

A Country Idyll – Dogs, Dorset and Design

Interior designer Charlotte Starling discusses her Georgian rectory refurbishment, her business and the delights of living in the Dorset countryside



Photographs by Paul Craig
Words by Victoria Dockrell

When former television producer Charlotte and her screenwriter husband Boris bought an old Georgian rectory in West Dorset in 2009 it had been empty for several years. “It was very tired and neglected but it had great bones,” Charlotte explains. Having viewed around 30 houses across Devon, Somerset and Dorset, they fell in love with the property instantly: “We had always loved the proportions of Georgian architecture and we loved the amount of light inside – the 12ft high ceilings give it an amazing sense of space.” They were also attracted by the “quintessentially English” setting with a grade I listed church at the end of the garden.

“I like houses to look like homes”



“When we found the house it felt very unloved, but there was a sense it was just waiting to be woken up,” she explains. After a nine month major overhaul, which involved installing new central heating, wiring and plumbing, as well as removing some asbestos flooring, Charlotte was ready to move the family (Florence, seven, Linus, five, and two rescued greyhounds, Velvet and Dash, plus some chickens) in.

Charlotte used scrapbooks full of tear sheets and photos to make her vision for the property a reality: “I wanted to achieve a look of classic elegance and remain true to the style of the architecture, but

with a sense of modern flair and the fact that this is very much a family home, not a showpiece,” she explains. “I wanted to maximise the light in the house so kept the background colours in most rooms quite muted and brought in colour with accessories,” she continues. They had a lot of furniture from their previous home to incorporate so she recovered a lot of their chairs and sofas, but confesses that she did indulge her weakness for beautiful wallpapers in a couple of rooms. “I like the odd quirky touch, a little bit of vintage or boho, but not too much...I like houses to look like homes, and therefore comfortable with style.”



Her favourite room is the kitchen and the breakfast room which was built to her design and which is full of meaningful pieces such as the steeple clock face found in a junk shop for £15. “It doesn’t work, so the hands are permanently set at ten to three recalling the Rupert Brooke poem (The Old Vicarage, Grantchester) – “Stands the church clock at 10 to 3, and is there honey still for tea?” – perfect for our setting next to the church,” she laughs.

