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## Past Masters

*When Patti & Ben Money-Coutts moved into their regency hunting lodge in Hampshire, it had lost much of its original charm. But thanks to their empathy with the past and Patti's talent for design, the house has been restored to its former splendor.*

Warm, vibrant and quirky with an underlying strength of character is a description that could apply to both this Regency hunting lodge and the personality of its owner, Patti Money-Coutts. From outside, the expansive 1830's built house, deep in the Hampshire countryside, is cool and elegant, but on the inside it reveals a series of jewel coloured rooms, each one a gem in its own right. "I couldn't live with neutrals," confesses Patti, who enjoyed the sunshine shades of a Texan childhood and was influenced by a creative mother with an eye for colour.

Patti and her city banker husband Ben and children, Chris, Cecily, and Zac, moved from south-west London to the house eight years ago "We wanted a commutable country lifestyle and room

for the children to grow," Patti says. The couple were also looking for space to accommodate Patti's interior decorating business, which she began after giving up accountancy to start a family. "The idea of combining my love of colour and textiles with my business background, in a job that could work around the children was very appealing", she explains.



The lodge, originally built as a large two up two down on a 19th century route from London to the New Forest, fitted the couple's vision perfectly, with seven bedrooms and a pretty cottage attached; just right for offices and a studio for Patti's business. Although the house had been extended in Victorian times and again in the 1970's, its original structure had been retained. The three-acre setting, with a tennis court, pool and kitchen garden, made it no less appealing.

The decoration was in an over-traditional style, not to Patti's taste, with heavy curtains, swags-and-tails and beige carpet, but the house itself was comfortingly solid. "We bought it because it had good bones, with well-proportioned rooms and decent original features, such as the fireplaces, flooring and windows, still intact," says Patti.

What's more, no major building work was required, just a gentle reconfiguring of certain rooms, in particular the





kitchen. "It was strangely placed in the middle of the house without any views, so we moved it to look out over the garden," explains Patti. A kitchen wall was then knocked down to link it to the dining room, which boasts original Regency alcove, oak flooring and an elegant fireplace.

Patti took a hands-on approach, treating her new home as a blank canvas on which to experiment with bold colours, rich fabrics and new ideas, inspired by the original red and yellow floor tiles in the hall, for example, she hand painted regency style stripes to go with them and, in the adjacent living room, mixed floral wallpaper with French antiques and vibrant furnishings. The maple kitchen was made to her own design, with the island unit and country chairs painted to match. Wardrobes in the main bedroom were stripped back, painted white and decorated on the outside with handbags from Patti's vast collection hanging from coat hooks. "Everyone asks if Ben minds, but he has his own dressing room so he doesn't

have to hunt through my handbags to find a shirt in the mornings," she explains. Although Patti gives Ben the same consideration she would a client - "he has the final say" - she pretty much has carte blanche because he is confident in her abilities.

Patti's bold decorating schemes in her own home have helped to encourage her clients to be more adventurous. "When they come to my house and see how patterns, stripes, and strong colours can work together, they get excited about trying something more challenging themselves".

Although the family have been here for eight years, with their Labrador, Chilli (named after the main ingredient of Patti's childhood Texan diet), two cats and five hens, there's still work to do. "A good house is never finished-it's always evolving," says Patti, who believes in under-rather than over-designing. "The last thing I want is something chichi and matching that looks like a hotel," she shudders. That would be her decorating nightmare.

