

Interior designer Pippa Paton has achieved a restrained interior style for this Cotswold stone cottage by using a host of natural materials and muted tonal hues, a mix of contemporary and traditional furnishings.



Modern COUNTRY

Natural materials, muted hues, pared-back decor and statement vignettes typify the contemporary country look, allowing the architecture of a period property or barn conversion to shine



ABOVE Heckfield Place is a Georgian property that has been carefully restored using natural materials and meticulous craftsmanship to create a luxury hotel with a contemporary feel. The original vaulted ceiling is a spectacular feature in the bedroom of the Long Room, a magnificent private apartment. Interior design by Ben Thompson.

How can modern family life best be conducted in a traditional rural property? One answer lies in adopting a style that could be described as ‘contemporary country’, in which sensitive alterations and understated design and decorating combine to create a space which is functional for today, yet respectful of the building’s historical roots.

In recent years, some wonderful examples have sprung up in the form of both private residences and country-house hotels – including Heckfield Place in Hampshire and The Painswick and Calcot Manor in the Cotswolds – where period character is celebrated alongside luxurious amenities, high-specification technology and an overriding sense of ease and comfort. They point towards a way of living that is both streamlined and softly rustic, focused on a life in the countryside, yet also sophisticated and very much appropriate for the 21st century.

ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

However attractive they may be, old country buildings – whether domestic or agricultural – are not necessarily designed for a modern lifestyle. Low ceilings, a warren of small rooms, tiny windows and inadequate heating are just some of the problems with which architects and designers are faced, in addition to which

beautiful, historic elements may have been covered up over the course of many years.

“Our starting point is to go back to the original fabric of the building, and look at how to expose and enhance it,” says Pippa Paton, who specialises in renovating, refurbishing, extending and transforming residential properties for 21st-century living. When planning work, she finds that clients generally want a spacious, multi-functional kitchen/living/dining space, which often means moving the kitchen from its original position at the back of the house. “Aspect is also important,” Paton adds. “Generally, country houses have good views, and most people want big, wrap-around windows, although sometimes we frame a view with a smaller window.”

MOVING TO OPEN PLAN

Unless precluded by a building being listed, removing internal walls is one way to create multi-functional rooms. However, rather than pure ‘open plan’, Paton prefers the concept of ‘broken plan’, in which spaces are divided into distinct areas with different functions by alterations in floor levels or finishes, differences in ceiling height or changes in paint colour. Also effective are dividers such as sliding doors, Crittall windows, screens, half walls or even the positioning of furniture such as a bookcase or console table with lamps. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Sisal flooring can be a good alternative to conventional carpet when something a little more rugged yet still comfortable is required. *Sisal Metallics Aluminium*, £84.45 a square metre, *Alternative Flooring*

In George’s Suite at the The Painswick hotel in a Palladian house in the Cotswolds, a pale, monochrome colour scheme pulls together a timeless look that is both understated and romantic. Layers of white, beige and brown create a contemporary look against roughly plastered walls and exposed beams. *Hand-cast Pencarrow day bed with a Naturalmat organic seat cushion*, from £2,030, *The Cornish Bed Company*

A woodburner takes centre stage in the drawing room of this traditional Cotswold-stone country house, which has been extended and updated by Verity & Beverley.

