

DETAILS**What** A refurbished 1950s house**Where** Gourrock**Interior design** Jeffreys Interiors**Contractor** Bann

The sea of tranquillity

A cool, calm holiday home on the Firth of Clyde has become a restorative haven for its owners

Photography ZAC and ZAC Words Judy Diamond

Have you ever stayed in a seaside holiday cottage? Was it done out in jaunty blue and white stripes, and dotted with storm lanterns, shells and driftwood? That's an easy, understandable approach to decorating a beachside home, instantly conjuring up sea breezes and sunlit days by the shore. But for a professional like Kimberley Bremner at Jeffreys Interiors, there are more sophisticated ways to convey the idea that you've escaped the daily grind. "Absolutely not!" she laughs when asked if she was ever tempted to give this house in Gourrock a hint of nautical styling. "No seagulls, no fish. If the clients had even attempted to sneak any of that in, they'd have been dumped!"

She is joking, of course. She has become very good friends with her clients, a couple with a young family, ever since they

commissioned her to design their home in Edinburgh's west end five years ago. For that project, a large Georgian villa where they still live, they'd been very specific about what they wanted: something traditional, opulent, gold and elaborate. Kimberley gave them exactly that, and they were delighted. But when it came to this house, which was to be their weekend escape, they trusted her to come up with the scheme. "They said, 'We want you to design for us and our family and our needs but also for the house and its location.' So I instantly thought of a serene, calm, pared-back space," recalls the designer. "I wanted them to be in surroundings that would bring them peace."

The house, which was built by the previous owners around seventy years ago in what Kimberley describes as "a sort of mock Arts and Crafts style", sits in an elevated position with jaw-dropping views across the Firth of Clyde. But things are rarely as straightforward as they sound on paper. "The clients phoned me out of the blue and said, 'You're going to think we're mad – we're looking at buying a house in Gourrock. It's not the prettiest, but the position is incredible and we know it could be exceptional once it has had a paint job and a new kitchen and bathroom.' I went to take a look at it – and, oh, it was so much more than just a paint job!" she laughs. ▶





[Left] A John Sankey sofa is a comfortable spot from which to enjoy views to the garden or out over the water (the previous page shows this room from the opposite angle). The wallcovering is called Scent, from Arte's Signature collection. Där's Epstein pendants and wall lights inject a touch of glamour. There is a more formal dining room, but this area by the window, with its Charlotte James table and chairs, is a popular spot for easy dining. Note the Belleville acacia cabinets by William Yeoward: their curved front and reeded finish are two recurring details throughout the house



[Left] Another view of the living room, looking out over the Clyde. The armchairs at the window are Julian Chichester's Button chair. [Bottom left and below] The kitchen was made bespoke by Peden & Pringle, designed in collaboration with Jeffrey Interiors. The cabinetry, like all the woodwork, walls and ceilings, is painted in Snowdrift by Designers Guild. The bar stools are from Charlotte James

"It hadn't been decorated for fifty years and needed massive upgrading. But I could see why it appealed to them – they sail, they love the coast, they'd be able to leave Edinburgh on a Friday afternoon and drive back on a Monday morning, and it had the scope they needed for their growing family."

She went away and spent three months working out what needed to be done to reshape the layout and remedy its flaws. The most obvious of these was the lack of connection between the house and the large private garden and the views. The kitchen, at the sea-facing side of the building, had just one tiny window above the sink; the dining room looked out at a brick wall; and every window had venetian blinds. "It was almost like the house was trying to shut itself off from the outside world," recalls the designer. "There was nothing bringing in the beauty of what was outside."

The floorplan was redrawn, with a ground-floor bedroom

amalgamated into the living room and a small upstairs bedroom sacrificed to make an en-suite for what would become the guest bedroom. (Going from five bedrooms to three was only possible because it had already been decided that there would be a second phase to this project – namely, a large two-storey extension with a lot more living space.) "Staran Architects worked very closely with us," says Kimberley. "I know from my experience of this kind of project how interior architecture works, so once I'd done all the space planning and working out what we needed to achieve from the house, I presented it to Staran and asked, 'Can we make this happen?' They then did the technical side of things."

