

High drama



Asia and Andrew Trotter on the master bedroom balcony which overlooks the gardens designed by Thomas Mawson. The view south takes in a panoramic sweep of the Lake District



A house near Cockermouth with spectacular views to the fells over a famous terraced garden has been refurbished to let in the landscape and sleep 18 people

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Celebrated landscape architect Thomas Mawson designed the six-acre terraced garden and JMW Turner painted the dramatic view south over the mature woodland and River Derwent flood plain - a panorama taking in Skiddaw, Whiteside, Grasmoor, and the Vale of Lorton.

Now the house, Wood Hall, at Bridekirk, near Cockermouth has been renovated to provide self-catering accommodation for up to 18 people. Owners Andrew and Asia Trotter, who bought the hall in 2011, have redesigned it to make the most of its setting, using local materials, contractors and craftspeople.

The hall for which Mawson designed a suitably impressive garden in 1910, its lawn bounded by a balustrade following the line of the Derwent, was demolished after World War Two and the barn and stabling at the top of the steeply-dropping terrace were converted to a five-bedroomed house in the 1960s.

"We've made it more open plan and brought the staggering view into the house," Andrew tells me.

Andrew, 35, who owns a translation business with offices in London, Singapore and Romania, was brought up near Ullock, five miles from Cockermouth and went to St Bees School.

"I left Cumbria after university but always came back regularly," says Andrew. "We were looking for a smaller place in the national park then this came up on the boundary.

"We did a semi-renovation three years

ago and rented it out to test the market. People were overjoyed to come here, which justified a major renovation."

"Guests feel so immersed but they are five minutes from the shops in Cockermouth," says Asia, 34, who worked as a TV project manager but is now on maternity leave - the couple have three children, Tavie, four, Arlo, two-and-half and August, 11 months.

When the Trotters bought the house, they added a porch to create a more substantial entrance, being careful, says Andrew, not to destroy the Boston ivy clinging to the walls of the house which turns red in autumn.

The window arch, built in stone from a quarry outside Whitehaven, mirrors the big arch delineating outer and inner hallway. "The floors are in oak from a company in London," says Andrew. "We had them battered to look rustic so people feel comfortable and we don't get precious if there's a dent."

There's a skylight in the outer hallway, exposed stone and a bench beneath the window made from yew on the Mirehouse estate at Bassenthwaite Lake.

The hallway opens into a huge open-plan living area - the Trotters just call it the big room - dominated by the view over the grounds to the hills. The large coffee table in the window, which runs up, conservatory-style, into a partially glazed roof was made by DF (Danny Frost) Bespoke Furniture & Timber at Bothel in elm from Crow Park in Whitehaven. DF also made the fumed oak dining table and MJ Cabinet Makers at

Braithwaite made the fumed oak sofas, the side units and the console tables. The huge, Chinese-designed pendant lights over the dining table are also in fumed oak. Two coffee tables were made from the bough of a beautiful copper beech, the oldest tree on the estate, which fell off in a storm last year.

The contemporary German fireplace has a surround made by Saddleback Slate, of Threlkeld Quarry, which was also responsible for the kitchen worktops and slate fittings in the cloakroom.

The kitchen was fitted by Expression Kitchens and Bedrooms in Wigton and has a central island, a five-oven Aga, a double Belfast sink and French Grey units. Sliding doors allow the kitchen to be closed off from the rest of the living area.

"A lot of our guests are here for celebrations and employ caterers - the sliding doors give privacy," says Asia.

Touches giving the ground floor its character include old skis found in a shed and now on a wall in the kitchen area, a model of the Cutty Sark bought by the Trotters on honeymoon in Mauritius on a deep window sill in the kitchen, a wild boar's head and a stag's head. "We pick up things at sporting sales at Mitchells [in Cockermouth]," says Andrew.

Wilkinson Joinery at Wigton made the sliding doors, the architraves and other new internal joinery. Mark McCarthy of Egremont did the decorating. "He's been going nearly 40 years and said it was the biggest job he'd done," says Andrew. "We've kept the paintwork neutral throughout, letting the view take precedence."

