

# HOUSE & GARDEN®

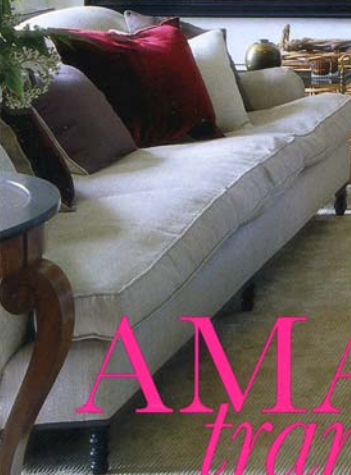
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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO STYLISH LIVING

**THE DUCHESS  
OF BEDFORD'S  
RESTORATION  
OF THE GARDEN  
AT WOBURN**

**FINISHING  
TOUCHES**

**SHOPPING FOR  
FLAT-WEAVE RUGS  
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MADE CURTAINS  
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**AMAZING**  
*transformations*

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*Modernising a Georgian town house*

**CONVERTING A BEACH HOUSE IN PORTUGAL**



John Minshaw used the original Purbeck-marble chimneypiece in the music room (this picture) as a benchmark for other chimneypieces in the house. At the other end of the room is a Louis XV sofa in front of six gilded mirrors (right)



# LIFE CYCLE

*Architect Edwin Lutyens found fame and success for his skill in adapting English vernacular style to the requirements of modern comfort; at Sullingstead, a complete refurbishment, inside and out, has continued the process, restoring and updating Lutyens's original conception for life in the 2010s*

TEXT LIZ ELLIOT | PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON UPTON



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Purbeck marble was laid in alternating honed and polished squares in the library corridor, in reference to a Lutyens design at nearby Tigbourne Court. The kitchen was created from three rooms, and heightened with an oak A-frame roof. The dining-room walls are finished in off-black plaster mixed with mica dust. The exterior of the house has been carefully restored with Arts and Crafts detailing by architect Michael Edwards. A large photograph of Marilyn Monroe by Gene Korman hangs on the wall of the staircase that leads to the cinema. OPPOSITE The curved staircase that leads from the library corridor down to the music room and wine cellar was rediscovered during the restoration; the wall is painted in 'Roman Bronze' by Marston & Langering



**S**ullingstead was one of the first houses to be designed by Edwin Lutyens, when he was in his twenties. Completed in the Arts and Crafts style in 1897, and complemented by the later addition of a large music room, also by Lutyens, in 1903, it stands overlooking an area of outstanding natural beauty in Surrey, surrounded by a 10-acre Gertrude Jekyll garden.

However, during the last century the house underwent several 'improvements', and little of the original interior detail remained. It was suburbanised with the introduction of french windows along the back, had no large spaces other than the music room, and its nine small bedrooms and poky kitchen made it feel dark and unloved.

Happily, it was bought 10 years ago by an owner whose admiration for the creator's original concept has prompted the restoration of both the house and gardens to their former glory, at the same time making it into a home that is compatible with twenty-first-century family living.

The owner was brought up in the area but had lived for some years with his family in the States, so when they decided to return home, they were looking for a house that was within commuting distance of London and that had a perfect English country view. Their first visit to Sullingstead was made during a torrential downpour, so to see a view at all was impossible; but three months later, when they gave the house a second chance, the sun shone and, although parts of the Jekyll garden had been grassed over for ease of maintenance, the azaleas were just about to bloom. 'The views over Hascombe Church to the south and Newlands Corner to the east were as perfect an English landscape as we were likely to find anywhere,' recalls the owner. 'Despite the huge amount of work that needed to be done on the house, we decided to buy it.'

They enlisted the help of Lutyens expert and local architect Michael Edwards and, on his recommendation, interior designer John Minshaw. 'We had been used to American designers who had talked of carpets and curtains. John's portfolio was architectural and minimal, and much more in our way of thinking,' says the owner. 'We needed larger bedrooms, as we had been living in America, where every bedroom has an en-suite bathroom. We also needed a big family kitchen, and my wife, who is a keen



## WHILE THE EXTERIOR WAS RETURNED TO ITS ORIGINAL DESIGN, THE INTERIOR WAS ADAPTED TO MODERN LIVING

swimmer, wanted a gym and a swimming pool.' So, while planning permission for the changes was granted on the basis that the exterior should be returned to the original Lutyens design, as documented in 1904 Raffles Davison drawings and early *Country Life* photographs, the interior was to be adapted to more modern living.

The house more or less had to be gutted, so that nine bedrooms could be pared down to four beautifully appointed suites. The main suite comprises a magnificent bathroom, study, dressing room and south-facing bedroom, which incorporates a wall of grey-stained sycamore panels inset with polished stainless steel.

