

KEEPING THE FAITH

A FORMER BISHOPS' RESIDENCE, ARDBRACCAN WAS LOVINGLY RESTORED TO ITS FORMER GLORY



The grandeur of Ardbraconn, a Palladian-style mansion in Co Meath, is testimony to its one-time status as the residence of the Bishops of Meath. The imposing limestone structure that stands today was commissioned in 1734 from Richard Castle, the architect behind Russborough and Leinster House, and completed over 30 years later with contributions from other architects. But when the current owners came into possession of it in 1998, Ardbraconn was in great need of restoration, having lain empty for a time. The painstaking work took over four years – the plasterwork alone requiring 18 months to strip and clean. The results are stunning: on the ground floor, a vaulted entrance hall leads to an enormous central saloon at the rear of the house. Opening off this are the main reception rooms, including a library, resplendent with deep red wallpaper, a drawing room and dining room. Upstairs, on the first floor, the main bedrooms are occupied by the family, while the original servants' quarters on the top floor have been transformed into a series of elegant guest suites. The complete overhaul extended to the basement level, where a flagstone floor was laid, and a large, warm kitchen created. Also off the long vaulted corridor is a bright, airy laundry room. The decoration throughout was the work of the interior designer Serena Williams-Ellis, an expert in historic houses, together with the owner of the house. The furniture is a mix of auction finds and inherited pieces. While remaining faithful to its heritage, there is a relaxed informality to the new Ardbraconn, in keeping with its main purpose – that of a welcoming family home.

Above: The unadorned garden façade dates from the 1770s, the grey of the limestone heightening its austere impression. *Opposite:* The ground-floor library, with its deep red walls and Kilkenny marble fireplace. The recessed glazed mahogany bookcases are from the 18th century.





Above: The central saloon has the proportions of a ballroom. The round mahogany table at its centre was inherited from the owner's grandmother. Above the fireplace hangs an 18th-century landscape. The ornate plasterwork in this room was painstakingly restored over 18 months. *Opposite:* The light colour scheme of the drawing room, with its hand-printed wallpaper, enhances the natural daylight that pours in through the large windows.





Above: In a guest room, an antique painted chest stands at the end of the brass bed. *Right:* At the foot of the bed in the master bedroom on the first floor is an 18th-century sofa, while above it, an antique textile wall-hanging from Central Asia adds a touch of colourful exoticism.

