



DESIGN DESTINATION Inspiring Spaces

A mix of stylish design, carefully chosen antiques and home comforts make for this cool and understated hideaway hotel

PICTURES LUKE WHITE AND ANNELI MARINOVICH | WORDS CIARA ELLIOTT

Stepping off the cobbled streets of Rye and into the low-lit reception area of The George Hotel feels a bit like entering a glamorous movie set – which isn't surprising when you learn that the hotel owner's previous job was as a set dresser on films such as 'An Ideal Husband', which was penned, of course, by the flamboyant Oscar Wilde.

'We'd always wanted to run a hotel,' says Katie Clarke, who along with her hospitality consultant husband Alex, realised the potential in the 16th century coaching inn when buying in 2004. 'We had been looking for the right property but when this came up I'd just had our second daughter. There was some initial reluctance, but when I saw it I fell in love.'

Within weeks the couple had sold their London home and moved to the small East Sussex town. Working with interior designer Maria Speake, Katie used her experience from her film days to moodboard ideas for individual rooms as well as to source some interesting props and to use bold colour and different design styles to achieve a personalised look.

'It's an eclectic process,' says Katie. 'We start with a theme for the room in mind and then we work together on colours and fabrics as well as find the right mix of art, design and handcrafted furniture.'

The result? A chic hotel with a mix of bedrooms. From sleek chalet style to a hint of Deco, here are some stand-out design features that caught our eye. **EKBB**



Katie Clarke
CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
THE GEORGE HOTEL
Following a successful career as a set designer and buyer for films, Katie turned her creative eye to interior design. Along with her husband Alex they bought a dilapidated yet functioning hotel and turned it into a destination design location, sensitively refurbishing the warren of interconnecting buildings which now comprise the charming George Hotel in Rye.



BATHE IN GLORY

Above Natural materials and muted colours combine to create a serene scheme in this en suite bathroom. The roll top bath is from William Holland

COSY NOOK

Left The idea for a separate 'bunk room' came from a hotel the family had stayed in before. The couple have three girls – Esme, seven, Olive, 10 and Matilda, 12. 'I wanted to create a luxury version for The George,' says Katie. 'Here, it also cleverly hides the headroom from the stairs below'



'This suite is inspired by my grandmother's house in Miami where I used to stay as a little girl. People love the bespoke round bed and the huge bath'



SCENE IN GREEN

Above The bespoke round bed is from Vi-Spring and comes with a customised headboard that can be ordered through The Shop Next Door. The wardrobe and dressing table are designed by Katie and made by Holland of Rye

A NEW LEAF

Right The nickel roll top bath is from William Holland. All other bathroom fixtures, including the taps, sink and toilets, are from AJP bathrooms



Q&A

Did your previous career as a set designer inform the hotel design?

Yes I think this definitely had a bearing on the look. I worked overall on the project with interior designer Maria Speake, whose style is amazing. We did get a bit overexcited at the start and produced moodboards for each room according to each one's 'character'. I think the most important experience that I used from my film days was my ability to source interesting items from the huge range of eclectic suppliers that I had built up over the years when sourcing props. My background also helped me to be brave with colour and also to mix different design styles.

Can you tell us about the inspiration behind the hotel rooms pictured here?

The first two room sets were influenced by a house story in The Hamptons that I had torn out of interiors magazine years before. I wanted to recreate that calm and give the bedroom a woody beach feel. I love Dinesen Douglas Fir which is so warm and soft and we've used it on the floor and walls and to make the joinery in the room. The other suite (*shown above*) came from childhood memories - from my time staying with my grandmother in Miami. She had a very similar white and green colour scheme in the bedroom and I always remembered it. It's amazing the number of people who love the room - especially its bespoke round bed and the huge nickel bath.

How did you go about designing these rooms and pulling the looks together?

I've normally got a mood or theme for a room in mind and then I work together with Maria on colours and fabrics. After that it's a mixture of luck and finding the right furniture and lighting that works. I have several containers of furniture in store and I'm always on the look out for new things.

How important are details such as bathroom products to a scheme?

Massively important. I love Ren products and our linen is Italian high thread count from Frette. In fact I had so many enquiries from clients about specific items in our hotel rooms that we've now opened an interiors shop in Rye called The Shop Next Door.

GARDEN PARTY

Above The lush tropical printed curtain fabric is from Christopher Farr Cloth. The furniture on the adjoining private terrace is vintage and sourced from the Ardingly Antiques Fair in Sussex