The loft area was converted into a cinema, with Howard sofas, art-deco grilles covering the air-conditioning units, and even a cloakroom with a one-way mirror on which the films can be shown, so that no one misses out.

One of the only original features of the house was the chimneypiece in the music room made from Purbeck marble. With this as his benchmark, John used the same stone for the other chimneypieces in the house, as well as the curved staircase, rediscovered during the restoration, which leads



OPPOSITE A 'modernist box' within the Arts and Crafts exterior houses the pool, which was designed to give the impression of an infinity pool overflowing into the rill outside. The walls are lined with backlit, polished-plaster panels, and stainless-steel columns support the gym above. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE In the hall, wainscoted jib doors, hung with paintings by Edward Povey, open into the underground tunnel that leads to the pool house. Halfway along the tunnel, light from an oculus is reflected by a circular mirror set into the floor, which is surrounded by a pattern cut in Purbeck stone. Outside the pool house, the 50-metre rill runs between two neatly manicured banks. A bust of Lutyens - 'hatted' with the dome of his Viceroy's House, now Rhastrapati Bhavan, New Delhi - stands in the garden





**THIS PAGE** The nine existing bedrooms were converted into four large suites. The carpet in the main bedroom (above right) is 'Linen Rib' in mouse grey, from New Franco Belge. The polished-steel chimneypiece - seen here through the en-suite bathroom (above left) - is surrounded by sycamore panels inset with polished stainless steel. The art-deco wall lights in the adjoining dressing room (below right) were from Carlton Davidson. The gardens follow Gertrude Jekyll's established pattern of formal planting around the house (below left). Several original walkways (left) were rediscovered during the garden's restoration by Jekyll specialist Michael Tooley. **OPPOSITE** The bronze statue, 'Standing Girl' by Vincent Butler, was bought from Architectural Heritage



from the library corridor down to the music room and wine cellar. In reference to a Lutyens design at nearby Tigbourne Court, the marble was also laid in alternating honed and polished squares down the library corridor and on into the hall.

In the music room, the Sixties french windows were removed and long windows were reinstalled. Furnished with large sofas, giant ottomans, and life-size portraits at one end, balanced by six gilded mirrors and a Louis XV sofa at the other, it is now a spectacular drawing room.

Original window openings were also reintroduced to both the study and the dining room, on either side of the hall at the rear of the house. In the dining room, to add glamour, John finished the walls in polished off-black plaster mixed with mica dust, adding a hidden door at the far end that leads into the rear hall and kitchen.

The kitchen, rebuilt in what was found, through local documents, to have been its original position - although it had been divided into three small rooms - is now the longed-for family space. Created by removing partition walls and ceilings, it was heightened with a magnificent, oak A-frame roof, and - since a century ago servants were not permitted to look at the view - new windows were added to overlook the surrounding countryside.

An underground tunnel accessible through a hidden door in the hall leads to the pool house. It goes down three steps, and is slightly curved, with an oculus halfway along whose light is reflected by a circular mirror outlined in a diminishing geometric pattern of Purbeck stone. The corridor then gently narrows and leads back up to huge bronze doors that open out on to a celestial hall of white and silver.

'The architect designed the exterior using Arts and Crafts detailing, so we simply built a modernist box inside [to house the pool],' explains John. 'By lowering the glass curtain wall and situating the pool at the edge, we created a white infinity pool that appears to overflow into the 50-metre rill outside, which runs between two banks out into the view.' The walls are made of backlit, polished-plaster panels, the floors of off-white reconstituted stone, and the structural columns supporting the gym above are solid stainless steel. The whole is a classic and luxurious piece of Minshaw understatement.

The original gardens had followed Gertrude Jekyll's established pattern of formal planting around the house and terraces, becoming gradually



## IN THE GARDENS, WALKWAYS HAVE BEEN REDISCOVERED AND THOUSANDS OF TREES AND SHRUBS HAVE BEEN PLANTED

more natural as they stretch away towards the woods. However, over time they had been simplified and had lost their Jekyll planting and winding walkways, so, true to his exacting standards, the owner asked Michael Tooley, academic, horticulturalist and expert on Jekyll gardens, to oversee their restoration. Using her original designs he has, over four years, rediscovered walkways and planted thousands of trees and shrubs. Thanks to the work of pond designer Patrick Pakenham-Keady, water now flows down the hillside in what had been a leaking system of cascading ponds, and a flimsy Seventies aviary was replaced by a Lutyensesque summer house, the perfect spot for a quiet drink as the evening light fades over the ever-present landscape.

In 1913, Lawrence Weaver, then the architectural editor of *Country Life*, wrote of Sullingstead: 'The house stands remote and sequestered, and we come upon it with a sense of surprise.' That feeling remains today, thanks to the expertise and commitment shown by all involved in its restoration □

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