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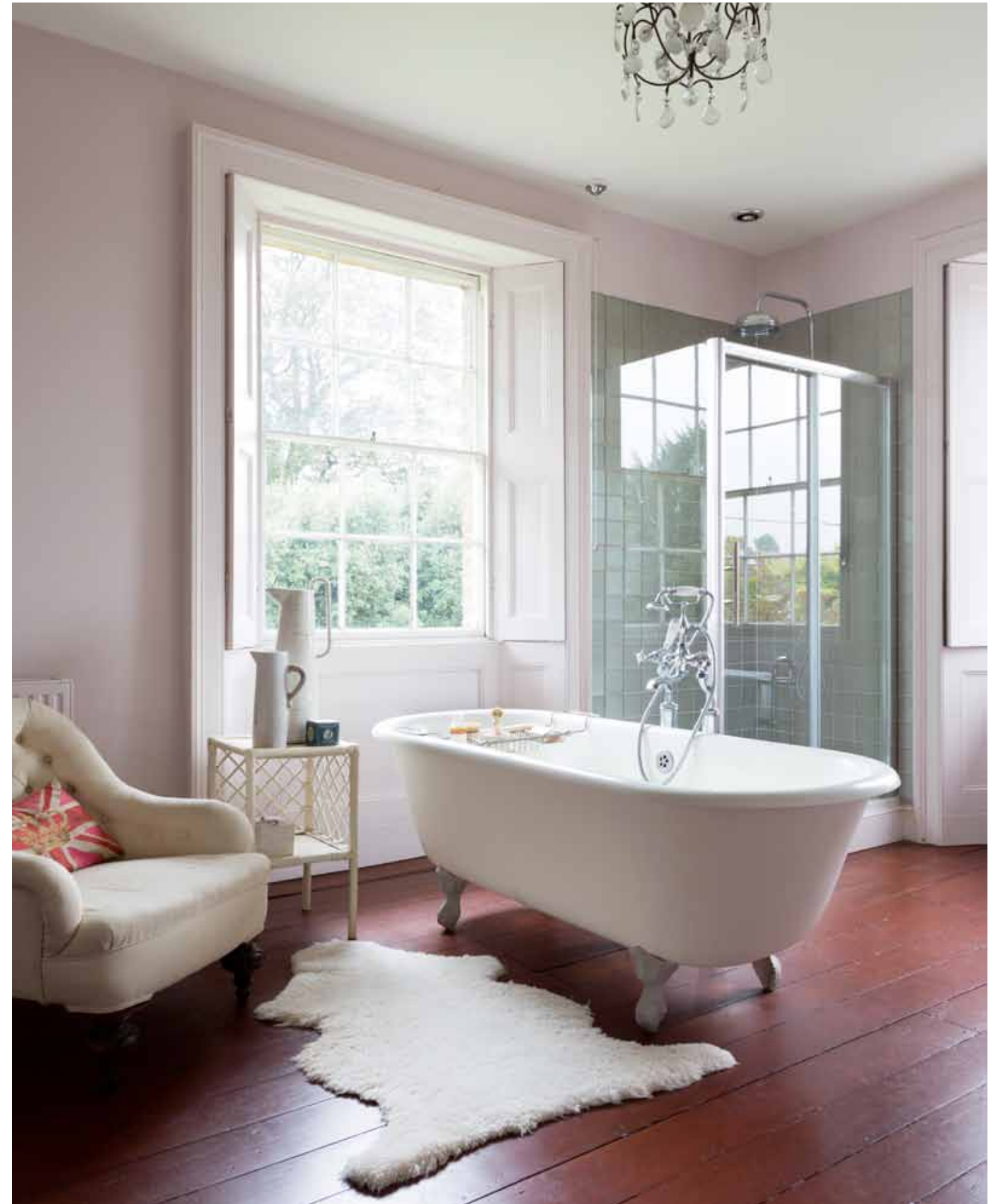




“I’ll buy something I love and then worry about where to put it later”

Being married to a writer her house is full of books, which along with interior magazines are a major source of inspiration alongside Italian cities such as Florence and Sienna. Her parents live in Tuscany so the family spends a lot of time there. She describes herself as “a bit of a magpie.” I’ll buy

something I love and then worry about where to put it later”. She is also a big fan of buying “unfashionable ‘brown’ furniture” and then either painting it or using it as a base for a collection of quirky pieces.



Charlotte loves to potter around Anthropologie, local independent stores and the vintage market in nearby Bridport. But, living in rural Dorset, she relies heavily on websites – Rockett St George, Etsy and Ben Pentreath Ltd are particular favourites.

