Home!

YOU WON'T FIND A WHITE WALL IN MY HOUSE!

Vibrant shades in every room add the wow factor to an interior designer's grade II listed Surrey home

The turquoise living room

REPORT Lisa Grainger
PHOTOGRAPHS Paul Massey

Home!

The guest bathroom

Ana Engelhorn has one – rather unlikely – rule as an interior designer: don't be afraid. "People worry too much, especially about colour," she says, laughing. "If you paint a room and after a few months you're still not sure about it, then you can change it. It's not the end of the world."

The home she moved into in April, in Effingham in Surrey, certainly features brave colours. The living room is painted lurid turquoise, her guest loo is fuchsia pink, and even her bedroom is mauve. But then colours to her aren't just decorative; they affect the way she feels and the way she lives, she says. Which is why she painted her entrance hall sunflower yellow. "That way, when you come into the house, you go, 'Wow!' " she explains. "It's like you come into a place that's uplifting and full of sunshine. The entrance is where you want to be light."

By comparison, her bedroom, which has its own fireplace and living area and flows into an en suite and an antique-mirror-walled dressing room, is soft mauve – or, as the ecological paint company Francesca's Paints describes it, "Piedmontese Aubergine". Soft shades of purple, blue and green, Engelhorn explains, "are good for bedrooms or rooms you like to relax in, as they are calming. They also make small rooms appear larger because the colour looks like it recedes in space."

It's to this room that she comes at the end of the day to sit and knit. The combination of her clattering needles, the soft light and the cosseting shade of the walls, she says, helps her to unwind. "I can't tell you how many things I have knitted or sewn," she says. "Probably hundreds. When I was about 13, the two best sewers in English

Five-year-old Charlie's room, with a bed in the shape of a Mini
Paul Massey

schools were chosen to meet the Queen Mother, and I was one. We went to Buckingham Palace and had tea with her."

But then being creative, and making things, is a key part of who Engelhorn is. As she says, "I like to take things and bring them to life." When the Swiss-born designer found the 17th-century Lower Farm in 2020, it had been amended five times, with a new front added in the 18th century. Its previous owners had lived in it for more than 20 years, "so everything needed redoing," she says, "from the floors and heating to the electrics and plumbing. In short, a total renovation."

The way the house had been laid out wasn't to her liking either. Rooms were small and cosy. Ceilings were low. And for someone who had grown up travelling around the world, with her German father and Spanish mother, living between smart homes and bohemian hotels, there weren't enough bathrooms.

So with the aid of "amazing engineers and architects and builders", she reconfigured the grade II listed house, turning a

warren of little rooms into a spacious, airy family home whose four bedrooms now all have en suite bathrooms and/or a dressing room. There is underfloor heating and big Paladin radiators. Plus she has created new contemporary spaces for the family to live and work in: an office, painted vibrant sea blue, "that makes me concentrate and feel efficient, and is quite masculine"; a living room, whose ceiling was removed to create a vast, soaring space; and an open-plan kitchen with a breakfast bar, where she can make her children, Charlie, 5, and Lola, 13, pancakes in the morning or eat dinner with them at a low antique metal table on chairs from the Soho House collection.

Inventive hotels, she says, have long been a source of inspiration. As a child, travelling with parents who collected pieces to decorate their homes, she learnt to look in all sorts of places for interesting items, from churches and hotels to galleries and markets. The Bowery Hotel in New York, the designer says, "really blew me away": its richness and opulence in the

living spaces and mix of contemporary and antique furniture upstairs. "I went away thinking, 'I could do that.' " In Switzerland she fell in love with "warm, cosy" wooden beams and boot rooms by the front door – both of which she has in Lower Farm. "You'd never wear your shoes indoors in Switzerland. You take them off and put on felt slippers."

She has always collected antiques. They are scattered around the house: a pale blue-painted Swedish chest of drawers and a grandfather clock in the kitchen; a pair of wooden wheeled trolleys from Switzerland in the playroom; an old French font, which she has converted into a basin for the guest loo; a retro English football table in the pool room.

Inspiration for parts of the house has also come from slightly unexpected places. As well as owning horses, which her ex-husband keeps at his farm in Spain, the 40-year-old is a fan of motorbikes (of which she has three, to commute to London) and vintage cars. Her dining room is painted the red of a Porsche she covets; its photograph hangs on a wall. And for her equally car-mad son she had a bed made by a company called Reroom in the shape of a red Mini Cooper.

The boy's bathroom, featuring a French chandelier and a pop art-style painting of a blonde getting into a Mini, is pretty grown-up for a five-year-old, she admits. But having done up ten houses before this one – seven of her own and three for clients since she qualified as a designer in 2018 – she's learnt to future-proof her investments by making them suitable for other families too. "Although hopefully we will still be here for him to appreciate it when he's

Lounging area in Charlie's bedroom
Paul Massey

older," she adds.

The children certainly appreciate the five-acre garden that the previous owners had lovingly created, with a pond, fields and vegetable garden alongside a tennis court, swimming pool and sauna. "The garden is blissful," Engelhorn admits. "That was what really sold Lower Farm to me."

What the house now is, she hopes, is a place that reflects who she is – although she suspects she will keep changing it, by altering the colours. "You have to keep being surprised by your home – and inspired by it. So if you stop looking at a piece of art or the colour of a wall, you should change it. A home isn't about trends. It's about how it makes you feel."

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