



OUT TO IMPRESS

Clara and Mike Bennett were first attracted to their Bristol home by its garden, but have since worked hard to create an equally breathtaking interior

Words Sharon Davies Photography Hugh Burden



Meet the owners...

Clara and Mike Bennett, who own their own business, and their two children Arabella and Angus

Previous homes 'We had a tall Victorian house in Bristol,' says Clara. 'It was really too big and yet it had a tiny garden, which was no good for the children, so we decided to look around for a more suitable house.'

Current property...

1920s detached house in Bristol

Rooms Hall, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, family room, orangery, utility room, five bedrooms (three en suite), dressing room, two bathrooms

Purchased 2006 Price £950,000

Renovation cost £200,000

Value £1.2 million



Favourite shop: 'I love to buy furniture at auction, but I also have a soft spot for Atelier Abigail Ahern, which sells a quirky mix of vintage and modern pieces'



Clara and Mike Bennett's Bristol home is both elegant and charming. Its perfectly proportioned rooms are filled with antiques and French-style furniture: a sleigh bed in the master bedroom and a pair of armchairs in the orangery are just two examples of the exquisite pieces on show. But the house hasn't always looked this good.

'We were looking for a project, and this place fitted the bill perfectly,' says Clara, who has renovated a number of properties in the past. 'The 1920s house wasn't particularly inspiring, but I could see its potential as a home for us and our two young children, Arabella and Angus. However, the large, south-facing garden took



1 Orangery Two armchairs from Atelier Abigail Ahern (020 7354 8181) are adorned with fuchsia silk cushions from John Lewis (08456 049049) **2 Kitchen** Old and new work in harmony even in this functional space, where units by Moon Design and Build (0117 973 3284) are paired with a reconditioned Aga (0845 712 5207) **3 Dining room** The oak table is surrounded by chairs originating from Spain; both are antiques, but for similar, try The Real Wood Furniture Company (01993 813887). Direct Linen (0161 870 6240) is a good source of dining chair covers

my breath away. It had obviously been the previous owners' pride and joy,' she adds.

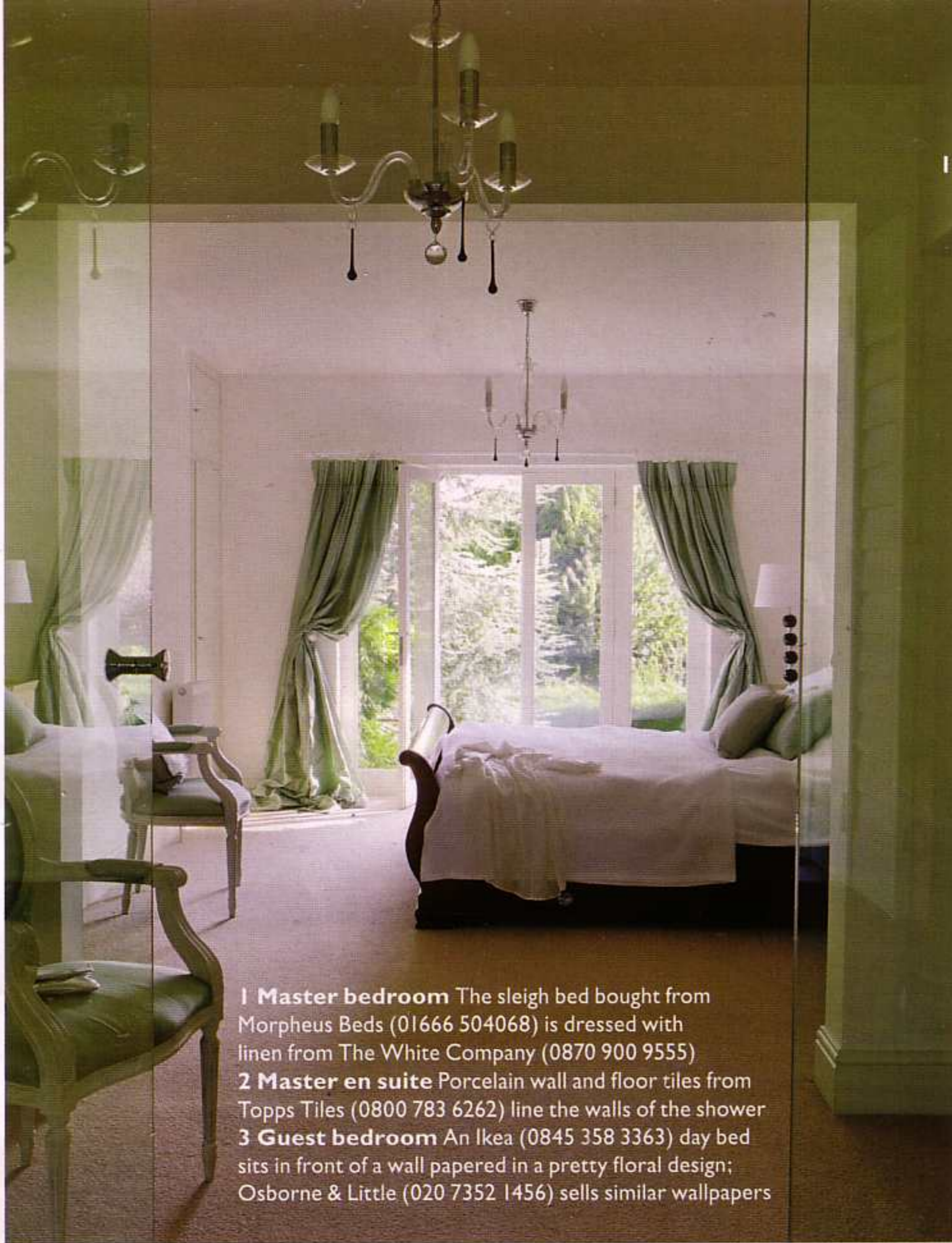
Clara and Mike's plans for the house included converting the loft to create two more bedrooms with en suites, and turning a single-storey extension at one side of the property into an orangery. 'The place hadn't been decorated since the 1960s,

