



Built on land that once marked the Roman Empire's north-western frontier, this house carries its history effortlessly

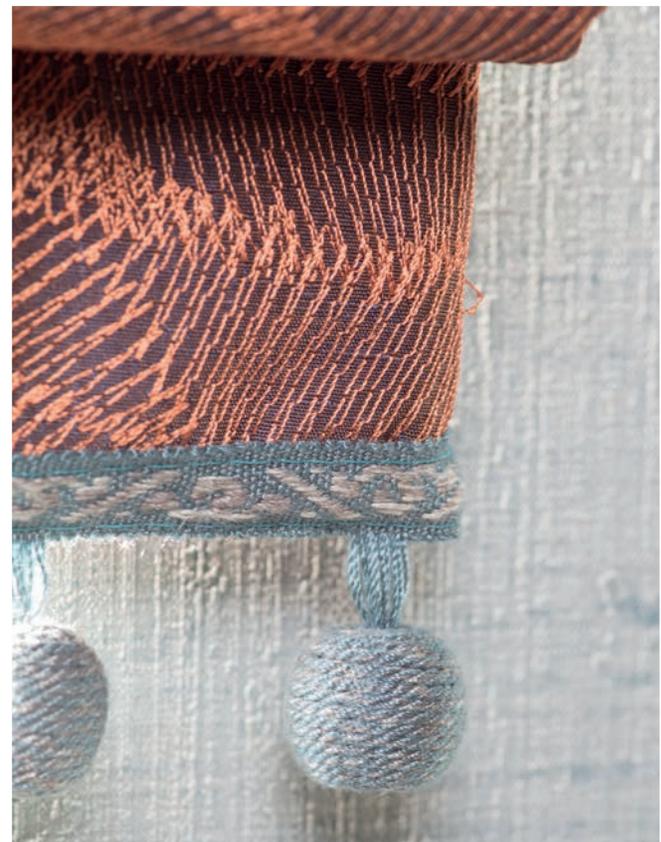
Photography Susie Lowe Words Catherine Coyle

DETAILS

What A five-bedroom extended bungalow

Where Bearsden, Glasgow

Interior design Gisele Cooney,
Chelsea McLaine Interior Design



History seeps from the very walls of this house. It looks from the outside like a regular suburban bungalow, but its heritage is hidden in plain sight. The Antonine Wall, built by Roman legionaries in the second century AD to mark the empire's north-western frontier, runs for 37 miles from Old Kilpatrick on the west coast, through Bearsden, to Carriden on the Firth of Forth. The plot on which this house is built skirts the boundary of this World Heritage site, which cuts through its garden; it meant that when work was being carried out to extend the property, an archaeologist was required on site to ensure the site's safe and lawful protection.

Built in 1926, Stronvar (from the Gaelic, meaning 'edge of the ridge') sits at the top of a hill, overlooking the golf course below. Only four families have lived here, including two generations of the same family, and its current owners have slowly and very carefully reinterpreted the structure from the outside in, over a period of more than a decade.

Affording such thoughtful consideration to the house seems only right; the previous owners had been adamant that they wanted the house to go to a family that would give as much to it as they had over the years – and gain as much in return. Putting this sentiment at the heart of their plans, the current inhabitants enlisted Chelsea McLaine Interior Design to help them with the decoration.

The builders had already completed most of the structural alterations by the time the Bearsden-based firm was commissioned, so design director Margot Paton, lead designer Gisele Cooney and designer Tracy Sifaoui knew they would be working with spaces that had already been formed. Their task was to come up with a scheme that would suit both the interior and the family who lived there. "We have been working with the clients on this project for two years now, and it is still ongoing," says Paton. "They brought us in because they were concerned about tackling such an extensive design project themselves – they knew mistakes would be costly."

The designers were given a minimal brief – a request for earthy tones and no wallpaper – which evolved as

the clients began to trust both the team and themselves, finding the confidence to make bolder, richer and more assured choices as they realised the changes would not detract from the features that had first attracted them to this property.

