

Classic Comfort

Restoring a beautiful Georgian house near the Suffolk coast meant that Cindy and Colin de la Rue could create an individual and characterful family home

FEATURE **GREG COOK** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD PARSONS**

Up until 1995, the de la Rue family – Colin, Cindy and their son Sam, then just a toddler – were living in a terraced townhouse in bustling south London. Their current home, on the other hand, is a Georgian villa set in seven acres of attractive grounds, situated just a couple of miles inland from the Suffolk coast, with its distinctive low salt marshes, reed beds, big blustery skies and sparkling seas.

Cindy recalls: 'When I mentioned to a good friend of mine that we'd been looking around this area she said she knew a house that would be perfect for us –

if it ever went up for sale. After two years of fruitless searching I was on the verge of desperation, so mentioned this place to our long-suffering agent. To our mutual amazement, he told me that the property had actually come on to the market – for the first time in 23 years – just two days earlier.' Not one to ignore such portents, Cindy and Colin instantly set off to see it.

'Even as we drove through the front gates and approached up the sweeping drive, I had a really positive feeling,' she remembers. 'I absolutely loved the setting and the classic Georgian facade; and inside, there were lots of appealing period details.'





KEY FACTS

Location Suffolk
Period Georgian house built in Regency style
Size Seven bedrooms
Owners Cindy de la Rue and her husband Colin, a lawyer, have three children: Sam, 16, Rose, 12, and May, 10

OPPOSITE The elegant exterior of the Georgian villa. Colin has carefully landscaped the grounds

LEFT Cindy in the garden
ABOVE In the drawing room is a pair of comfortable sofas in a broad stripe from John Lewis. Chocolate coloured faux-suede cushions are from cushionsonline.co.uk. Above the original fireplace is a circular gilded Empire mirror

Another persuasive factor that convinced Cindy that this would be their ideal home was the owner's ambivalence about putting his home on the market.

'It certainly wasn't your usual sales pitch from an estate agent,' she says. 'The owner showed us around and it was clear that he didn't really want to leave, but that, he said, he and his wife were getting too old to manage the maintenance of such a large house. He kept pointing out all the property's faults and what would need repairing or updating almost as if he couldn't help himself. We weren't put off, though, and it was actually helpful because we bought the house with our eyes wide open, knowing exactly what to expect from the building before we even rang a surveyor.'

Eventually, in the summer of 1995, Cindy and Colin completed on the sale of the property and found themselves transporting Sam and all their belongings out of London and into the Suffolk countryside.

'The previous owners had done what a lot of older people often do in similar situations and were simply living in a couple of rooms, the main one being the large kitchen,' Cindy explains. 'So when we first came here, even though we'd already looked around, we were opening doors to different rooms with a real sense of excitement and trepidation. The whole top floor, for example – which would probably have been servants' quarters originally – must have been abandoned for years, and somebody at some point had even ripped up half the floorboards.' >

READERS' HOMES

Over the next few years, the house was stripped of all its dated wallpaper and old carpets, ready for redecoration in soft neutral tones; and sash windows and doors were restored. The original stone flooring in the hall was exposed and hard-wearing sisal carpet was laid in all the other rooms.

While bathrooms were very tired and certainly needed replacing, the kitchen was in relatively good order, so it was simply freshened up with a coat of paint on the units; the exterior of the house, too, was painted in a similar tone to the existing colour.

'After replacing all the missing floorboards, we decided to convert the whole of the top floor into rooms, and that entire upstairs area is really just the children's domain now, which they love,' Cindy explains. 'It means that I can more easily manage the downstairs rooms and keep them clean and tidy.'

While Cindy worked tirelessly on the refurbishment of the house – and bringing up their three children, with the addition of daughters Rose and May – Colin was busy taming the extensive grounds. These include a series of walled Victorian kitchen gardens at the rear of the property, which they considered themselves most fortunate to inherit along with their new home. ▶

RIGHT In the downstairs hall the low bench upholstered in a needlepoint fabric and the large antique mirror above were bought from the previous owners and left in situ as they fit the space so perfectly. The beautiful existing wallpaper (for similar, try Sanderson) was retained and the original stone floor was exposed

BELOW The family's less formal sitting room is colourful with ornaments and mementoes from their travels. A striking glazed antique overmantel mirror above the stone fireplace reflects natural light and the vibrant walls, which are painted in Citron by Farrow & Ball





'I love the atmosphere of this place: it's ingrained with a sense of history'

ABOVE The classic wooden units in the country-style kitchen have been repainted in Farrow & Ball's Pale Powder. The enormous central island, topped in lacquered beech

with a large stainless steel sink, is the ideal place for preparing family meals

BELOW This guest bedroom is dominated by a simple iron four-poster bed (find similar

at The Original Bedstead Company). A collection of fine Victorian botanical watercolours (kittyprint.com has a selection) adds interest to the white painted walls

HOUSE HISTORY

Collin de la Rue has spent many hours researching the history of the house and its previous occupants. He explains: 'The first building here, which stood in the grounds near the front gate, was a Tudor hall erected in the 16th century by the youngest son of the Earl of Halifax, Richard Wood. His family remained here on the estate for the next 400 years, although the original property burned down in the early 1800s, to be replaced with the Georgian villa that stands today. Generations of the Wood family lived in the new house for the next century, until World War I, which decimated the family, killing five of the male line. With those that remained reaching the end of their lives without heirs, the house was put up for sale for the first time in 1936. Only four other families, including us, have owned it since.'

