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BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PERIOD HOMES MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2020

# PERIOD LIVING

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# A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

A dilapidated Georgian coach house that once belonged to the church next door has been turned into a welcoming home for writer and gilder Alix Bateman, who worked hard to keep its heritage charm intact

Words Sara Emslie | Photographs Rachel Whiting

A full-page photograph of a woman, Alix Bateman, standing in a bright, converted Georgian coach house. She is wearing a dark blue top and jeans, looking down at a small white dog. To her left is a large window with many yellow light bulbs hanging from the frame. To her right is a wooden table with books on it, and a small wooden chair. In the background, there is a large arched window and a sofa. The room has a rustic, open-plan feel with stone floors and white walls.

Alix and Bedlington terrier Vincent in the living room, where underfloor heating was installed under stone slabs. Alix painted the shutters and architraves in Farrow & Ball's London Stone and White Tie – shades that really suit the building's heritage. The vintage school desk and chair are from Sunbury Antiques and are easy to move when Alix is hosting an event and opens up the study and lounge to make a large open-plan space





Left: A slim window at the top of the room lets in light but maintains privacy. It also acts as a display shelf for ceramics and glassware. Alix picked up the oak chest in a Chiswick car boot sale – it's the perfect place for a pair of 1950s American flocked nodding lions found at Sunbury Antiques and some vintage metal toys. The circus plate on the wall is by Pia Bramley and the van print is a reminder of the one Alix used to drive

Below: The original window between the front room and the yard gets opened up when Alix hosts events. It makes a quirky 'cloakroom' with antler hooks from Graham & Green, a gilded shop sign from Sunbury Antiques and a painting of Vincent the Bedlington terrier's uncle, Dorian, by Cadogan Doggy Dogs

Below left: 'When we bought it there were rotten wooden gates into the passageway (now the lounge) that the coach and horses used to get to the stable yard,' says Alix. A new wooden frontage and brass door furniture have replaced the old gates, in keeping with the listed building criteria. The house sign is from Inkpin & Boot, gilded by Alix

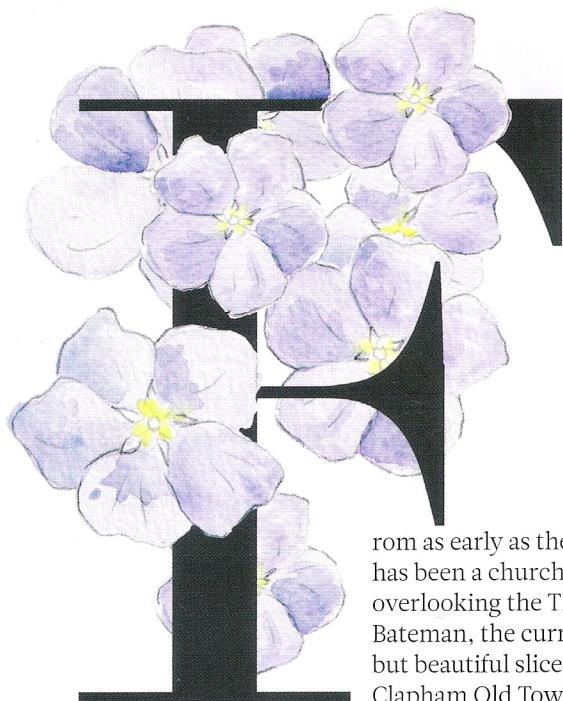




The living room was originally the passageway leading to the stable yard. It's furnished with a velvet sofa from Peter Jones and a cane sofa, which is a charity shop find. The sign is from Wiltons, one of the oldest surviving grand music halls. 'The architect who oversaw its renovation is a friend of mine and told me they were selling off props. It was part of the Live at Wiltons sign above the stage. It turned out to be too long for the wall so we prop it up wherever there's space,' says Alix. The cushions are by Chocolate Creative







From as early as the 12th century, there has been a church on the plot next door overlooking the Thames, explains Alix Bateman, the current custodian of a small but beautiful slice of history in leafy Clapham Old Town, south-west London.

