

CALL OF THE SEA

Tom O'Shea has reinvigorated his former childhood home for its next chapter as a much-loved coastal retreat to enjoy with his own family

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PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

The built-in banquette with drawers for additional storage beneath is upholstered in Lost and Found by Kit Kemp for Christopher Farr. Hutley & Humm sourced the dining table from Sussex Antiques and also encouraged Tom to have the inherited dining chairs sprayed a fabulous high gloss finish in Radicchio from Farrow & Ball. Wood flooring throughout is from Trunk.

Removing the solid wall under the stairs has allowed a neat cocktail bar, complete with fridge and wine bottle storage, to be built within the recess. Painted in Gamboge by Paint & Paper Library, it gives the room an instant hit of joyful colour.



‘This is a place that really makes us smile; it gets a “wow” from everyone who visits’

ABOVE Arabescato marble worktops and splashbacks supplied through Luxmoore & Co are combined with cabinetry painted in Invisible Green by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint, handles from Armac Martin and wall lights from Holloways of Ludlow.

RIGHT Bespoke storage for tableware and glasses has been neatly created to specification by Luxmoore & Co.

It is hard to put a finger on exactly what makes a house feel like home. Rooms that embrace everyone with comfort are essential, but when the very walls of the house seem soaked in happy memories, a feeling of welcome and connection resonates at a core level.

For Tom O’Shea, this fisherman’s cottage on the Devonshire coast could not be truer to this ideal. As his former childhood home, it echoes with youthful adventures of rolling out of bed to go to the beach and chattering around a bustling kitchen table surrounded by family and friends. Today, he relishes spending weekends here with his wife Louisa and their three teenage daughters – Eleni, Sophia and Marina – revisiting his alter ego in contrast to his cosmopolitan London life.

The couple bought the three-storey property from Tom’s parents in 2019. The elder O’Sheas had moved to another house in the village and no longer wanted





ABOVE Hutley & Humm designed the elegantly proportioned fire surround and the ingenious bi-fold doors above, made from framed, hinged botanical art to hide the television. The bobbin chairs are upholstered in Opio from Pierre Frey. LEFT The house's soft pink and green exterior lends a tantalising foretaste of its smart interior.

to run a holiday let. "Mum and Dad were umming-and-aahing about selling this, and when I realised, we immediately offered to buy it," says Tom, adding: "It was sweet that lots of locals said how delighted they were that it would stay in the family."

He and Louisa wanted a retreat that was relaxed and homely but that also felt special and did not sacrifice the comforts of their city home. "Holiday cottages can sometimes feel a little unremarkable or lack a sense of permanence," says Tom. "We wanted somewhere that would draw us with a sense of excitement down the motorway."

His parents gave their full blessing for the house to be extensively remodelled and took pleasure in watching the progress. "We were concerned that they might find it difficult, but Dad said, 'No - the house needs gutting; keep the memories but give it a complete overhaul,'" Tom recalls.

Having previously appointed Hutley & Humm to

design their London home, Tom and Louisa confidently returned to Melissa Hutley and Charlie Humm to manage the project. The designers started by deploying a multitude of thoughtful spatial changes. Although the front door already opened directly into the sitting room, the revised ground floor feels markedly different. An arched opening between sitting and dining areas was knocked through, and the solid wall which enclosed the staircase was also removed. This gained valuable space, made the ground floor almost completely open plan and allowed for a built-in cocktail bar under the stairs.

"The original kitchen had the feel of a lean-to conservatory, with PVC windows forming an angled back wall," Melissa says. "We replaced it with a Crittall window extension, repositioned the doors and straightened the exterior line, making it more balanced, practical and bright."

On the first floor, another wall and a door were

repositioned to improve the layout which now offers a guest bedroom, bathroom and ingenious bunk room with four full-sized single beds. Each bunk is beautifully appointed, with its own light, wall sockets and phone charging ports, while under-bed drawers and a central wardrobe provide ample storage.

The principal bedroom on the top floor is a calm haven with open views to the beach. "It was probably the trickiest space to work with because of the eaves," says Melissa, "but by projecting the roofline at the back we were able to create a spacious en-suite bathroom with a walk-in shower and to ensure the height in front of a vanity and above the loo weren't compromised." They also installed two Velux balcony windows that cleverly have a bottom half that unfolds outwards to offer balconies to the front.

Tom and Louisa originally leaned towards crisp, seaside-style interiors, but Melissa and Charlie encouraged them to avoid the expected and go for this ▶

ABOVE The first thought for upholstery for the sofa was a raspberry-toned fabric, but one of the couple's teenage daughters suggested a purple instead. Connemara in Aubergine from Loro Piana proves a stylish choice.



ABOVE Situated on the third floor, the principal suite is a haven of tranquillity. A headboard covered in Fern Stripe in Lime Green/Blue from Turnell & Gigon is paired with Avalon bedside tables in Ecru from Trove. Annette swing-arm wall lights from Ralph Lauren add a classic finishing touch.

LEFT This bedroom with four built-in bunk beds along one wall is given a subtle nautical theme with paint in Vert de Mer by Farrow & Ball and a Roman blind in Melba Stripe Teal from Paolo Moschino. A natural cane side table from Hadeda provides a handy extra surface.

smart yet joyful aesthetic. “In my inexperienced design mind, I was picturing the classic coastal look,” says Tom, “but Melissa and Charlie said the key to making a successful beach house was for it not to look obvious.” Charlie expands: “We wanted to steer away from stereotypical blue and white and made a decision early on that green would be the founding colour. We see green as a neutral; it never feels too overpowering.”

Luxurious textiles, full-length curtains, and seating one can sink into put comfort and colour at the heart of the redesign, while sophisticated references to the seaside location appear in botanical motifs, wall panelling and grooved storage.

The confident palette has injected a lively mood; even the Tom’s parents’ dining chairs, that he had sat on as a child and was eager to keep, have been sprayed with a hot pink gloss paint. Although somewhat daunted by the idea of this, the couple took a leap of trust and love the outcome.

“This is a place that really makes us smile, and it gets a ‘wow’ from everyone who visits. I think that came from giving Melissa and Charlie a free hand, trusting them and saying ‘go for it’, but also because at the centre of every decision, we held the importance of wanting to be excited about coming here,” Tom says. “It was always a very busy home and it seems to have kept its energy. When it was finished, Mum came and had a cup of tea and said something along the lines of ‘I feel the house was always meant to look like this’. It meant a great deal that she thought the house was as it should be.” ■