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# EXPANSIVE EQUILIBRIUM

Having commissioned an award-winning newbuild in Suffolk, the owners entrusted its decoration to interior designer Virginia White, who has used the asymmetrical spaces as a backdrop for harmoniously diverse furniture and furnishings

TEXT **JENNIFER GOULDING** | PHOTOGRAPHS **SIMON BROWN** | LOCATIONS EDITOR **LIZ ELLIOT**



OPPOSITE The design of this newbuild was inspired by tar-washed fishermen's huts in Southwold. THIS PAGE The Prince of Wales' investiture chairs in the hall were designed by Lord Snowdon in 1969





The open-plan kitchen and dining room is simply furnished, with white walls, natural wood and wide floorboards in Douglas fir. The bar stools are from The Conran Shop



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Tongue-and-groove panelling in the hall is painted in 'Elephant's Breath' from Farrow & Ball. The study is set in the middle of the house and overlooks the dining area. Georgian mahogany furniture mixes with modern pieces in the dining room and the sitting room beyond

**I**t is so beautiful here, we didn't want to build something that would be highly visible. We wanted something that would fit into the landscape,' says Lucy Turvill, owner of this award-winning newbuild in Suffolk. In response, architect Anthony Hudson looked to local landmarks for inspiration, drawing particularly on the tar-washed fishermen's huts in Southwold. 'Lucy and Richard were adamant that it shouldn't look like a barn, but it is a farming area and the site originally had a double-height barn, so we have also given it an understated agricultural feel,' says Anthony. The result is a gloriously asymmetrical building that is completely in context, yet is as visually arresting as its uninterrupted views across the Hen Reedbeds.

Lucy, her husband, Richard, and their daughter, Clea, now 16, moved from London 10 years ago when Richard acquired a Suffolk-based business. Originally, they had rented a house on the nearby Benacre Estate. 'We used to look across to this spot and think: "Wouldn't that be a lovely place to live,"' recalls Lucy. When they eventually secured the plot, they asked Anthony to design their house. 'He has a lovely voice, so that was it for me. But seriously, I just liked him. He is charming and he appreciated the site.'

Lucy and Richard's brief to Anthony was for an H-shape house, with the kitchen and living areas in one arm, the guest quarters in the other, and the middle acting as the body of the house. 'The H has been radically delimbed due to budget. It is more of a U-shape, but that is the reality of newbuilds – and the principle remains,' says Lucy. Size was another important issue. 'We are a small family, but we have a lot of



In the sitting room, the sofas and ottoman are covered in turquoise fabric from Pierre Frey, with the Georgian armchair upholstered in Raoul Textiles' Ananas fabric in lake



guests. We need plenty of space, but we didn't want the house to feel empty when we are on our own.'

Anthony dealt with this by turning the gallery leading to the spare rooms into a self-contained study for Lucy, and creating communal areas with pockets for expansion that do not look empty when they are not in use. Each one is painstakingly positioned to frame the views and capture the best of the sunlight, creating an unusual layout without a single rectilinear space. 'There are no abrupt changes in the interior. You are subtly guided round the house by the inflected walls. It is like being a ball in a pinball machine, but in a calm, gentle way,' he explains.

The centre of the house is the dining room, which is overlooked by the gallery-cum-study. 'In our previous houses, my study was always tucked away in a room that no one else wanted to use, which was ridiculous as I am often alone in the house. I wanted to be in the middle of things. I love sitting in my study now,' says Lucy. This winsome double-height, highly glazed space leads to the kitchen on one side and the living area on the other, and is partially open plan. 'It is a family house, so we wanted to get that sense of togetherness and of shared social spaces, but also the feeling that you can get away from one another,' says Anthony.

Excepting the steel staircase, which has a faintly maritime air, the finish of the interior is inspired by Kettle's Yard in Cambridge; Lucy describes it as, 'The most uplifting space – white with contrasting wood, old furniture and wonderful art. Although we have a long way to go with the art, our house is simple in a similar way.' Anthony agrees: 'It is our interpretation, but it has that modernist aesthetic and the palette is the same – white rendered paint, slate and pine boards.'

However, the decoration of the house is the work of Lucy's sister, interior designer Virginia White. 'My first thought was: "Let's anchor this house." For me, the anchor of a house is good furniture, good pictures and good sculpture. The house itself should be the background. It's probably a bit old-fashioned, but there it is,' says Virginia. Although Anthony designed the house to accommodate key pieces of Lucy and Richard's existing furniture – originally from their London house, also decorated by Virginia – adding and refining the layout was a challenge due to the unusual shapes of the rooms.