The coach house that she now calls home stands next to the church and was built during Georgian times on the site of the original manor house of Clapham. 'Old plans show Glebe House, as it is known, to be actually in the position of the kitchen for the great house,' says Alix.

By 1825 this section of the original building was part of the stable yard and associated buildings of Russell's Livery Stables and was used to house horses and carriages until it was eventually gifted to the church next door in 1903, along with a sitting tenant. Old maps show its different surroundings over the years, including the episode in 1895 when part of the building was demolished to make way for a Victorian road to be built.

Poor upkeep over the years meant that when the church finally came to sell the coach house it was in need of total renovation. Step in Alix, who was six months pregnant at the time with son Ply and adamant she didn't want a building project. This heritage wonder won her over and work began. 'It was its uniqueness and its potential,' she says. 'And it is in an amazing position, detached, next door to glorious church grounds and a listed Georgian church, and opposite a small chapel, which is now a community pottery. Behind it are walled allotments and community gardens with beehives and a pond, all in our large bustling, crowded capital city!'

Restoration seemed to 'take an age' says Alix. 'As areas were uncovered, I sometimes chose to leave them in their distressed state; the patina was often too good to cover up. Materials that were not original to the house were removed and more sympathetic ones reinstated.' But the major alteration to the property is the conversion of the covered side passageway into the family's living space. This original thoroughfare for the horses and carriages was accessed through large rotten wooden gates that Alix removed and replaced with a wooden frontage in the same style to satisfy the requirements of the home's listed building status.

At the back, wooden folding patio doors were added and large windows were fitted inside the original brick arches. The result is a space full of light and character that serves as the perfect modern-day complement to the building's heritage charm as well as the perfect backdrop to its current contents.

Alix and Ply both love collecting and the entire house is an assortment of curios and period pieces picked up along the way. As a former antiques dealer Alix admits that nothing gets her out of bed quicker in the morning than a trip to a fleamarket. 'I'm at the gates at 6am with all the mad men in macs awaiting the market's opening,' she confesses. And it has paid off with an enviable collection of Georgian furniture. 'I took my cue from the bare bones of the house and its period features,' says Alix. 'Some good bits of Georgian oak furniture just work so well alongside striking contemporary lighting and slightly idiosyncratic objects or furniture and keep it looking current, as I had no wish to create a Georgian pastiche.'

These antiques work well alongside Ply's impressive collection of natural history curiosities too. The original Georgian sitting room at the front of the house is not only Alix's study but home to her son's burgeoning collection of fossils, taxidermy and other Darwin-esque finds showcased on a couple of Georgian bureaux, including a woolly mammoth rib, a rattle snake's rattle and a bleached horse's hip bone found on a beach in Antigua.

They all come in handy as props, too, for the photo shoots, private parties and events that Alix sometimes hires the house out for – a business that developed organically. With so many possible variations on a theme it seemed a waste not to let others enjoy the charm of the property and its history. 'The exterior is quite unusual and arouses people's curiosity,' says Alix, 'so I get a lot of people tapping on the window mouthing, "What is this place?" Which led me to hosting mini pop-up events such as artists' and authors' talks, craft workshops, supper club nights, mindfulness workshops and so on.' Alix also hires out the property for filming, parties and private dining, and runs a boutique B&B here.

It is like an old curiosity shop with layers of history in every nook. Keenness to preserve the character has meant that the coach house 'squint window' still remains – a narrow glazed aperture in the kitchen through which the coachman could see the horse and carriages arriving and leaving. And so too does the original window from the study onto the yard that is now the living room. 'When we have events we throw it open. It's been used as a DJ booth, a bar, and an opening through which classical singers sing musical numbers at parties,' says Alix. 'I feel very lucky to have found such a special building and privileged that I could give it a new lease of life and be a small part of its history,' she says. The entire house it seems, along with all its contents, really is a window into the past. <sup>91</sup>



## THE STORY

**Owner** Alix Bateman, writer, gilder and former antiques dealer, lives here with her 13-year-old son Ply, and Vincent, a Bedlington terrier. Alix runs a boutique B&B from her home ([theglebehouselondon.com](http://theglebehouselondon.com))