The clients were happy to give the go-ahead – on condition that everything would be finished by the summer. By this point it was already Easter, so the timescale was incredibly tight. Thankfully, those months spent working everything out and doing a full background check really paid off, and there were ▶



[Below] "The owners' six-year-old is not a girly girl – she told us no pink, no unicorns, no rainbows," recalls the designer. "Even when her baby sister arrived just as the project was reaching completion, we were determined not to make it a babyish room. Just paint the bunk beds and it can grow with them." The wallpaper is Pierre Frey's Happy Monkey and the green paint is Zoffany's Poison. The beds were made bespoke by Peden & Pringle. The black light fitting is the Basil from Visual Comfort



no surprises when the walls started to come down; a full rewire and replacement of lead piping had already been factored into the budget and schedule. Kimberley also had assistance from Jill Eilbeck of the Jeffreys design team. “Jill and I ate, slept and breathed this project – she was my right hand on it and played a huge part in the sourcing. But because we had such a clear vision of what we wanted, it was actually relatively easy to achieve. We knew the brands, the products, I knew the client, and we were able to pull it all together into one cohesive scheme.”

That scheme flows beautifully throughout the house: a neutral or monochrome backdrop with hints of blue and green. The walls, ceilings, cornicing and woodwork are all painted the same pale shade (Snowdrift by Designers Guild), with warmth coming from rich timber flooring, rugs, layers of texture such as deep

upholstery and tactile cushions, and through unspoken details such as the correct colour temperature of the light bulbs. There are two sets of curtains in every window – sheers plus interlined heavyweight linen curtains. “The house was never to be over-dressed or over-designed,” says Kimberley. “It was always about being quiet and not distracting from what was going on outside – which, for an interior designer, is a little bit of a challenge! Apart from the children’s bedroom, there is colour only in the accessories.”

Another unifying factor is the use of curves. You can see them in the fixtures and furniture and even in the walls of some rooms. The house has a turret that contains the staircase and ground-floor WC, and the latter’s curved wall was the inspiration behind this. The designer wanted to pull that curve into lots of areas, ▶

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[Left] A play area has been cleverly carved out of the eaves.
[This page] The bathrooms are coolly monochrome but full of interesting details, such as the hexagonal Casablanca tiles from Mandarin Stone (who also supplied the wall tiles), luxurious Lusso Stone sanitaryware and fittings, curved walls (created by the contractor) and vanity units from Peden & Pringle





[Left] The restful guest bedroom has warm hints of tan and gold that emphasise the rich timber flooring



[Left and right] Two views of the master suite. The concave-front Percy chest of drawers is by Julian Chichester, as is the dressing table. The latter sits behind the headboard (see overleaf), forming a dressing area. [Below left] The downstairs WC in the turret was the starting point for many aspects of the design scheme. The floor tiles are from Bert & May and the freestanding marble basin is by Lusso Stone



so the newly formed guest en-suite, for example, has a curved wall and bath. The reeded glass details and vertically stacked tiles are part of this too.

The kitchen units, bunk beds and master suite vanity units were all made by Peden & Pringle. Kimberley has collaborated with the Edinburgh cabinetmaker many times over the years and they've developed an almost seamless way of working together. "Bespoke cabinetry is my background so I've a good understanding of how things are made," she explains. "I had a really clear idea of what I wanted so I was able to give them a lot of direction. It's a great way of working"

There were a lot of technical issues to solve around the

windows, particularly as the clients were adamant that nothing should get in the way of the views. Some sills are low, some are halfway up, some windows open inwards, some open outwards, so finding a cohesive way to dress them took a good deal of thought. In the end, the problems were solved by choosing sheers in the same colour as the pale walls, recess-fitting these and then stacking back the curtains as far as possible. "Often, simple designs can actually be very complex," says Kimberley. "When you're doing something heavy and opulent and much more detailed, you have more ways to hide things. There was no scope to hide anything here!"

Hitting that target of all being ready by summer was a

struggle, but thanks to the efforts of Bann, the contractor ("They were brilliant – we have a great relationship with them"), the house was ready for its new owners on time. They'd been so busy with their business and welcoming a new baby that they'd barely had a chance to visit during the renovations.

"Jill and I had been there since early morning, setting up all the rooms and lighting candles, and the place looked amazing," says the designer of the moment she handed over the keys. "The owners were both in tears by the time they reached the hall. It was a really emotional day for them. The transformation was huge. And it was all done, I'm glad to say, without any coastal clichés!" ■