The Trotters live in London and have a house in France, Les Confines at St Rémy de Provence, which also has a famous garden and which they let out as well. "We come up here most school holidays and for weeks here and there," says Andrew. "The kids did their



The open-plan 'big room' stretches from front to back of the house and includes a dining and lounge area and kitchen



The conservatory area at the end of the 'big room' has views over the garden and out to the hills; below: Asia and Andrew by the house's new porch

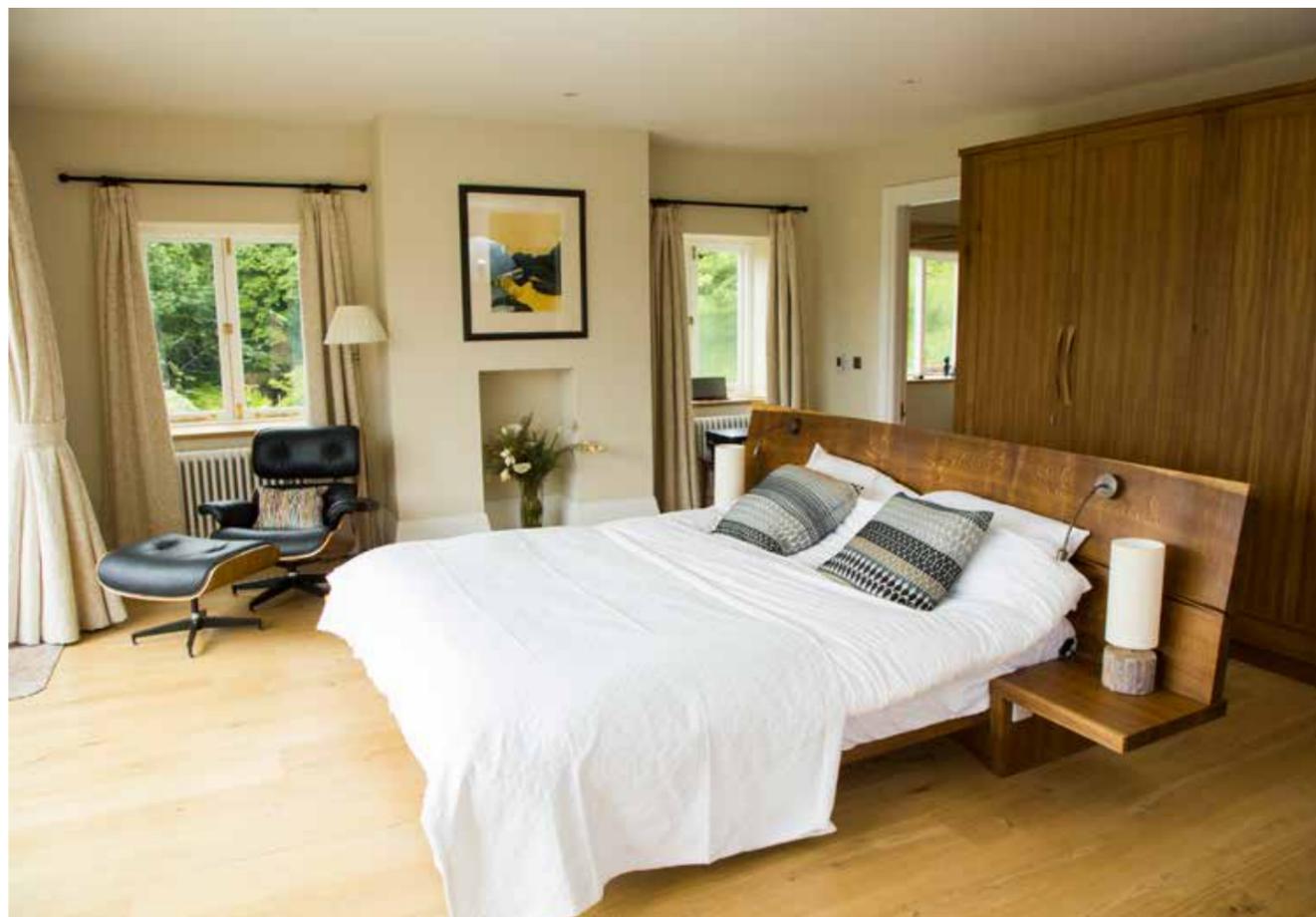


first Wainwright - Latrigg - yesterday," Asia adds.

Photographer Danny Fowler and I meet the children in the playroom, which doubles as a wet weather room where guests can watch the sports channels on TV and there's a wall covering in the form of a large OS map of Cumbria.

"Tenants say it has the feel of a family home," says Asia. "They can use all the kids' stuff."

The major renovation began in early January and was completed in July. Kevin Armstrong of Gilcrux did the main building work, Richard Bewley of Whitehaven, the electrical work and Storey & Warren of Crosby the plumbing. The house is heated by a wood pellet boiler system and solar panels provide the electricity. "We did all the design ourselves, very simple rooms with very good furniture," says Andrew. "Sarah Byers of Sisco Interiors in Cockermouth did the soft furnishings." ❏



The master bedroom, which has spectacular southwards views, has fumed oak wardrobes and a copper and tin bath (below)

'People fight over whether to stay in the master bedroom or the coach house, which is a romantic hideaway'



One of the eight en-suite bathrooms; right: an original lightswitch



The house has nine bedrooms, seven with the spectacular view to the south and all except one with en suite bathrooms. "People fight over whether to stay in the master bedroom or the coach house, which is a romantic hideaway," says Asia.

