



Alix Bateman and her son Ply at their Georgian coach house in London.



CREATIVE RESTORATION

WITH A RICH HISTORY, A WEALTH OF ORIGINAL FEATURES AND A REMARKABLE COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE AND SALVAGED FINDS, ALIX BATEMAN'S GEORGIAN COACH HOUSE IS NO ORDINARY HOME, DISCOVERS EMMA J PAGE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHAEL SMITH



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ust as clothes make the man, the perfect fit between a home and its owner produces an enviable symbiosis. Such is the case with Alix Bateman and the Georgian coach house she now calls home. The Grade II listed building was crying out for a buyer who could match its weather-beaten charm with enthusiasm, vision and plenty of creativity. Fortunately, former gilder and antiques dealer Alix was equal to the task.

A decade ago, while searching for a family home, Alix ventured south of the Thames and stumbled across a modest, dilapidated coach house in a sleepy Clapham side street. Owned by the neighbouring church, it had long since ceased its duties, instead variously housing visiting clergy, church guests and the parish's handyman. Pregnant with her son Ply at the time, the last thing Alix needed was a renovation project, but she was instantly seduced. 'I noted the Georgian proportions and a wealth of original features and that was it,' she says. 'I'm never attracted to anything run of the mill.'

With its original gates hanging by a thread, behind which the coach house courtyard was unchanged, this house was hardly quotidian. But its beauty was concealed beneath pine floorboards, gloss painted mantels, woodchip wallpaper and the ubiquitous avocado bathroom suite. Alix's former husband and his brother set to work peeling back the layers, unearthing an eclectic history at the same time. 'It's likely that the coach house was once used by the Thomas Tilling bus company, whose transport was initially horse-drawn,' says Alix. In fact, her favourite feature, the squint window, is still intact in the kitchen, a narrow vertical pane originally offering the resident coachman a discreet view of the courtyard.

'I wanted to retain every feature, such as the fantastic original shutters, but I had no interest in creating a Georgian pastiche,' explains Alix, whose love of antiques, from

Originally the passageway that horse and carts travelled through, Alix converted the space into a living room. The narrow window on the left is the 'squint' window used by the resident coachman.





‘THE CHURCHYARD, COMMUNITY GARDENS NEXT DOOR AND THE VICTORIAN WALLED ALLOTMENTS TO THE REAR OF THE HOUSE MAKE IT A SPECIAL SPOT. I’VE DUG UP SOME INTERESTING PERIOD FINDS IN THE ALLOTMENTS.’



(left) The impressive shutters in the living room were handmade by a joiner to recreate the Georgian originals.
 (middle top) A piece of gilded glass showing an image of a monkey, created by Alix.
 (middle bottom) Alix stripped a fireplace and discovered evidence that it had previously been marbled. She loved the effect and left as it was. The fireplace mantel shelf houses Ply's natural history collection.
 (above) Alix gilding in her study.





‘THE KITCHENS IN STATELY HOMES HAVE ALWAYS HAD A BIG INFLUENCE ON ME. I LOVE THEIR RELAXED YET PRACTICAL ATMOSPHERE.’



Victorian to Art Deco, hints instead at her magpie nature. A handful of alterations were made, converting the partially covered courtyard into a fully enclosed living room space, replacing the exterior gates with exact handmade replicas, infilling the gap between them and the roofline with glass, and extending the kitchen into the rear. But so sympathetic are the tweaks that they seem integral to the original fabric of the building.

