

HOUSE & GARDEN

MAY 2016

IN THE DETAIL

PERFECT POTS AND
PLANTERS

WILD NEW WALLPAPERS

PRETTY JUGS AND
PLATES

SPEEDY SUPPERS

Fresh and
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SENSATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

HOUSES DESIGNED TO FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

LIFESTYLE

TEXT ROS BYAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY

JOINT ENTERPRISE

Relocating to a house and farm buildings in rural Hampshire six years ago, the antique dealer and decorator MAX ROLLITT and his wife, movement therapist JANE WATSON, have created a relaxed base for their family and their work



Max Rollitt's earliest memory of a lane that wends its way through Avington beside the wide ribbon of the River Itchen is trudging along it as a Boy Scout about 40 years ago. 'We stopped near the farm and ate some nasty beef sausages,' he says. More recently, he would regularly cycle along the route on the nine-mile ride from his townhouse in Winchester to his antique shop in The Old Telephone Exchange in Alresford. Six years ago, he and his wife Jane Watson and their three sons – Edward, now 17, Alfie, 15, and William, 12 – moved from Winchester to live on this lane, in a neat brick and flint farmhouse.

Most of the land belonging to the farm was sold separately, but Max and Jane bought 10 acres, as well as the farm buildings opposite the house. The grain store has been Max's showroom since January 2015. Across the yard, the old dairy has been converted into a consulting room and studio, where Jane works as a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method – a movement, breathing and posture-based therapy. From the window of the consulting room, you can watch a pair of magnificent pigs, Betsy and Madame Whiteboots, foraging in the mud and grass. A cat called Sushi, a Parson terrier named Beano and Ginny the English pointer complete the household.

Max and Jane were both brought up in Winchester ▷

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A view of the converted barn, which houses Jane's consulting room and studio, and the farmhouse on the right. Jane practising the Feldenkrais Method on a client in her studio. Max, Edward and William walking with dog Beano along the River Itchen





The interior is a typical Rollitt mix of clean-lined, high-quality antiques

but did not meet until they returned as adults and were introduced through mutual friends in a pub. 'Max announced he was going trekking in Nepal,' says Jane, 'I had a gap in my schedule at exactly the same time in December, so on the spur of the moment I said I would go with him. We saw each other twice between that first meeting in May and the airport. While we were away, I decided I wanted to marry him.'

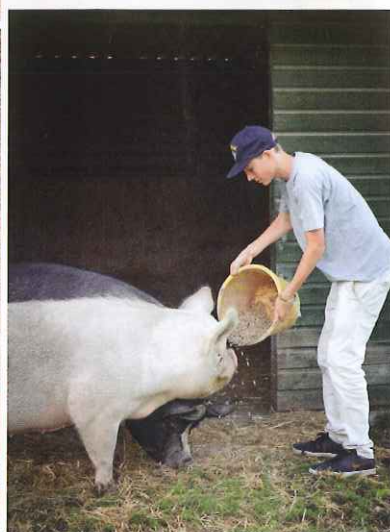
They may have grown up in the same city, but their paths were very different. Jane's childhood passion for ballet developed into a love of physical theatre. She studied in Paris and learned butoh dance in Tokyo, then spent some time in Hong Kong and Sydney, where she set up her own theatre company, Watson & Co, before eventually returning to the UK. 'At one point, I worked with a director who started every rehearsal with a session of Feldenkrais. I realised that afterwards we all felt much more alive, creative and in our bodies. It inspired me to train to teach the Feldenkrais Method. But it is only >

OPPOSITE The morning room is filled with an eclectic mix of antiques. THIS PAGE Ginny the English pointer in the kitchen (top), which is decorated with simple wooden furniture, such as an antique cupboard in its original paint and a Windsor bench designed by Max (bottom right)





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Layers of pattern decorate the main bedroom, which is lined in Pierre Frey's 'Sans Papillons' wallpaper. Chickens in the garden. Alfie feeds pigs Betsy and Madame Whiteboots. The sitting room



since we came here that I have concentrated on it full-time and given up my job as senior lecturer in performing arts at Winchester University.'

