

Under the Tuscan sun

The dappled light streaming through the windows of this Italian farmhouse was hugely influential in all the decorating decisions designer Nicola Harding took when reinventing the property as a luxurious retreat


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ENTRANCE HALL

This provides a calming transition between the house and garden, and between the different rooms,' says Nicola.

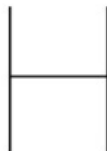
Walls in Pure & Original Silver Clay Fresco. Victorian library table, Tinker & Toad. Medici scone, Atelier Vime Editions. Plaster cone light, Rose Unfacke. Painting by Christy Matson





EXTERIOR

Intimate spaces under the shade of the wraparound terrace are perfect for enjoying the garden and olive grove views. For similar loungers try Neptune



How do you find a compromise between the tastes of an Italian husband and an American wife when bringing an ancient Tuscan farmhouse to life? Bring in the colour- and comfort-loving British interior designer Nicola Harding. ‘They wanted something soulful, warm and friendly,’ says the designer renowned for her gentle, soothing approach to interiors. ‘They wanted a house that would feel immediately like home the minute they arrived, and somewhere relaxing to spend time together as a family and entertain friends.’

The couple, having met ‘in some far-flung corner of the world in their twenties and made their fortune in New York from nothing,’ says Nicola, bought the house and surrounding olive groves, not far from where he grew up. They wanted to instil in it an element of future-proofing – should their twenty-something children bring friends or start to have families of their own – as well as allowing for the wife to feel at ease having people in her space. ‘She was open about finding this difficult, so we needed to make this comfortable for her.’

Nicola’s answer was to concentrate on the heart of the house, designing rooms that included an intimate dining room and easy-going living spaces such as a kitchen, sitting room and snug downstairs, as well as four bedrooms and bathrooms upstairs. Outside, a pool house – with a kitchen (doubling as a bar), dining and living areas – was created from scratch and outbuildings were converted into guest cottages, one with its own kitchen and sitting room, affording both the family and guests the perfect balance of privacy and conviviality.

Hard finishes were reused where possible, from the stairs and tiled floors (‘much nicer to cover them with really big rugs’) and metalwork (‘rubbed down and repainted’) to asking the builder to give a less than attractive fireplace a sculptural lift in brick and plaster. ‘Sometimes, reusing things pushes you to find creative solutions that work better for everyone.’


A bigger main bathroom was also fashioned by removing the walls of a toilet cubicle installed by the previous owners; a butler’s pantry was created next to the kitchen and Nicola arranged the basement to include a wine cellar, space for a billiard table and plentiful storage so the house never feels too cluttered.

The designer accentuated the flow of light by ‘dialling the colour palette up and down according to the location



of each room,’ she says, bouncing off the views of olive groves outside. In the darker dining room, shaded by the vine-strewn terrace outside, she swathed the ceiling in red and the walls with a teal blue grasscloth. ‘Layering darker colours in different tones from the same family ensures the effect doesn’t feel too hectic.’ By contrast, in the light-filled sitting room, Nicola layered shades of white with hints of blue in the textiles and lamp bases. ‘Blue is such an easy colour to live with,’ she says.

It is now a home that feels ‘smart and grown up but also welcoming and approachable,’ says Nicola. This owes much to the designer’s love for seeking out local craftspeople to bring every space ‘depth and a sense of history’. Here, artisans have helped with the textural fresco wall finish – ‘it really accentuates the dappled light coming through’ – to tiling, joinery and rattan work.

She also worked with makers, including Matthew Cox for the dining table, Rose Uniacke for sofas, lighting and linens and Soane Britain for rattan, lights and fabric. ‘It’s like matchmaking, finding things with interesting stories, be they antiques or new pieces, that resonate with the people who are going to live in the house,’ says Nicola. ‘That sense of affinity and connection with a piece and the person who made it is what makes someone feel completely at home from the get-go.’ 

■ nicolaharding.com

“The greatest compliment someone can give me is that it isn’t immediately obvious a designer had been involved”



DINING ROOM

Rich colour and texture deliver a sense of depth. **Socle table**, Matthew Cox. **Chair cushions in** Gorjon, Namay Samay. **Ceiling in** Georgetown, Paint & Paper Library. **Extra Fine Arrowroot wallcovering in** Tourmaline, Phillip Jeffries. **Pendant**, Soane Britain. **Lamp**, Tyson London. **Rug**, Tatiana Tafur

SNUG

'I wanted this space to completely envelop the family,' says Nicola. **Walls in** Courtyl Rose, Pure & Original. **Wall light**, Pinch. **Lamp**, Julian Chichester; **bespoke lampshade in** Anemone paper by Rosi de Ruig. **Sofa and ottoman**, both bespoke

"I personally don't feel very at ease when things are too perfect – I think it is imperfection that makes a home comfortable"



KITCHEN

The red island 'gives the room a warm heart and draws the focus to the centre,' says Nicola.