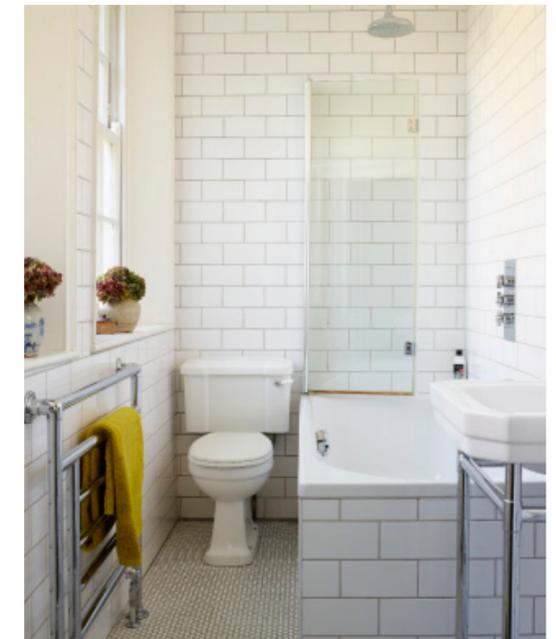
A series of intuitive moves followed, each teasing life out of the house. Fireplaces were stripped back to a mottled patina, concrete floors replaced with flagstones, and additional shutters were made and painted with Farrow & Ball's earthy White Tie. Upstairs, three bedrooms and a bathroom were gently redecorated with muted colours and plenty of salvaged oak pieces. Eventually the scene was set for a host of reclaimed, vintage, antique and salvaged pieces to give voice to the building's eclectic charm. 'I grew up visiting flea markets and stately homes, so collecting comes naturally to me,' says Alix.

The kitchen is a case in point, with an unfitted country house style inspired by the pantries of grand homes. In the fireplace nestles a miniature cast iron range complete with rotisserie bought via eBay from a vicarage in St Leonards-on-Sea. Next to it sits a vintage Mercury range cooker in baby blue – a reference to Alix's 1950s-inspired kitchen in her former Islington flat. Meanwhile, a nine-foot wide polished concrete trough sink is fitted with antique brass taps salvaged from a dealer in Manchester. 'My earliest memories are of ♣



(this page) The kitchen houses a nine-foot wide polished concrete trough as a sink, a useful space for stashing the washing up! The skirting boards are painted in a chocolate colour paint as Alix prefers historically accurate colours. (far left) On the stove sits an original architect's model of a row of Victorian houses, alongside rusty toys sourced by Alix's dad. (near left) Wall-mounted plates are a mixture of old and new.

‘THE PIECES I COLLECT RUN THE GAMUT FROM GEORGIAN TO CONTEMPORARY, WHICH IS JUST WHAT I WANTED TO DO WITH THE HOUSE - SPAN THE CENTURIES.’



(left) The antique radiator was sourced from The Old Radiator Company and the lampshade from Chocolate Creative. (above) Ply's bedroom has a 1930s British theatre poster on the wall and his bed is a French carved frame bought for £50.

scouring the markets of Portobello with my Dad,' says Alix. 'He was always a collector of ceramics, books, prints and maps. He's up at 5.30am most days still, and the prospect of unearthing a gem remains the one thing that would have me leaping out of bed at the crack of dawn.'

Over the years, Alix's hunting grounds have stretched far and wide. 'I love the imperfect patina of age and I'm a big fan of dark English wood,' she says. 'I used to buy from Marolles, the daily flea market at Place De Jeu De Balle in Brussels and auctions in Lancashire. Nowadays I mainly buy from Kempton Park Antiques Market and some pieces, such as the oak armoire in the guest room are from eBay, while Chiswick Car Boot Sale turns up some gems now and again.'

Other finds were more serendipitous and unearthed closer to home, including a gilded over mantel discarded by a neighbour and now used as an impromptu headboard in the guest room, flanked by a pair of salvaged railway lanterns. In the living room, a lit billboard was sourced from London's oldest surviving music hall, Wilton's, and currently makes a contemporary light installation. 'I never spend big money

though,' reflects Alix. 'Plenty here cost less than £100.'

It's little wonder that Ply, now 10, is a born collector with a love of natural history. The study he shares with his mother is full of his finds. 'Imagine his delight when four years ago, a desiccated bird dropped right down the chimney straight into his makeshift Natural History Museum,' smiles Alix. 'It still forms part of the display.' A veritable cabinet of curiosities, the house now draws visitors from near and far, especially since Alix runs the house as a boutique b&b, hires it out for private events and hosts a regular calendar of talks, workshops and supper clubs, with a focus on making. 'I like to share my home and get locals involved in history, collecting, interiors and traditional craftsmanship such as wood carving and letter cutting,' she reflects. 'We also have plenty of curious collectors come to stay. But nothing here needs to be pristine. As with any antique, the knocks and chips only add character - and that's just the way I like it.'

» To book an event, talk or workshop, or to stay at Alix's home, The Glebe House, also a b&b, call 020 7720 3844 or visit thelebehouselondon.com