Feldenkrais is a therapy that improves movement and posture, and can relieve stress and pain by retraining the brain through a progression of gentle exercises. Individual sessions take place in her consulting room at Yavington Studio, and three times a week she holds classes for up to 12 people in the big studio, also on the farm.

Max has also benefited from Jane's knowledge and skills. A keen long-distance cyclist, four years ago he had a serious accident when he was dragged under a passing lorry, which left him seriously injured. Jane practised the Feldenkrais Method with Max during his recovery from the accident; now fully recovered, he is planning to cycle to Rome to raise money for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance, which he credits with helping to save his life.

Despite the fact that Max works as an interior decorator, with up to three projects at any one time running alongside his antiques and furniture-making businesses, when it came to furnishing and decorating the farmhouse, Max and Jane collaborated. 'I have been learning the trade since the age of seven,' Max says. 'I used to sit on the stairs in my mother's antique shop in Winchester and listen to her sell for a profit a piece she had just bought down the road. It was a masterclass in salesmanship.' Neither school nor university was a success, he says, and after >



an interlude 'living as a hippy on a hill in Wales', Max discovered a liking for furniture design and went on to do a course in joinery. When he left Rycotewood Furniture Centre, he started an apprenticeship with Winchester-based furniture restorers Frearson & Hewlett, working with the man he now employs as a restoration expert.

'It was the best education,' Max says. 'All the top London dealers came in, and the work made me fanatical about craftsmanship and patination.' In 1993, he opened his own shop in Winchester and a couple of years later invested in a stand at Olympia. The investment paid off, and his client base expanded to include American as well as British admirers of his eye for quality and scale. 'I view thousands of antiques every week,' he says, 'but only buy perhaps three things. I look for beauty, for purity of design and for authenticity.' Over the years, he has bought pieces so desirable he has had them reproduced. He is best known for his range of sofas copied from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century originals, and a recent addition to the bespoke range is ceramics. 'I have always sold to decorators – people like Axel Vervoordt, Colefax and ▷



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Max with his assistants Nina Matengu and Lynette Healy in his antique showroom in the former grain store on the farm. The workshop of restorers Frearson & Hewlett near Winchester, where Chris Frearson works on a Georgian card table. Max beside an eighteenth-century bust at his showroom's entrance



'I look for beauty, for purity of design and for authenticity in pieces'

Fowler, and Michael S Smith. When I was first asked to decorate a house, it seemed like a natural progression with my passion for furniture.

'The shop is my decorating arsenal,' he continues. 'I can raid it to find things for clients and, if something doesn't work, I can take it back again.' The interior of his own house, with its eighteenth-century cottage proportions and simple architectural detailing, is a typical Rollitt mix of clean-lined, high-quality English antiques, with an armchair, a sofa, a Windsor bench and a kitchen table from his own workshops. He is particularly good at colour, making unexpected combinations like mauve and royal blue work. Antique textiles add richness and texture.

The house is on a modest scale, in which a central hall leads to the sitting room on the right and the morning room on the left, with the kitchen behind and four bedrooms upstairs. Being six foot four, Max is always in danger of banging his head in the house, but in the showroom there are high ceilings and 460 square metres in which he can indulge his taste for large-scale, architectural pieces. The industrial chic of the zinc cladding and roll-down metal shutters gives way inside to some spectacular pieces of furniture, such as a huge pedimented bookcase circa 1770 from Walpole House. 'We had a dream of living the rural idyll,' he says, surveying his aesthetic empire. It has worked out pretty well □

Max Rollitt: 01962-791124; maxrollitt.com

Yavington Studio: 01962-779295; yavingtonstudio.co.uk

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP Max and Lynette by a George III bookcase from Walpole House in the showroom (also bottom left). Michele Wyatt upholstering a headboard in the workshop