Lower units in Spruce, Paint & Paper Library; wall units in Silver Clay; island in Old Wine, both Pure & Original. Camembert stool, Howe. Zellige tiles, Mosaic Factory. Pendant lights, NPage Studio



BEDROOM
This space is in the guest cottage.
Headboard, KLS Interiors; covered in Christopher Farr Cloth's Echo in Pale Blue. **Walls** in Pure & Original Skin Powder. **Bedsread**, Toast



MAIN BEDROOM
An anteroom leading from here affords the owners a sanctuary. **Daisy pendant**, **wall light**, both Soane Britain. **Cushion** in woven silk velvet ikat from Nushka



MAIN BATHROOM
Inset shower panelling made from local Breccia Violetta marble lends a jolt of energy. **Walls** in Chalk White by Pure & Original. **Zellige tiles** in colour 1019, Mosaic Factory



MAIN BATHROOM
Pink feet add a playful modern twist to the traditional bath. **Rockwell bath** with feet in pink, The Water Monopoly. **Vanity** in Moorland by Pure & Original. **Wall light**, Collier Webb



CLOAKROOM

This cocooning space, rich in colour and pattern, sits 'somewhere between romance and glamour,' says Nicola.

Bespoke vanity made locally in Verde Guatemala marble. Mirror, Lorford's Antiques. Hopper wall lights, Jamb. Palampore Blossom wallpaper in Pink and Red, Soane Britain. Door in Georgetown, Paint & Paper Library



COURTYARD
Paint for the facade was custom mixed by Pure & Original with shutters in Ethereal Blue by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint. Antique stool, Vinterior; covered in Canal Stripe by Perennials Fabrics



EXTERIOR
It was important that the garden flowed around the house. The star jasmine planting 'has the most incredible scent and is clipped to the shape of the windows to feel very architectural,' says Nicola

☞ Nicola Harding

The designer shares her style inspiration

SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT We changed several of the openings from squared tops to rounded, which despite being simple and relatively inexpensive made an enormous impact on leading the eye through the space and how the light flows from one place to another.

YOUR STYLE IN THREE WORDS Soulful, curious, user-friendly.

GO-TO COLOUR Pink. It's nurturing and calming and works at all times of the day, all year. I'll never forget someone telling me that prison cell walls painted pink help to calm the inhabitants.

PLAIN OR PATTERNED... I would rarely do a patterned sofa, it would be more like a patterned accent – the punctuation rather than the main event.

DESCRIBE YOUR DESIGN PROCESS I start with a feeling. I have long conversations with clients about how they want the space to feel, how they want to use it and then the colour palette comes from that because it plays such a big part for me in creating the right mood. Next comes the furniture and lighting; and then fabrics come last.



ENTERTAINING AREA
Everything is completely weatherproof in this space, which is open to the elements all year. Coffee table is bespoke; made by a travertine supplier. Atzompa pendants, L'Aviva Home



OUTDOOR KITCHEN

Fashioned in steel stainless and local hardwood, this is the perfect space for cooking for large numbers when entertaining family and friends.

Splashback in zellige tiles; for similar try Bert & May. Salsa bar stools, Sika-Design. Sugar Cone pendant lights by Rich Miller from The New Craftmaker. Travertine floor tiles sourced locally

SITTING ROOM

'It was important for this space to feel cosy if it is just the husband and wife at home, but with plenty of seating for when people visit,' says Nicola. Walls in Pure & Original Calm Fresco. Rattan chairs, clients' own; cushions in Bhuji in Denim, Namay Samay. Custom Studio sofa in heavyweight linen in Clay; seat in Stripe III, Rose Uniacke. Antique white table lamp and shade, Caroline de Kerangal. Celadon blue table lamp with Robert Kime Papyrus lampshade. Drapery in textured linen in Cameo, Rose Uniacke. Antique mahogany side table, Miles Griffiths Antiques