The master bedroom has a king-sized bed and wardrobes made in fumed oak by MJ Cabinet Makers. There's a deep copper and tin bath in the bedroom and a recliner and stool. The en suite has a walk-in shower and a double hand basin. Two separate doors lead onto the slate-floored balcony. "We chose his and hers doors to either side rather than a big central frame to spoil the views," says Andrew.

"You feel as if you are part of the landscape," says Asia, telling me that one of the guests had drawn up a Wood Hall quiz including questions such as where is the best place to play boules.

At the end of one of the paths which wind down the through a profusion of roses, honeysuckle, hostas, fuchsias and geraniums is the Coach House, which had never been inhabited until the Trotters converted it to the hall's ninth bedroom last autumn.

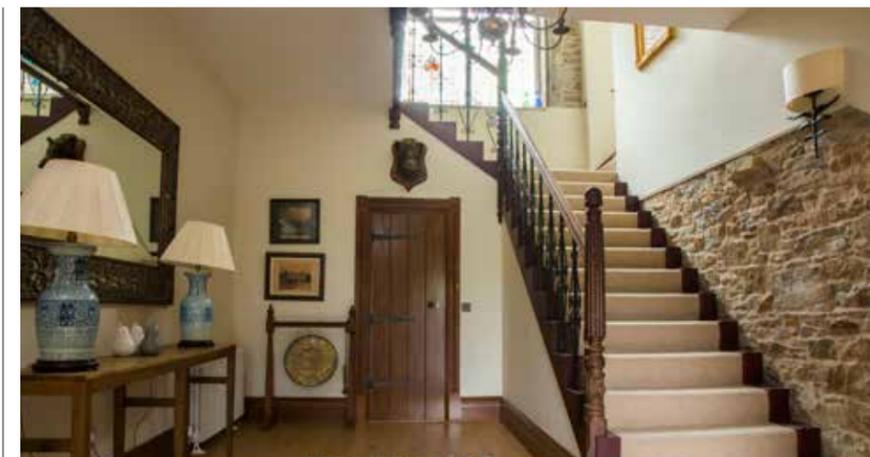
From the patio, you enter through a



Andrew in the Coach House, which is separate from the main house; below: the hallway is decorated with a boar's head and other objects found on the couple's travels and at sporting sales at Mitchells auction house in Cockermouth



Tavie in the playroom, where a wall is covered with an OS map of Cumbria



glazed and arched door into the living room which has exposed beams, a wood burner with a surround by stone-mason James Stubbs, of Carlisle and a big DF coffee table in fumed oak. Up some steps, the bedroom has a glass fronted wardrobe with Arts & Crafts style decoration and an en-suite shower room with a slate-topped cabinet.

"We've put floodlights beneath three trees and the gardens are also lit at night," says Andrew.

I find out the answer to the boules question - at the remains of a loggia designed by Mawson - when Andrew gives me a quick tour of the grounds. "We can't take any credit for the garden," says



The newly built porch has an arched window mirroring an internal arch

Andrew. "Dorothy Jackson, the previous owner, had done such a good job. She cleverly built into the foundations of the old house."

A former kitchen, for example, where pigs were salted in the arches, is now a paved area with tables and chairs.

Dorothy Jackson found the old mansion's fountain in a sale - it used to be in Wood Hall's kitchen garden - and reassembled it on the lawn. Beyond the lawn steps lead down to the Lower Belvedere and a forestry walk.

There are two Mawson-designed summer houses, one of them re-roofed by Andrew's father, Douglas Trotter, a retired dentist living in Eaglesfield. There's also an old, lime-washed peach house where the Trotters have planted peaches, apricots and a vine.

There's a newly planted orchard behind the hall and the original kitchen garden to the side.

"We want to have produce for tenants to help themselves - vegetables, fruit and herbs," says Andrew.

<http://wood-hall.co.uk>



The oldest tree on the estate, a copper beech

Wood Hall's hundreds of years of history



A Saxon nobleman, Henricus is said to have lived on the site from 859, baptising his children in a stream of spring water running into the Derwent.

In 1544 a descendant of Henricus, Henry Tolson, obtained a grant from Henry VIII to Wood Hall for the sum of £337 16s 9d and his descendants lived at Wood Hall until the early 19th century.

The Fisher family built a new hall in 1821, which burned down in the 1870s - one of a number of a number of houses on the site from the Middle Ages onwards. Carlisle solicitor Edward Tyson built the hall for which Thomas Mawson created such a fine garden. The house was dismantled in 1946 after developing dry rot.



The lower summerhouse designed by Thomas Mawson



The mansion's reassembled old fountain; a lily pond and an antique lawn roller

