

# Reaping the REWARDS

Under the direction of designer Stephanie Dunning, a working farm has blossomed into a gentrified home

FEATURE MAGGIE COLLIN PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT SANDERSON

Ethnic touches bring a splash of colour and add vibrancy to the traditional English style of the drawing room. The rich reds that tie the scheme together are picked up in the armchair from Stephanie Dunning Interior Design and cushions from I & JL Brown.



Traced with greenery, the entrance to the hall provides an inviting welcome for the family's many friends who often come to stay.



*“It is all about making things work as well as look good. Stephanie knew that we needed a family-friendly space as opposed to a showroom”*



The wind over Salisbury Plain is legendary and its effects nowhere more bleakly observed than when newlyweds William and Florence MacGregor drove up to view the farm they were thinking of buying some 18 years ago. Totally isolated, apart from its three shepherds' cottages, it sat in a field surrounded by mud. There was no garden, and Florence was first to notice what was sadly lacking. “There were no trees or hedgerows and not a sound of a bird anywhere. It was very bleak and inhospitable with asbestos ceilings and no old stone floors. It had been ‘modernised’ in the 1960s, with the old stone floors removed and all else that implies. We had to remind ourselves we were looking to buy a farm for our herd of pedigree Aberdeen Angus bulls, and the house was incidental.” Florence silently regretted not having further looked into the alternative career choice of becoming olive farmers in the South of France, but it was never a serious option. “I had to come to terms with what was on offer and take up the challenge of transforming a ▶

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The Wiltshire-based farm house. A favourite blue Aga takes centre stage in the new kitchen designed and made by Thomas & Thomas. Florence MacGregor in her much-loved, new extension. The farm's other inhabitants, enjoying the freedom of the meadow. Wallpaper from Zoffany lines the walls of the drawing room.



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE** The walls in the snug are painted in Charlotte's Locks from Farrow & Ball. For similar upholstery fabric, try Linwood, and for similar check fabric, Sanderson's Larsson check is comparable. The ikat cushion in Fadini Borghi is from I & JL Brown. An old chest in the hall holds rugs and cushions utilised for garden living in the summertime. The couple worked hard to create an appealing outside area as well as transforming the house.

house we would never have chosen to buy had it not been part of the right farm with the right acreage."

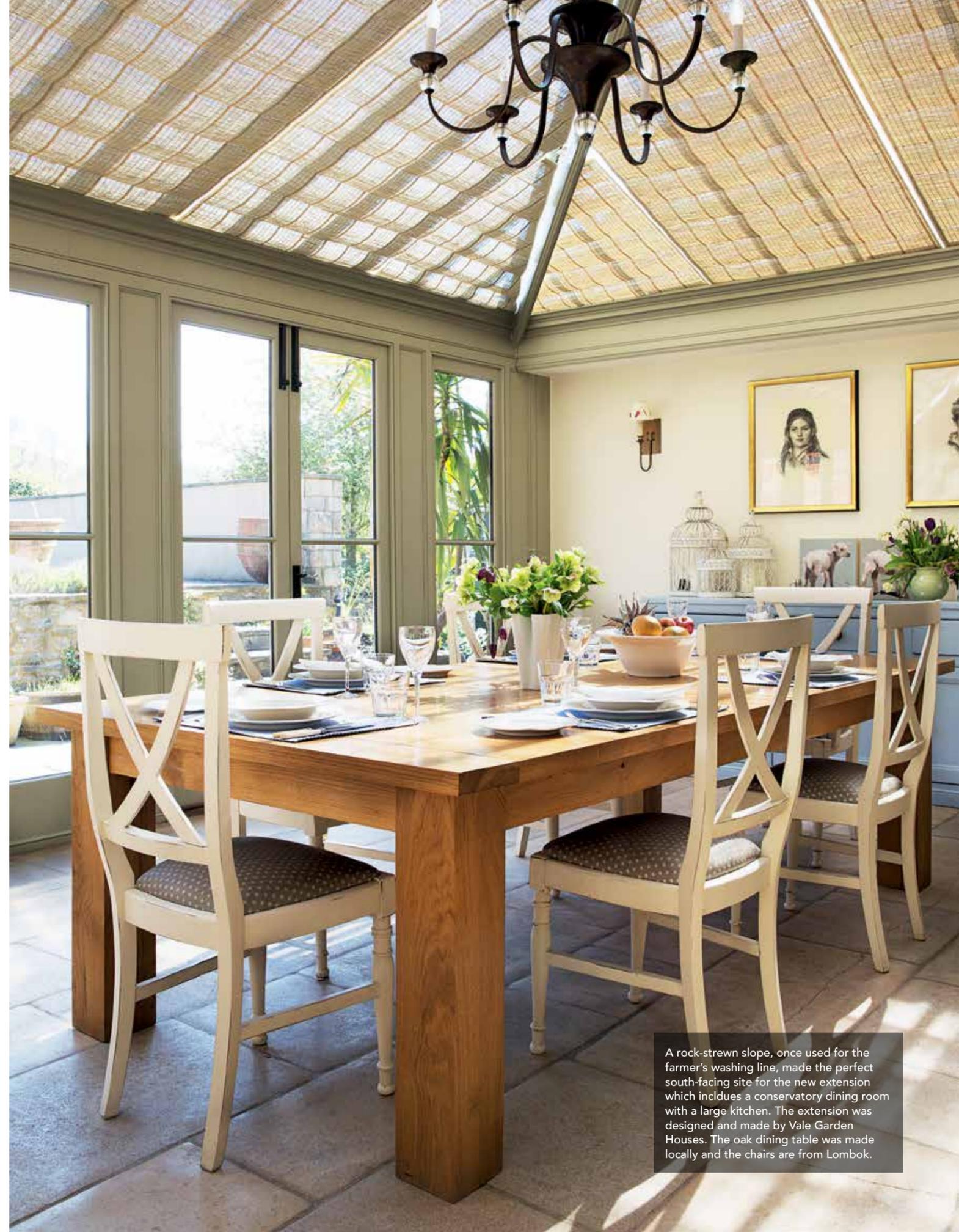
Being young and newly married with parental values still subconsciously motivating her, extending the drawing room was first on Florence's list. "Our parents' generation always had a large drawing room, so extending ours was our first building project." Fortunate to have inherited a characterful stone fireplace, they silently thanked the previous owner for the fan he installed halfway up the chimneybreast. "This fire really draws well," points out William with genuine appreciation.