and there was woodchip on the walls, polystyrene tiles on the ceiling and two orange bathroom suites,' Clara remembers. 'It took weeks just to strip it all back.'

The couple approached several contractors to carry out the work. 'It was then we met Nick Ross and Tony Newman from Moon Design and Build,' says Clara. 'We

knew we could work with them, as they were helpful and flexible. I think the latter is an especially important quality, as no project ever goes completely to plan.'

This renovation was no exception. 'When designing the orangery, I'd initially given it a pitched roof,' Clara reveals, 'but then I decided it didn't fit in with the style of ►



1 Master bedroom The sleigh bed bought from Morpheus Beds (01666 504068) is dressed with linen from The White Company (0870 900 9555)
2 Master en suite Porcelain wall and floor tiles from Topps Tiles (0800 783 6262) line the walls of the shower
3 Guest bedroom An Ikea (0845 358 3363) day bed sits in front of a wall papered in a pretty floral design; Osborne & Little (020 7352 1456) sells similar wallpapers



the rest of the house. So Nick suggested we install a flat glass roof instead, which has worked perfectly in this setting.'

Before decorating, Clara created moodboards to help her visualise each scheme. 'I started by choosing one particular item for each room, whether it was a fabric, a paint colour, or a piece from our collection of antique French furniture, and then worked around it,' she says.

However, rather than combine such traditional furniture with rich colours and fabrics, Clara has introduced a fresh palette of hues to inject some contemporary style into the tired building. For example, the kitchen features clean, modern units, and upstairs the bedrooms are crisp white with touches of mint green.

With this eclectic approach, Clara has created a home that combines family functionality with comfort and classic design. 'Rather than just thinking about the purpose of each room, I also focused on its beauty,' she says. 'That's what has made this home perfect for all four of us.' ■

Decorating tip: *'I'm a big fan of mixing items sold on the high street with antiques and designer one-offs'*



Inspired buys

The Bennetts' dining room is home to a set of elegant chairs. Here are a few of our favourite designs



Classic Louis XV dining chair with caned back and handpainted finish, £495, Gustavian (020 7724 6444, gustavian.com).



Berkeley dining chair, from £475, The General Trading Company (020 7730 0411, generaltradingcompany.co.uk).

Floral dining chair, available in Black, Brown or Cream, £152.75, QVC (0800 504030, qvcuk.com).