**Property** A converted Grade II-listed Georgian coach house in south-west London, that was built around 1825 and started life as Russell's Livery Stables. The coach house was gifted to the church next door in 1903

**What she did** Alix oversaw a sympathetic renovation throughout. The covered courtyard was converted into a new living room with access to a patio garden. An internal wall was removed to enlarge the kitchen. Original fireplaces and panelling were restored

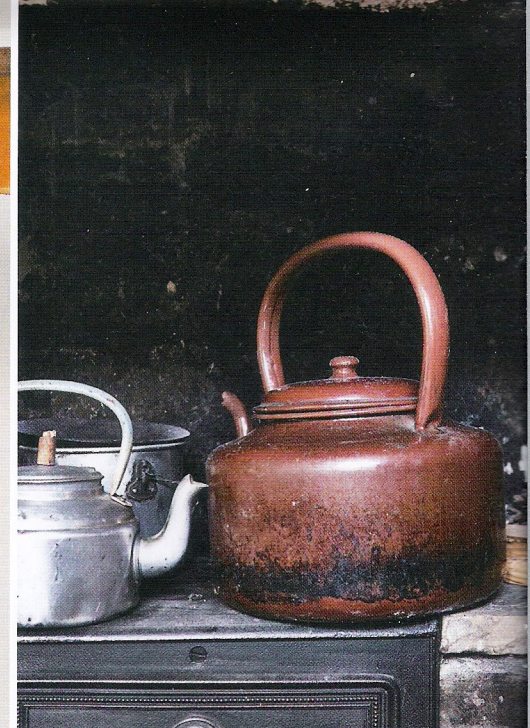


Above: The Georgian shutters, panelling and fireplace in the study have all been lovingly restored. 'When stripping the fire surround I discovered the original marbling. It was too good to cover up,' says Alix. The space serves as a workshop, where she creates gilded glass panels and embellishes antique furniture with gilding or painting

Above left: The Georgian bureau came from Kempton Park Antiques market. On top is a gilded house sign, made by Alix for a client in Antigua. A neighbour gave Ply the stuffed squirrel and Alix bought the elephant's tooth in a fleamarket in Belgium to add to Ply's collection

Left: Treasures here include Alix's gilding tools, her son's Darwin-esque finds, a plate from Anthropologie and a couple of antique sea-life prints





Above: The reclaimed cast-iron range is the focal point of the kitchen, while a drying rack, an old oil painting, and some vintage pots and kettles add to the period charm  
 Right: Alix had the concrete trough sink custom made and found reconditioned laboratory taps online  
 Above right: A large dining table is paired with mismatched chairs  
 Opposite: The open-plan kitchen-diner is full of Georgian character and modern-day essentials. The range cooker is by Mercury, the steel trolley is from Ikea and the clock is by Newgate; for similar pendant lights try Original BTC. At the far end of the kitchen is the original 'squint' window from where the coachman kept an eye on the horses and carriages coming and going









*Below and bottom right:* Alix found a discarded gilded overmantel in the street nearby. She brought it home, restored it and infilled with foam and tartan fabric to make a stunning headboard that works well in this warm-toned room. The lights at either side of the headboard are made from reclaimed Victorian railway lanterns found online, and the cushions are from Chocolate Creative. The walls are painted in White Tie by Farrow & Ball

*Right:* Alix collects vintage tin toy cookers. Most are stored in the loft but some of her favourites, like this one, are out on display

*Below right:* Alix opted for simple utility styling for the bathroom, with classic brick wall tiles and traditional fixtures and fittings

*Opposite:* There are plenty of authentic period details in the blue bedroom with Georgian oak furniture bought at antiques markets and plenty of decorative china and glassware. Alix is a big fan of Chocolate Creative and chose one of its pendant lampshades and a pair of cushions. Alix sourced reconditioned cast-iron radiators from The Old Radiator Company for the bedrooms. The walls are painted in Arts and Crafts 12 from the Crown Trade Historic Colour Collection