At the same time, the couple installed a new bay with sash windows and doors to the garden, which was marked out and enclosed with high cobblestone walls. Magnolia, cherry and apple trees, shrubs, herbaceous borders and hedgerows were laid out, whilst the master bedroom acquired a new balcony from which to enjoy a glorious view of the garden. The composite stone balustrading built above the new bay window soon weathered and now looks Victorian in character.

Battling with cold, dark winters, the original 1960s kitchen, which was tiny and overlooked the muddy drive, was originally relocated to what is now the family television room. However, ten years later, with five children, and a black Labrador called Spot, the need for a brighter, lighter family room with a much larger kitchen became a priority, and it was then that Stephanie Dunning, a long-term friend and interior designer, came to Florence's aid.

"Stephanie had already been holding my hand with colour schemes," says Florence, "but at this point she truly proved to be a godsend. We had expensive architect's plans drawn up, but it took Stephanie's genius to work out a better new layout for the extension, linking it to the swimming pool."

Under Stephanie's direction, the atrium roof over the new dining room and kitchen extension opened it up to the sky, light and warmth. Within the same open-plan area there is a home office for Florence, and, behind closed doors, a larder, laundry and utility room. "Stephanie has a large family of her ▶



A rock-strewn slope, once used for the farmer's washing line, made the perfect south-facing site for the new extension which includes a conservatory dining room with a large kitchen. The extension was designed and made by Vale Garden Houses. The oak dining table was made locally and the chairs are from Lombok.



own so she knew just what we needed: a large dining table for family parties and children’s homework, and a big enough downstairs cloakroom for children to take off wet swimsuits. It is all about making things work as well as look good. Stephanie knew we needed a family-friendly space as opposed to a showroom.”

The new kitchen has a sunny warmth to it, with walls painted in Dayroom Yellow, offset by units painted in Strong White; both by Farrow & Ball. Meanwhile, William’s collection of pewter beer mugs lines the shelf above the bright blue Aga, which was purchased from the Aga Shop in Marlborough.

Having so many rooms has given Florence the luxury of enjoying different styles. A cosy ambience envelops the snug, generated by burnt orange walls, and ikat patterns in the rug and upholstery fabrics. This room is most appreciated on family film nights and winter evenings. “We vacillate between traditional English to ethnic, with a few contemporary bits,” Florence observes of the interior. “It is a rich tapestry of different looks, which is the ▶

**ABOVE** Classic blue-and-cream toile de Jouy – Vauxhall Gardens from Lewis & Wood – makes a decorative impact in the guest bedroom.

The comfortable, Edwardian mahogany beds were inherited.

**LEFT** The bedroom of the couple’s eldest daughter, Claudia, is filled with rosy patterns set against peaceful grey walls in Skimming Stone by Farrow & Ball; try Clarke & Clarke for similar rose-themed cushions and fabrics.



*“I love it when the house is bursting at the seams and throbbing with life”*

**ABOVE** The master bedroom opens onto the stone balcony on top of the bay window, created in the early years of the farmhouse’s transformation.

**RIGHT** The bathroom was half panelled and painted in Strong White to contrast with the grey-blue walls; both colours Farrow & Ball. The blind was made by Stephanie Dunning Interior Design in Cranbourne Trail from GP & J Baker. The Tay cast-iron bath from Drummonds has a zinc finish.

result of undergoing such a gradual transformation.” Stephanie Dunning also created many of the soft furnishings, adding the final personal touch to rooms, including the curtains in the master bedroom. These were made using an old Colefax and Fowler fabric, which is one of Florence’s personal favourites. In the bedroom of the couple’s eldest daughter, Claudia, Stephanie Dunning Interior Design made the curtains and bedhead in grey English Rose fabric by Clarke & Clarke.

Needless to say, the house is often filled with the sound of children’s happy laughter, as well as friends who habitually ask themselves to stay. “Isn’t that what big family houses are for? I love it when we are bursting at the seams and throbbing with life,” Florence says. “The house has a good atmosphere about it, and even when William and I are on our own, we never feel alone because of the way the rooms relate around the new heart, which is of course our much-loved and long-awaited new extension.” ■