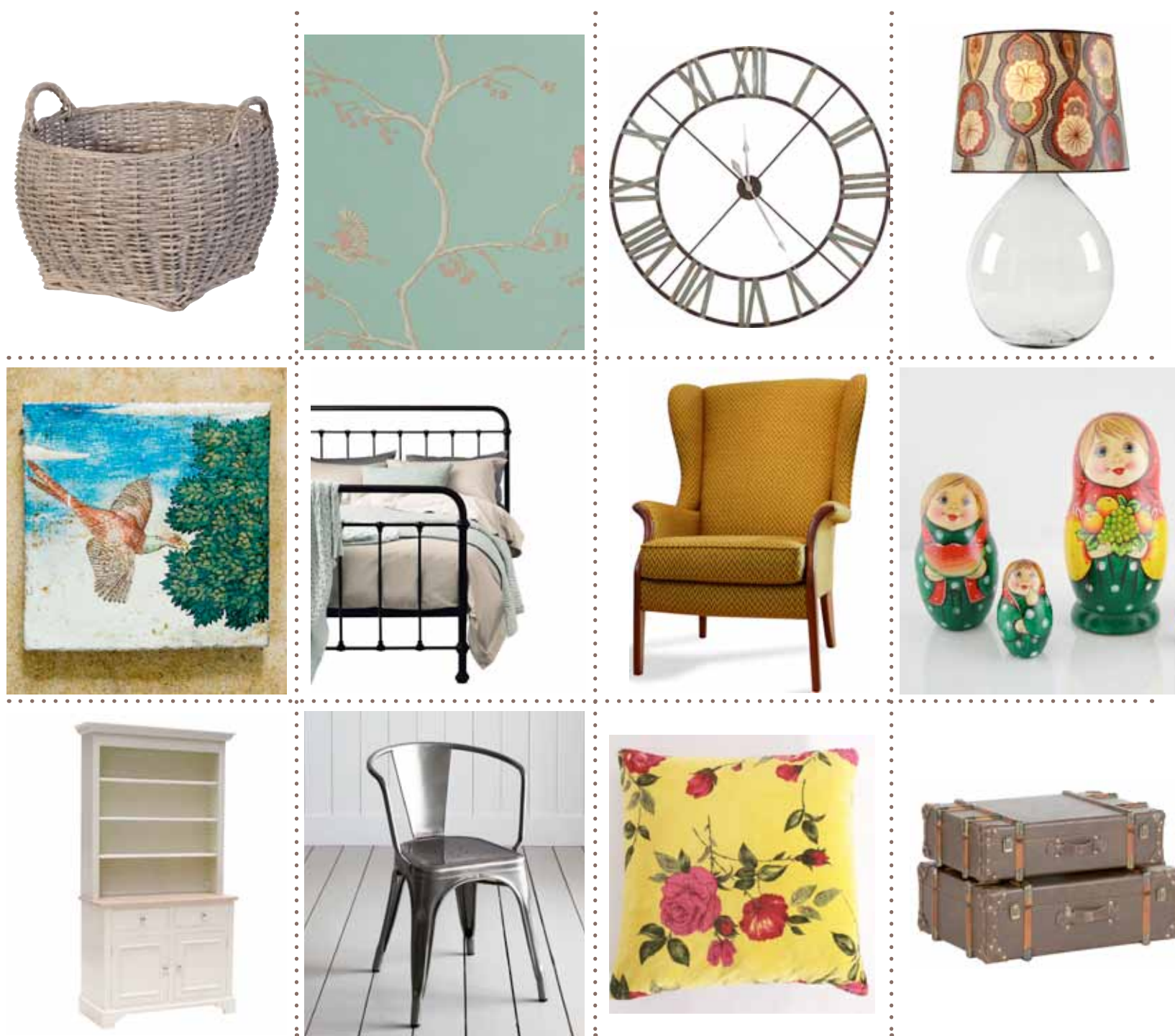
Having set up Velvet & Dash Interiors (named after her dogs) about 18 months ago, Charlotte expanded the business to include an online boutique of unusual homewares to indulge her passion for finding new or little-known designers

and products. She works with artists and designers in Dorset – glass, pottery, wallpaper – to develop products and ideas.

velvet-dash.com

Style Steal

Get the look from Charlottes's house



- Grey Wash Round Willow Basket, £31.50, Drift Living • Barneby Gates English Robin Wallpaper in Jade, £78, Rockett St George • Steeple Clock, £145, Furnish • Hand painted lampshade, POA, TMO Lighting • Large Pheasant Tile, £35, Velvet & Dash • Oliver Iron Bedstead, £275, Feather and Black • Reclaimed Parker Knoll in Yellow Peak, £900, Oliver Hayden • 7 piece Flower Girl Russian Dolls, £27.99, Annushka Russian Dolls and Souvenirs • Chichester Open Rack Dresser, £600, Kit Stone • Tolix Armchair, £239, Graham and Green • Vintage Rose Velvet Cushion, £19, Oscar and Eve • Perth Dark Brown Luggage Storage Cases, £229, Artisanti.