

HOUSE & GARDEN

JULY 2004
£3.20

The Daily Telegraph
HOUSE & GARDEN
FAIR 2004
24-27 JUNE AT OLYMPIA

SUMMER OUTLOOK

DECORATING
INSPIRATION
FOR TOWN
& COUNTRY

OUTDOOR ESSENTIALS

- THE BEST BARBECUES
- IDEAS FOR GARDEN PATHS
- DESIGNING AN OUTSIDE LIVING SPACE

EXCLUSIVE
INSIDER VIEW
OF STATELY
HOLKHAM HALL



9 770043 575131

GREEN CAST

THIS FARMHOUSE IN CUMBRIA IS ALMOST ENTIRELY NEW – BUILT FOR A SCULPTOR AND HIS WIFE, WHO LONGED TO LIVE IN THE COUNTRY

TEXT CELESTRIA NOEL PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW WOOD
LOCATIONS EDITOR LAVINIA BOLTON



ABOVE Poised above raised beds of lavender, *Louise* by David Williams-Ellis overlooks a tree-studded Cumbrian valley. OPPOSITE The drawing room lies beyond this vestibule off the main hall, painted 'Old Pink' by Serena Williams-Ellis; the curtains and pelmet are antique English chintz, bought by Serena





It was sculptor David Williams-Ellis's desire to 'walk on green' which brought him and his wife Serena to Cumbria, where Serena was brought up. Serena claims to have been happy living in London but David whittled down the choice to Cumbria or his native North Wales – his great-uncle was architect Clough Williams-Ellis, creator of Portmeirion. In the end Cumbria won, and the good train service allows Serena to run her international antiques and interiors business from the converted farm buildings which also house David's studio. David loves the quality of the light here where he models human figures mostly in clay, although he is currently experimenting

ABOVE In the drawing room, seating is grouped around an ottoman from Serena's collection of made-to-order furniture; it is covered in antique kilim. LEFT David Williams-Ellis has a studio beside the house; he is experimenting with large-scale sculpture in plaster of Paris

THIS PAGE The drawing room is uncurtained: a large bay window floods it with light, warming the cool palette of two shades of grey paint used on the walls, and predominantly neutral upholstery, including an armchair covered in 'Faded Hibiscus Stripe on Oyster' in a bespoke colourway by Bennison (right of picture)



THIS PAGE One wall of the dining room is hung with a set of nineteenth-century animal pictures which Serena found in a junk shop. The Gothick cornice is stylistically contemporary with the ebonized Regency dining chairs, which are fitted with squab cushions in a George Spencer linen/silk strie, with bespoke passementerie





ABOVE FROM LEFT On the half landing, the new Venetian window is typical of local classical architecture. In the kitchen made by local joiners to a design by Serena Williams-Ellis, a large tile picture of a trout by ceramicist Bronwyn Williams-Ellis hangs above the Aga

with plaster of Paris. His figures are sometimes life-size, even twice life-size, particularly his larger bronzes, many of which are positioned outdoors. David travels less than Serena but both thrive on working and living in such rugged, unspoilt country.

