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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

STRIPE A POSE

Vincent Darré's strikingly
decorated apartment in Paris

DUNROBIN DECLUTTERED Heirlooms
from the 189-room Highland castle go to auction





At the kitchen/dining end of the main room in the 'new' half of this rural retreat, the island, with its Carrara-marble top and Grohe 'Concetto' tap, dominates. Further down the room, peeking over the sofa, are two Giuseppe Terragni chairs



SOLE PROPRIETOR

When architect Barbara Weiss had the chance to expand her family's Wiltshire retreat by buying the property next door, she envisaged a 'shoebox' shape for the new annexe. Putting her best foot forward, she aimed to create a calm country cousin to their London house. Now she and husband, Alan Leibowitz, have more of everything: space, garden, peace. Elfreda Pownall sees for herself just how well they've tied up the loose ends. Photography: Simon Upton



This page: comfort and aesthetics come together in the sofas, covered with a bespoke pale-green linen from Love Your Home of Godalming. A recent auction in Chicago provided the Hans Wegner coffee table, and the rug is 'Linie' from Heal's. Opposite: the dining table is Barbara's design, underpinned by sturdy Le Corbusier legs courtesy of Twentytwentyone. It's surrounded by ten 'Galvanitas S16' Dutch School chairs





This page, clockwise from top: the gable of the more recent building, right, echoes the rooflines of the two cottages making up the family's original rural weekend home; the couple's facing Artek desks were designed by Alvar Aalto. The vintage chairs from Loft Me are by Oswald Haerdtt; the view through the front door across the entrance hall towards the rear garden. Barbara designed the industrial-style steel pulls herself



Barbara commissioned Kate Blee to produce the rug as part of celebrations for Alan's 50th birthday. The wall-mounted red light was bought at auction, as was the Danish mid-20th-century sideboard attached to the far wall. The Caccia Dominioni circular mounted light is one of two, with the second out of shot. Normal working life in the study wasn't possible during the pandemic because of the distraction of online meetings



This page, clockwise from top left: the bedroom's yellow-edged grey throw is by Eleanor Pritchard. The rocking chair is a family heirloom; french doors lead to a roof terrace featuring a light well; wooden stairs to the bedroom and study; the hall pictures are by Aldo Rossi. The wall and contrasting banister run past a below-stairs room. Opposite: now for guests, what was once the main bedroom has a Lloyd Loom chair





SEVENTEEN years ago, Barbara Weiss and her husband, Alan Leibowitz, bought a small house in a quiet, rural part of Wiltshire, where they and their three young children could spend weekends away from their busy London lives (Alan is a property developer and Barbara heads her own architectural practice). Barbara oversaw the gutting of the property – two farm workers' cottages, dating to 1910, which had been poorly knocked together – and created a comfortable, elegant whole. A decade later, as the children grew into teenagers, the house was bursting at the seams. When a couple in the cottage next door, which, like theirs, had a half-acre garden, decided to sell, Alan bought it immediately. 'It made sense to do so,' says Barbara. 'Well, not financial sense, of course, but it's peaceful here and we didn't want new noisy neighbours.' The cottage remained empty while the couple pondered what to do. 'We thought we might knock it down and ask the planners if we could add the volume of that to ours,' she says, 'to concentrate the built form in one place and then have a bigger garden.' As this is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the couple held out little hope, but Barbara's proposal was similarly beautiful. Planning permission was granted.

Barbara wanted the new building to 'look like a shoebox'. 'The cottages were quite complicated in shape. I was looking at something simple. I wanted the two buildings to talk to each other, but not be in competition.' Her first step was to build a wall from brick and flint, a popular vernacular treatment in this area. Barbara took her time choosing handmade bricks in pinks and greys, which would work with the worn and patinated bricks of the cottages. 'These days, you can buy pre-cast flint panels, which are horrendous... they're fake! But we found these wonderful bricklayers who work with flint in the traditional way. We took them to see old, flint-banded walls locally, so they could get the right proportions and the right sizes of flint. We also used a slimmer mortar joint for the bricks – it's only 7mm. I think I drove them crazy.'

The old cottages and the new building are linked by a ground-floor passage with a skylight: turn left for the old house, right for

the new building. Most of the ground floor is taken up with a kitchen/dining/living room – 15m long – with windows on three sides and glorious views over the garden, which leads to the fields of the neighbouring estate.

'Cooking is my great passion,' says Barbara, who designed the huge kitchen island that features a Carrara-marble top. 'It's often used in Italian kitchens; perfect for rolling out pastry and making pasta.' Born in Milan to Italian/American parents, Barbara came to Britain aged 20 to study in London at the Architectural Association's school, qualifying five years later and working in America and Italy, before a position brought her back to London, where she met Alan.

Pragmatism is evident in the furnishings of this large white room. The perfectionism – and financial outlay – of the exterior has been balanced through simpler and less expensive choices inside. 'For our London house (*WoI* July 2014), we chose the best of everything, but we don't want anything too precious here. We use the house for weekends. We keep it simple.' The shells of the kitchen cupboards are from Ikea, drawing praise from the architect for their internal organisation (though she made the doors from painted MDF). The broad floorboards are pine, with several layers of thinned white emulsion paint, which sinks into the grain and reflects the light. The effect is completed by simple white curtains and the family's first truly comfortable sofas. 'The children love them. So does my husband. Previously, I have always gone for good-looking but less-soft seating.'

This is not to say that perennial favourites are absent. There's a Butterfly chair, a Hans Wegner coffee table, Best & Lloyd lamps, though she admits without embarrassment that the hanging lamps over the dining table are Alvar Aalto lookalikes. 'They cost £60 each instead of £300. They're a bit flimsy. We'll see if they last.' Chrome chairs featuring dark-red leather are original designs from the 1930s by Italian architect Giuseppe Terragni.

Above the kitchen, the main bedroom favours a similar simplicity. Wide white floorboards and the darker MDF architrave around the french doors (which open to a rooftop garden) are in harmony with the living room below. Two cupboards slot below a low-slung shelf running along one wall. 'When I come down from London,' says Barbara, 'I put everything I need in a big basket, which gets stored in the cupboard under the shelf.' A dressing room next door with a Hans Wegner chest of drawers offers more neat storage space, as does the bathroom beyond.

The couple have a joint study on the same floor, featuring a pair of facing desks, views over the garden and a lovely Bauhaus-inspired rug by Kate Blee that Barbara commissioned for Alan's birthday. A pair of drawings from the Bauhaus textile designer Anni Albers gaze down.

While the main living room/kitchen is a great space for parties and relaxed dinners when people come to stay, the smaller rooms of the old cottage provide retreats for reading or watching television. Their children are now grown up, but a dormitory, made for teenage sleepovers in the old cottage, is another simple, clever idea. A large platform holds four mattresses, with alternate navy and white sheets plus navy ticking pillows and duvet covers. Naturally, for a person who likes to have a place for everything, there are elegant built-in storage drawers underneath.

Back in the kitchen/living room, Barbara explains the reasons for darker architraves outlining the windows. 'They're often used in Tuscan houses. Besides, I'm very fussy about aligning things, and the architraves help with that.' They are made in MDF not stone. After all, this is her relaxed and easy weekend house ■

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This page: the bathroom features a double-basin unit set in a Carrara-marble top plus walnut storage area. The room's high ceiling leads into the gable. Opposite: Barbara has created the perfect sleepover room. On a broad plinth running along one wall of this room in the old cottage, four mattresses have been laid side by side and foot to foot. Storage solutions are a feature of the property, here taking the shape of clothes drawers