

AS SEEN IN

PERIOD LIVING

TRADITIONAL HOMES, INTERIORS, GARDENS, ANTIQUES & RENOVATION

READERS' HOMES



A HOUSE OF MANY ASPECTS

Seasoned renovator Jennifer Bristow-Smith has completely transformed a tired Victorian house into an appealing home with the air of a colonial retreat; it won the title Best Country House and was voted Best Budget Project in our Readers' Awards 2010

FEATURE NAOMI JONES PHOTOGRAPHS BRENT DABRY

This grand Victorian country house in south west Scotland was waiting for just the right people to come along and bring out its original splendour. Thankfully, in 2008, Jennifer and Laurence Bristow-Smith found the house and could see past the heavily embossed 1970s wallpaper, garish red carpets, avocado bathroom suite, and unattractively orange varnish on all the woodwork. In two short years, while Laurence, a diplomat, has been continuing his professional duties in Milan, Jennifer has scraped back the dated finishes to reveal the idiosyncratic period character of the building. Her achievements are clear at a single glance: the house has elegance, functionality, and clever design ideas throughout; this project was the unmistakable winner of the Best Country House

category in our Readers' Awards 2010 – and was given the prize for Best Budget Project by our panel of judges. Much of what Jennifer has learned about creating a home over the years seems to have crystallised in this renovation. She explains: 'Before I met Laurence and moved to Milan, I lived in Norway for over 20 years; I still love Nordic simplicity, light, natural materials – I collect antique linen – and a Gustavian palette. I also spent several years in Marrakech, where I took on projects for friends; that's where I learned to create unusual interiors on a budget. I also called on my training as a sculptor to redefine interior spaces and use grouped objects to form interesting vignettes.' While Jennifer has obvious design talents, she was not wary of getting involved with the hard work of this renovation, which began with the lengthy process >

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT Jennifer is a keen seamstress and collects vintage buttons and trinkets and stores them in glass jars. (find similar jars at bristol.co.uk); Jennifer in the garden; buttercups hang outside the kitchen to ward off insects – a tradition Jennifer picked up in Norway. **OPPOSITE** Jennifer's clever use of lighting is seen here, with Am Lawrence pendants over the coffee table above the fireplace she used pages from a dictionary as wallpaper.

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of finding a new home. In between fulfilling her role as a diplomatic wife, she flew back and forth from Italy to the UK in search of the 'ideal' home. 'We looked everywhere from the south to the north, east to west, until we eventually found this place; we admired the village and the landscape as well as the house. But I knew this was a major project so I'd have to be very careful with our limited budget.'

'We were fortunate that, quite early on, some good contacts were recommended to us,' she continues, 'and I worked very closely with just one tradesman throughout the renovation process, making the schedule and finances much easier to control. Brian McKend – our builder, plumber, carpenter and electrician – has been exceptional; he's only called in for extra help for jobs that needed certification.'

'The house has elegance, functionality, and clever design ideas throughout'

Before she could begin the main house, though, Jennifer decided it would be wise to freshen up the adjoining cottage so that she could let it out as soon as possible as a holiday home to help pay for the work. That done, she and Brian set about restoring the main house as well as providing the option of running it as a bed and breakfast business in the future: the upstairs layout has been sympathetically altered to give it five bedrooms, each with its own en-suite bathroom; and to make the building more energy efficient, they installed two condensing boilers and a new water tank to improve the water pressure. Jennifer and Brian have restored some of the original features, too, for instance: servants' bells in the kitchen that were hidden under layers of paint, and badly stained tongue-and-groove panelling and cornice in several rooms. They also repaired the sash windows and wooden doors throughout, revamped the pitch pine staircase and brass rods, cleared out the four-paned fire, and stained the tiled entrance hall floor. Another challenge was to build bookshelves in the original drawing room to house Jennifer and Laurence's huge collection of books. 'Between us, we own many thousands of books, so it seemed sensible to create a library,' Jennifer says. 'But like the rest of the renovation, it had to be done fairly inexpensively so I came up with the idea of using standard boards from a DIY store and then adding beading on the edges, andoving along the top to make it look more impressive.' There was one area, however, that Jennifer was certain she didn't want to compromise on – and that >



KEY FACTS
Location Dumfries & Galloway
Period Victorian
Size Five bedrooms, each with an en-suite bathroom
Owners Jennifer Bristow-Smith and her husband Laurence, a diplomat who is currently British Consul General in Milan. When he retires they hope to run a bed and breakfast business from home