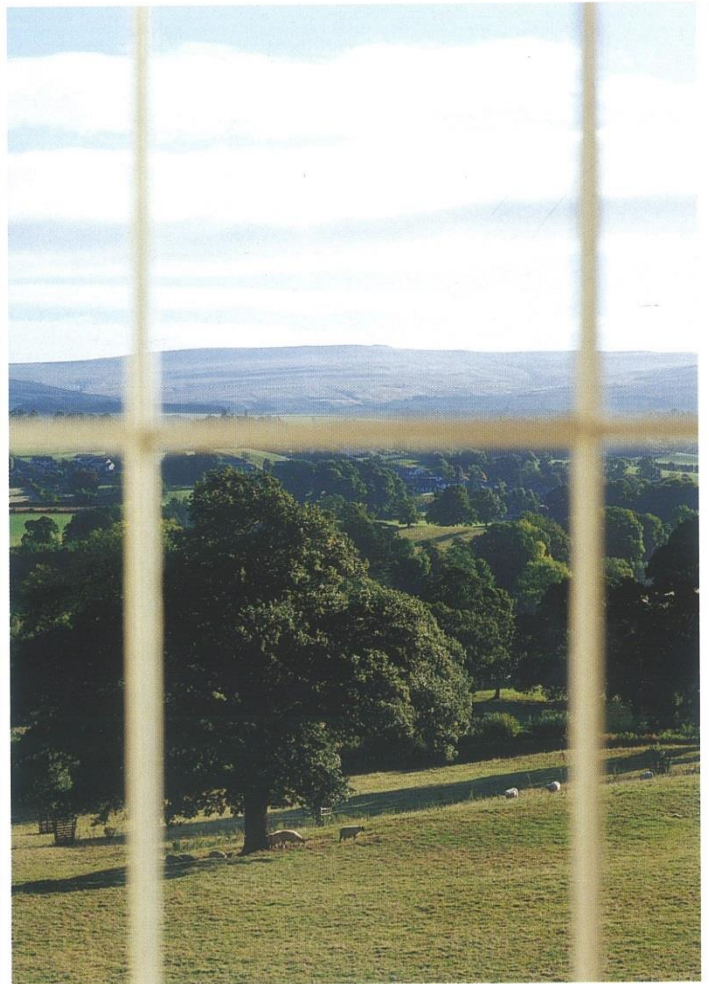
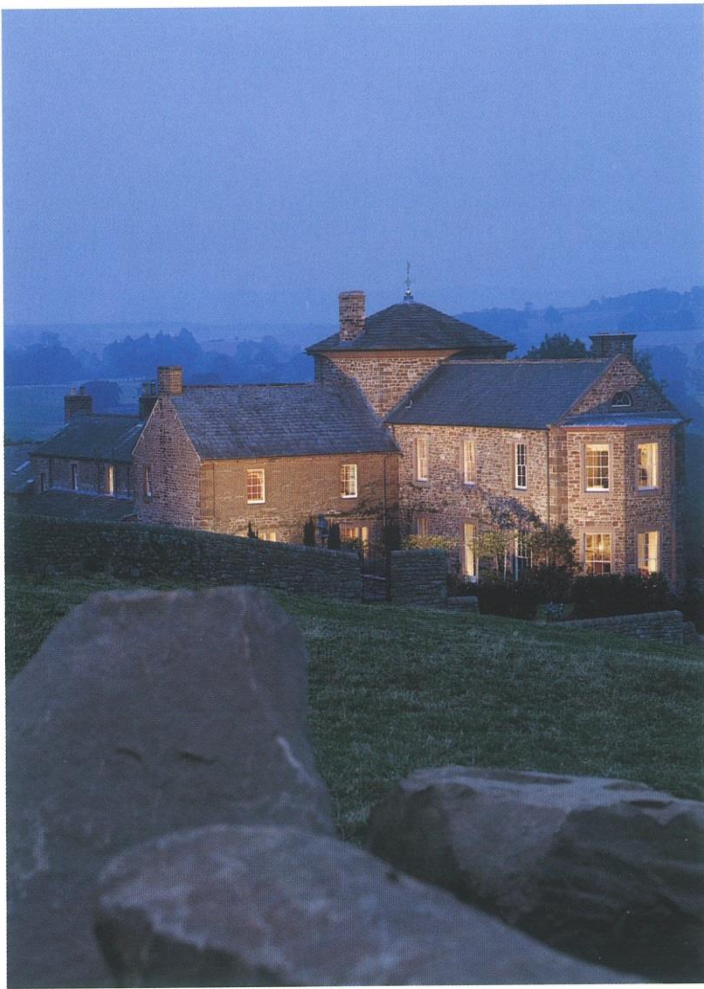
Their house began as two farm cottages. 'It would be wrong to call it a conversion,' says Serena, since the shell of the cottages accounts for so little of the present house, much of which is new and anything but cottagey. Nor is it what you expect from a typical Cumbrian farmhouse. Built on several levels, it has a grand, domed hall painted pink, a cantilevered staircase and large, high-ceilinged rooms linked by fine, wide corridors, lit by large windows with very thin glazing bars to give a bright and airy feel. Serena's use of light, clear colours in the decorating, especially greys and blues,

seems brave so far north, since it could have made the house seem chilly; but the atmosphere is one of warmth and comfort.