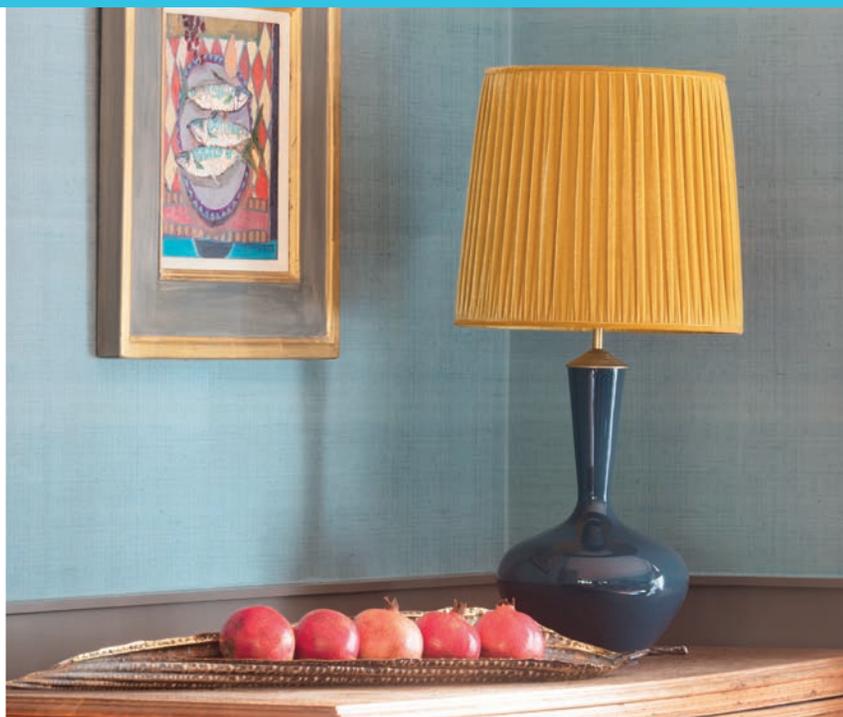
Among those features was the garden – it had clinched the decision to buy, in fact. Their builders had opened up the rear to take in a full-width extension, its three, four-panel bi-fold door system making the back of the house effectively a wall of glass. This area, an open-plan kitchen-dining-living space with a utility room, had been added before the team at Chelsea McLaine was drafted in. "A beautiful reclaimed hardwood floor in the adjacent formal dining room had been laid in herringbone format, which provided a great starting point," recalls Paton. "But the space itself felt very big; while this would suit larger gatherings, we had to find ways to make the room feel intimate enough for smaller ones as well."

One of these ways was to install half-height wood panelling, which breaks up the long expanse of wall on either side of the room. "A bespoke double-pedestal dining table by Julian Chichester to seat ten, comfortable Scott dining chairs by Charlotte James, and an extra-long cabinet, together with an Arque side chair by Whitehead, a baby grand piano and an occasional table help to fill ▶





[Above] The sheer size of this room presented a challenge, which the designers met by using colour, texture and scale to make it feel inviting and warm without losing any of its impact. The panelling, painted in Zoffany's City Grey eggshell, sets off the textured wallpaper by Jane Churchill. The curtains are Zoffany's Water Iris fabric in peacock and copper, hung from a Bradley Collection curtain pole in bronze to accentuate the room's metallic highlights. [Below, left to right] The Julian Chichester Circles Long sideboard combines rustic oak and mirror; a detail of the cushions in the study in Osborne & Little's Menton fabric and Designers Guild velvet; *Three Mackerel on Card Table* by David Smith hangs next to Porta Romana's Shisha lamp in kingfisher with its ochre velvet pleated shade. [Previous pages] It took six people to carry in the 3.5m-long double-pedestal dining table without fracturing its top; a detail of the Roman blind in Zoffany's Cirrus embroidery in copper trimmed with Jim Thompson accoutrements; Porta Romana's Willow wall light is French brass with a turquoise satin shade







[Left and above] Zesty orange accents lift the lounge's neutral, textural base, with the bespoke rug by Rug by Turnberry and Roman blinds in Jane Churchill's Fontana floral fabric; original features such as these symmetrical stained-glass windows show how period detailing can work in a contemporary setting

the space," says Paton.