Nevertheless, she set about mixing the existing Georgian, country pieces with items from her recently launched furniture collection. 'Designing furniture is quite a turning point for me, but it is hugely exciting. I am influenced by the type of Georgian furniture you see in the house, but I am also obsessed with klismos, which is the style of chair depicted on fifth-century Greek vases. My versions are pared-down and comfortable. They are things of value, sure-footed, steeped in history, yet utterly modern,' declares Virginia.

To this she has added interest with details: traditional curtains and roman blinds in both plain and highly decorative fabrics; splashes of bright colour from upholstery, cushions



FROM TOP Opening off the dining room, the sitting room has a contemporary, uncluttered feel. An old, country-style desk stands at one end of the sitting area, which is used as an occasional work space

FROM RIGHT A bath from Duravit and a slate-topped stand with twin basins furnish the main bedroom's en-suite bathroom; the portrait of Lucy is by her sister Philippa Kunisch. Lucy's daughter Clea has her own sitting room, bathroom and mezzanine bedroom

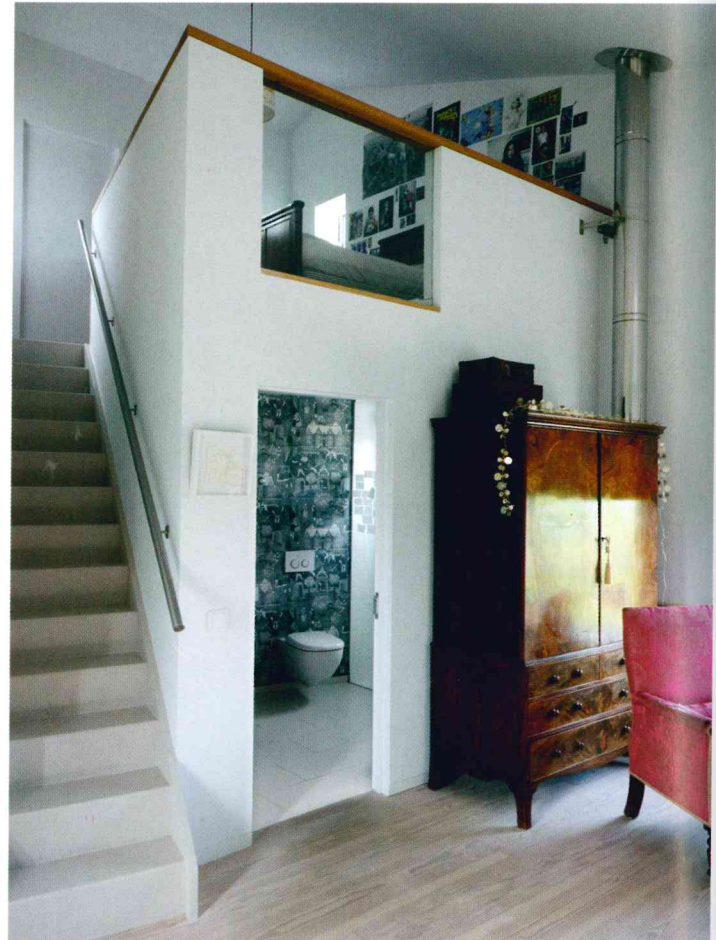


and lacquered furniture; and lighting that ranges from simple pendant shades to glass table lamps from Porta Romana and ornate, antique wall sconces. She has expertly hung Lucy and Richard's pictures, which they collected with her advice, and cleverly displayed groups of objets d'art. Virginia also played a large part in the design of the bespoke kitchen, advised on the flooring and added details such as bookcases and panelling. 'I wanted the house to be warm, modern and well suited to Lucy and Richard's lifestyle, which is very outdoorsy,' she explains.

It is a rather unexpected way to decorate a house that has a cutting-edge design, but it works wonderfully. The interior feels layered, comfortable and unpretentious, and the interplay between the architecture and decoration is very pleasing. But Virginia is not satisfied yet. 'The process is ongoing. In time, we'll bring some twentieth-century classics into the mix. It needs a little more modernity,' she says.

Lucy and Richard are content to let the decoration evolve, but they are also very happy with the house as it is: 'Anthony has built something that totally suits our needs. He really got under the skin of how we live, listened when we explained what's important to us, and considered the precise function of each room. There is not an inch of dead space in the house. It's a real achievement, and a real luxury. It is lovely to live in' □

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Blinds made in a Florence Broadhurst fabric dress the narrow windows in the spare room; colourful

touches contrast with the neutral walls and flooring, including a red side table by Virginia White. Lucy Turvill with her Labradors Flint and

Dougie, and horse Birdie. A Georgian armchair and chest of drawers add simple elegance to the main bedroom