When, in 1990, they decided to build this house, David and Serena used the old-established York firm of Francis Johnson: the tower, which is such a striking part of the concept, was very much Francis Johnson's brainchild (then in his eighties, he died in 1995). Serena so liked his traditional hand-drawn plans that she used them to paper the downstairs loo. Given Francis Johnson's age, much of the work was undertaken by Digby Harris, then a junior in the practice, with whom Serena worked closely. By her own admission, Serena is fanatical about detail, remorselessly energetic and very practical. David was principally interested in the design of the garden, on a difficult hillside plot. Several of

his bronzes of female figures can be seen there, including two in a square pool outside the dining room. He and Serena chose local red sandstone to clad the house, so that it would look as if it belonged in the landscape; the pedimented Venetian window is also a style found locally. What they did not want, however, was pastiche. 'I wanted it to look timeless, not modern or eighteenth century,' Serena says. She also stresses that this was to be a house for family life (they have three children), not a stage set.

Serena began her career as an antiques dealer specializing in what she calls 'charm' furniture (painted and decorative pieces) and old textiles, which she prefers to new fabric off the roll. This background can be seen in her drawing room, painted in two shades of grey, in which the marble chimneypiece is one she found in 27 pieces



ABOVE LEFT The house is built of local red sandstone. Completed in 1995, it evolved around the shell of two nineteenth-century farm cottages, which now form the kitchen (far left of picture). ABOVE RIGHT Eighteenth-century-style sash windows with narrow glazing bars offer long views towards the Pennines

in France, the door is eighteenth-century salvage and the lamps are Forties. Serena is exacting about picture hanging. The paintings here are mainly contemporary and include her own portrait by Howard Morgan. There are no curtains, only painted shutters. Fabric interest is provided by a nineteenth-century *metzarra* of the tree of life used as a wall hanging. An oversized square ottoman from Serena's own range of furniture is covered in antique kilim with a heavy bullion fringe and stands close to a bright orange armchair – proof of John Fowler's maxim that, handled carefully, 'ugly' and 'pretty' colours work happily in combination.

Directly above the drawing room and with fine views over a river valley to the distant Pennines in the east is Serena and David's bedroom, with a brass four-poster

bed which Serena bought years ago, an antique suzani on the wall, antique sofas by Howard & Sons and curtains with gilded pelmets found in France. The room is flooded with morning sun, as is the next-door blue-and-white-striped bathroom. Mini steps to the bath and the *étagère* are both from Serena's own furniture range – she began to make furniture for clients to overcome the difficulty of finding certain items. She recently expanded her range by designing her first fabric, 'Lollipop Flower'.

This is a house that is full of objects but consistently avoids looking cluttered or flung together. Glass and bronze figures by David, ceramics by David's sister Bronwyn Williams-Ellis, early Portmeirion plates and Serena's collection of blue-and-white china coexist equably. Not everything, however, is staying put. Nineteenth-

century animal pictures in the dining room will disappear if Serena carries out a plan to panel the room, and the Fragonard prints in her bedroom may be exchanged for a newer interest, twentieth-century British watercolours.

Serena ranks organization high among her talents – she describes herself as a troubleshooter for houses in which people are unhappy and need their things to be reorganized. She is passionate about order, proportion and good design but is not a dictator – she undertakes modern as well as traditional projects. What is guaranteed is that Serena always listens to clients and the results, while neither eccentric nor kitsch, will be different □

Serena Williams-Ellis Antiques & Interiors (tel: 01768-898073); *David Williams-Ellis* (tel: 01768-898071)

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE In the main bedroom, the curtains are 'Provençal Sprig' by Chelsea Textiles; and the sofa is covered in 'Samarkand Creme' by Claremont – Serena deliberately left the brass four-poster bed uncurtained. In the next-door bathroom, curtains in Colefax and Fowler's 'Bowood' chintz complement striped paper by Zoffany (now discontinued); the *étagère* is from Serena's furniture collection. Serena papered the downstairs loo with Francis Johnson's hand-drawn plans for the house