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OPPOSITE TOP A small table and chair from Norway provide an appealing place to sit overlooking the front garden. **OPPOSITE BELOW** The grand exterior of Jennifer and Laurence's Scottish country home. **LEFT** Jennifer created an attractive seating area in the hall with Victorian club chairs sourced on eBay; a Chocci rug from Afghanistan, and vintage coronation portraits bought at auction; the used Dulux Goodberry Fool 4 paint on the walls. **BELOW LEFT** The original encaustic tiles and oak panelling in the entrance hall were restored; the impressive carved settle was bought at auction. **BELOW** The iron door knocker's original to the house; a similar one is available from Argos.



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BELOW Jennifer created an eating area in the kitchen in what was once the coal hole; many of her cushions are made from vintage linen. She carefully restored the enamel bowls that had been covered in layers of paint.

RIGHT Solid oak worktops were chosen for the Ikea units; the pendants are also from Ikea. Open shelving is practical and makes the room feel even more spacious.

OPPOSITE The enormous table in the dining room was bought at an auction – it seats up to 14 people; the large chandelier is German. Jennifer restored the intricate corning and the original black marble fireplace.



'The lighting is a dominant feature and has been used to create interest and intimacy'

was the lighting. 'I decided to buy good quality fittings with a period feel from suppliers including Jim Lawrence, Triomiths, and RE. Although I managed to cut costs in other areas, this wasn't something I wanted to economise on.' The lighting is a dominant feature in the house, and it has been used to create interest and intimacy in equal measure. Dinks or tables in bay windows are illuminated by low hanging pendants, as is the sitting room coffee table, which is served by a pair. There are many tripod lamps, spotlights and wall scones; the attention to detail is evident always. Jennifer has been just as thoughtful throughout the rest of the house, using an inexpensive kitchen from Ikea with solid wooden worktops and some open shelves to create a country feel; the bathrooms feature basins and sanitaryware from Ikea, too. 'I like to combine functional low cost pieces with more quirky finds,' she explains, 'and they're a great source of inexpensive and unusual furnishings. I have an idea of what I want, then hunt it down.' Vintage luggage, for instance, is a much-loved collection, put together from online auctions and local antiques shops; it >



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LEFT Books of the same colour are displayed for visual impact. **BELOW LEFT** Jennifer chose basins from Ikea for the master en-suite bathroom, and off-white tongue-and-groove panelling. **ABOVE** The master bedroom overlooks the front garden and the countryside beyond; the window has been dressed with simple linen blinds, leaving the fine view unimpeded; the tall table lamps came from The Antique Shop in Kilkubright.

provides not only useful storage in the hallway and in many of the bedrooms, but has an evocative feel of adventurous journeys enjoyed by passionate travellers, like Jennifer and Laurence themselves. Another innovative idea evident in some rooms is Jennifer's unusual feature wallpaper. She has created a focal point over the sitting room fireplace using pages from a vintage dictionary – perfectly apt in a room that also serves as the library. Meanwhile, in the downstairs cloakroom, she chose music sheets above the basin; to ensure the paper is waterproof, she covered it with clear acrylic medium. As Jennifer comes to the end of the work, she can finally take a step back and look at the significant changes she's made to the house, of which she should be crossly proud. She says: 'I'm looking forward to the day that Laurence retires and we'll be permanently reunited in our beautiful new home.'

WHY THIS HOUSE WON PL'S BEST BUDGET PROJECT 2010

Jennifer spent **£93,500** fully renovating and furnishing this large house. Building work **£10,000** (project was hands-on and self-managed making huge savings)

- Plumbing **£4,000** • Electrics **£7,000** • Central heating **£10,000** • Window repairs **£2,000** (refurbishing existing sashes rather than replacing) • Roof repairs **£2,000**
- New kitchen **£8,000** (using inexpensive Ikea kitchen while investing in solid wood worktops and quality appliances) • Five new bathrooms **£24,000** (using Ikea pieces with solid wood) • Furniture **£10,000** (sourced from eBay, antiques shops and auctions)
- Lighting **£5,000** • Paint/wallpaper **£1,500** (replicating heritage shades with Dulux paint) • Flooring/carpets **£6,000** • Accessories **£2,000** • Gardening/landscaping **£2,000**

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