish list to fulfil in their house search, wanting to live in a market town close to a station and within an hour's commute of London – and the location of this unpromising-looking house appeared to be ideal. Halfheartedly, they booked a viewing and were pleasantly surprised.

"Up close I was delighted to see the property looked more Georgian than I had thought," Leah says. "Inside was empty, and although there were not many original features, there was the perfect mix of cosy rooms, a huge kitchen and a wonderful grand drawing room with beams and a corner fireplace. Then a deer appeared in the garden, and I knew instantly I could live here."

The couple moved in December 2015, relocating from their London maisonette to start a family; at the time, Leah was pregnant with their son, Raef, who is now five, whilst their daughter, India, is two. ▶

ABOVE The panel above the fireplace in the snug is a clever solution to conceal the television.

Framed prints are pages from an old botanical book and ArtisanTi sell similar. LEFT A simple picket fence surrounds the house. Leah and Rupert have kept the immediate gardens as simple and traditional as possible.



ABOVE Leah sanded and oiled the original kitchen worktops, painted the cupboards in Fired Earth's Top Hat and added wooden knobs from the Suffolk Latch Company. RIGHT On display in the utility room are Leah's mother's vintage scales and baskets and her grandmother's copper moulds. Similar can be found at The Antique Dispensary.



Keen to know more about the property's history, the couple spoke to neighbours and discovered it had been a large farmhouse on one of seven farms owned by the nearby castle estate. Its roots go back to 1718, noted by the date engraved on the weather vane, with the entrance hall, drawing room, snug and the rooms above all part of the original building. Additions came later to extend the back and side of the property.

With five bedrooms and five bathrooms, the house had plenty of space, leaving the only major change to create a walk-in dressing room and generous en-suite bathroom to the principal bedroom. "Overall, the interiors lacked charm, with modern faux-wood flooring and sockets dotting the walls," says Leah. "I gradually reinstated period features and furnished the rooms with antiques, old furniture, knick-knacks, art



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and furnishings to make the house feel more comfortable and lived-in."

Leah researched decorating ideas by collating old pictures of Georgian houses on Pinterest. She also took prompts from her beloved period dramas – the Georgian sofas in the drawing room are similar in style to those seen in *Sense and Sensibility*. Interior designer, Ben Pentreath, provided another source of inspiration. "I love the way he adds warmth by mixing patterns, such as stripes with chintz florals," Leah explains. "It's timeless design and for me that is exactly what an English country house should look like – slightly worn, a few rough edges, yet classic and elegant at the same time."

Leah has always favoured heritage paint colours over wallpaper – when she was 21 and such specialist



colours were difficult to source, she managed to hunt down an Indian yellow for her living room. That said, she is careful to make sure paintwork does not look too fresh or too new. "Decoration needs to seem as though it has always been there, so I have taken inspiration from Georgian colours, such as sage green in the principal bedroom, beige pink for the snug and then added blues and pinks in furnishings and fabrics as the thread between rooms," she says.

Antiques play a part in achieving this ambition, too. Leah rarely buys new, with a passion for the old deep-rooted from childhood. "I grew up in an Edwardian house and often went shopping with my mother for antiques," she says. "Having old things around me with bumps and cracks are part of who I am. I bought my first antique when I was eight ▶

ABOVE LEFT The kitchen faces the back garden. Plans are afoot for a new orangery to extend the kitchen. Leah made the gypsophila flower garland. ABOVE RIGHT The dining area in the kitchen is furnished with a pine Victorian dining table. Similar can be found at Antiques Atlas. The pretty Narrow Pleat porcelain pendant light is from deVol.



ABOVE The panelling, designed by Leah, is painted in Little Greene's Pearl Colour Pale. The bed is from Feather & Black and the side tables are from Oka. RIGHT Marble wall tiles lend the en-suite bathroom elegance. Similar tiles are available at Walls and Floors. The Turkish rug is from Sunbury Antiques Market.

– an antique pram for my teddies – and have loved old things ever since.”
Walnut furniture and Bergère cane seating are some of Leah's favourites, taking pride of place in the principal bedroom and in various other spots around the home, along with Victorian side tables, chinoiserie lamps and antique rugs. Some pieces came from her mother, as well as gifts from her mother-in-law, Rupert or friends, otherwise Leah went searching online. “Being persistent resulted in some great furniture buys, I cannot understand why people want to get rid of such amazing pieces,” she says. “However, I will always pop into an antiques shop if I am passing and I am pretty much at our local one every other week, buying smaller things, like pretty vases, mirrors, antique shells.

I am a visual buyer, if it's old I will generally love it, and I think that is the point.”

Leah is enjoying the process of rolling back time as much as she enjoys living with the end results so far. A bigger change is still to come – an orangery across the back of the house. At the front, wisteria climbers have been scaled back to proportions that complement the architecture, with the most striking addition being the Georgian-style pillars. “Period dramas were a wonderful source of inspiration for finding an appropriate design and I am really pleased with the outcome,” she says. “It's hard to believe the house had been left empty for three years, and when we first came here, we had to walk through grass up to our knees to get in. We wouldn't want to live anywhere else now.” ■



ABOVE “The colour and tone of the walnut chest of drawers is beautifully warm and lovely for a bedroom,” says Leah. Vinterior sell similar chinoiserie vases.



ABOVE The large principal bedroom has space to accommodate an original Bergère blue velvet suite. The Mill Shop Online sells similar cushions. RIGHT Knocking together two bathrooms created the dressing room off the principal bedroom. The Victorian chair on castors belonged to Leah's mother.