The formal dining room, filled with natural light, had to be zoned. As well as a trio of pendant lights (Heathfield's large Derwent cubes in an antique brass finish, which have sumptuous Jane Churchill Emile Velvet shades with turquoise silk lining), there are two different types of Porta Romana wall lights (Pillar and Willow) and a variety of table lamps. These have more than simply a decorative role; they are task lights that can be deployed to create different moods, depending

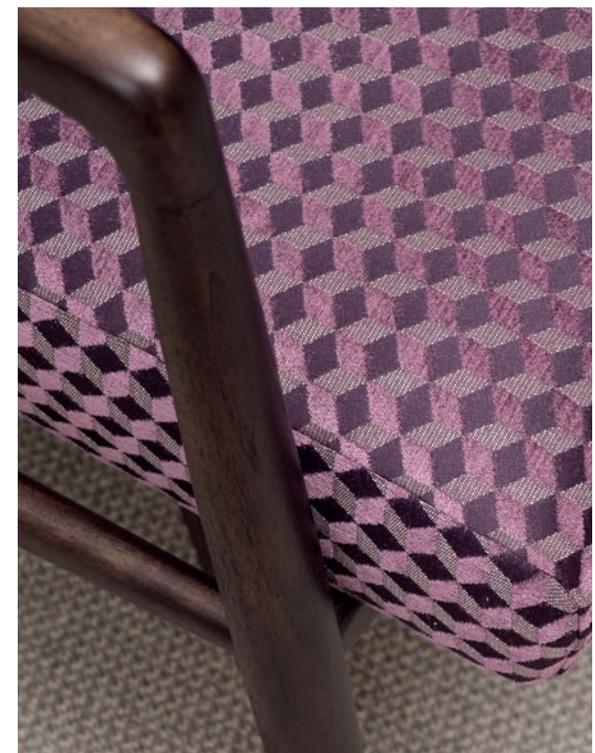
on how the space is being used.

Rich, saturated shades of teal, meanwhile, combine with contrasting metallics to give the room a warmth that can still be felt as the daylight fades.

The internal layout has been altered to suit the lifestyle of the owners. Although the front portion of the house retains its cellular configuration, the designers have created a feeling of continuity that unites the individual rooms. The best possible use has been made of the available space, often through the addition of bespoke cabinetry, (Chelsea McLaine has a long-standing partnership with Peter Thompson of York) which used up a significant portion of the budget. But, the results have been worth it, to give each member of the family a dedicated area where they can retreat to work or play. "Since the house had been extended into the roof space, ►



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[Top left] This simple Shaker-style kitchen was installed when the owners first moved in, before Chelsea McLaine became involved in the project. The pared-back colours and shapes draw the eye to the impeccable herringbone hardwood floor. [Above] The Lorca Mohawk fabric on this chair adds depth with its strong pattern. [Below left and right] The dressing room doubles as a guest bedroom and uses pattern to build layers on a neutral base, with Osborne & Little's Ravenna chenille covering Julian Chicester's Chagal chair, featuring Rana fabric cushions



and planning restrictions constrained the height to one and a half storeys, the slopes and angles of the roof had to be worked into the design,” explains Paton. “We teamed the built-in elements with confident, bold wallpapers and fabrics to give the rooms a real sense of their inhabitants’ identities.”

The lounge at the front of the house is a more formal room but the same vivid colour has been applied in a contemporary take on traditional. Tom Faulkner’s Madison coffee table in glass and bronze and the bespoke rug by Turnberry Rugs feel fresh and modern without sacrificing the gravitas of period styling. “A neutral textural base was created to gain the clients’ confidence, and then layers of colour were introduced via the Roman blinds, in Jane Churchill’s cross-stitch embroidered floral Fontana fabric, and through accessories.”

Surrounded on all sides by garden, the house has a strong connection to its roots, the outdoors and the various rooms in their new forms. “In the upstairs bedrooms, we created a pale, neutral backdrop, to retain a light and airy feel,” says Paton. “Downstairs, in contrast, in the brighter part of the house, we used more colour and pattern.”

With lots of windows to contend with on the ground floor, wall space was limited but the family was keen to introduce colour and texture through artwork. Their collection of Scottish art, including works by Gordon Wilson and David Smith, brings flurries of concentrated colour to the vast dining space in particular and allows the textured Jane Churchill Astral teal silk-effect wallpaper to take on a new dimension. This room, believes Paton, is the “jewel in the crown” of this project. “To balance the elements of any design, proportion and scale must be taken into consideration. This dining room, for example, wouldn’t work if we’d used a standard, off-the-shelf dining table and chairs. Normal-sized furniture would have made the space feel vast and unwelcoming, and trying to circumvent that by filling it up with lots of additional bits and pieces would have made it feel crowded and lacking in purpose.

“We are inspired by different influences, such as colour seen in art, nature and travel, as well as products. Often, choices of colour combinations are subconscious and are inspired by stored memories.”

Lock these images in your mind’s eye; they might just inspire your next interiors venture. ■