

## DINING ROOM

'The antique dining table is an amazing, solid, extendable piece that's great for Christmas,' says homeowner Sara Austin. 'The bistro chairs don't all match, which I like.'

Victorian dining table, Used Unique Boutique. Similar hoopback bentwood chairs, Merchant & Found



# Good tidings

A move from London to Northern Ireland presented Sara and Neil Austin with an opportunity to live a stone's throw from the beach and renovate a Victorian home

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## HOME TRUTHS

### THE PROPERTY

Detached double-fronted Victorian house built in 1896

**ROOMS** Sitting room, dining room, kitchen-diner, study, playroom, cloakroom, snug, utility room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms

### LOCATION

Northern Ireland



Sara and Neil Austin have always lived in period properties and renovated their way up the property ladder in London from a flat to a terrace. However, when they decided to upsize again for their boys, Felix, now nine, and Ralph, six, they felt the pull back to their roots in Northern Ireland. 'I didn't want to be a slave to a bigger mortgage and wanted to spend more time with my children,' says Sara, an interiors stylist and podcast host. 'We were keen to find a period house on the coast we could renovate within easy reach of Belfast.'

Sara and Neil found a double-fronted Victorian house with original fireplaces, parquet flooring, stained-glass windows and a tiled porch. Though it was dated, it had been structurally well maintained and was within walking distance of a beach and coastal paths, yet a short drive from the city. 'As a stylist, small details really matter to me and so I instantly loved the heavy old doors and the weighty feel of the handles in my hand,' Sara recalls. 'We love being able to pop down to the sea where we

### DINING ROOM

'Walls are neutral with pink on the ceiling,' says Sara. 'This Christmas, I've styled the table with rusts and ports to complement the pinks.' Ceiling in Taupe 03 Soho Roc House, Lick. Walls in Portland Stone, Little Greene. Brooklyn Umbrella wall lights in Brass, Industville. Tablecloth in Devon Stripe in Pink; napkins in Red Ticking, Ian Mankin

### SNUG

'It's a small, dark room and I embraced the cosiness with brown walls, a wood burner and wall panelling,' says Sara. 'I framed the Persian suzani textile I bought in Turkey years ago and the colours became the inspiration for the room.' Walls in Ganache, Little Greene. Find a similar vintage suzani at Francesca Gentili







#### SITTING ROOM

'Having the sofas close together creates an inviting space,' says Sara. Payton sofa, Darlings of Chelsea, is similar. Long cushions in Devon Stripe in Black, Ian Mankin. Self Portrait in Evening Dress olegraphy artwork, Brookpace Fine Art

'OUR CHRISTMAS TREES CAME FROM A FARM JUST OUTSIDE BELFAST WHERE THEY'RE GROWN ON THE HILLS - SEEING THEM RISING UP FROM THE CITY BELOW IS QUITE A SIGHT'



might spot seals or see people fishing. It's the lifestyle we want for our boys' childhood.'

The house had plenty of space but the ground floor layout needed reworking. A neglected room in the middle of the property had been the original kitchen and Sara turned this into a snug. A dated kitchen was in one of the front reception rooms. 'It felt wrong because of the lovely, curved bay window and fireplace and the flow of the house didn't feel right,' she says. 'I made this the dining room instead as the light's good in here and I often style and photograph tablescapes in here for clients, too.'

A 1990s extension sat alongside an overly large utility room so the couple knocked through to create a family kitchen-diner with a smaller laundry room. Sara added shutters to conceal the uPVC windows, replaced the bathroom and reinstated the fireplace in their bedroom. The adjoining room became a walk-in wardrobe and en suite.

With a background of 20 years in fashion for high street brands, Sara has created interiors that don't necessarily follow trends but are

#### KITCHEN

Deep green cupboards pair with dark wood worktops and a light marble-effect splashback. 'I invested in the handles as the quality was important to me,' says Sara.

Cupboards in Studio Green, Farrow & Ball. Scalloped cup handles, Cox & Cox, are similar. Kempton wall light by Dar Lighting, The Home Lighting Centre

#### DINING AREA

'The dining extension faces the garden so I wanted a wallpaper design to bring the greenery feeling inside,' explains Sara. 'It's so lovely, I won't get tired of this print.'

Plantasia wallpaper in Sage, House of Hackney. Bench seating in Studio Green, Farrow & Ball. Murano Amsterdam chandelier, The Conservatory, is similar







inspired by the environment around them and the house itself. 'The light here is different to London,' she says. 'We get many days when skies are heavy and I embraced that with moody, dark tones. They're not crisp, which goes well with the worn edges of the old house and the high ceilings, which can handle the depth of colour.'

The ground floor decor sits mostly within a palette of greens and browns, which Sara considers unconventionally neutral. Wallpaper prints and fabrics energise rooms. 'It's fun to bring in pattern and I love the clean aesthetic of stripes on stripes with a touch of floral,' she says.

At Christmas, the house looks especially festive and Sara uses her quilted stockings, pretty home-made bows from offcuts, as well as garlands of dried orange slices and wreaths made with local foliage. 'I like the traditional earthiness of making things, it's very satisfying,' she says. 'Christmas here is very different to London – we'll spend it with family and go down to the beach where the boys can run riot and climb the rocks. This is a good life.'

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**HALLWAY**  
'Panelling the walls brought back the character and I added wallpaper to draw the impressive entrance together,' says Sara.

Block Print Stripe wallpaper in 751; Adelaide wallpaper in 6305; walls in Hardwick White, all Farrow & Ball. Margao black wood lamp base, Ruma, would work. Navy pleated Ikat lampshade, Graham and Green

**FELIX'S BEDROOM**  
'The depth of the red accents against the lighter blue backdrop is a classic combination that works well in this bright room,' says Sara.

Walls in Oval Room Blue, Farrow & Ball. Scalloped border wallpaper in Red, Ottoline. Scalloped cushion in Red, Matilda Goad & Co at Anthropologie. Wobster table lamp, Pooky



**RALPH'S BEDROOM**  
'The tropical wallpaper is a bold choice that envelops the room and is a print from a hand-painted design by artist Jo Munsey,' says Sara. Canopy: 02 wallpaper, Lick. Christmas stockings, Cooper and Fred. Green bed canopy, Sestrene Grene

**BATHROOM**  
'The art is oleography, the Victorian process of replicating oil paintings with a textured finish to look like the real thing,' explains Sara. Madame Le Fevre de Caumartin as Hebe, 1753, oleography artwork, Brookpace Fine Art. Walls in De Nimes, Farrow & Ball. Try the Dryden bath, Period Property Store