

# Living

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
& BERKSHIRE

JULY 2020 • HOMES & INTERIORS • PEOPLE & PLACES • FASHION & BEAUTY • FOOD & DRINK • COMPLIMENTARY

## CREATIVE PASSION

Meet the team transforming  
homes from Ascot to Devon

*Inside*

## TRAVEL DREAMS

Ocean holidays to  
cure lockdown blues

## Picture perfect

Berkshire  
photographer's  
stunning shots

## STYLE SECRETS

Interiors expert at Marlow's  
Susie Watson Designs reveals all

## Property heaven

Westcot House adds  
that special touch

## A CUT ABOVE

Sustainable  
hairdressing  
with Reading  
salon

*Plus*

HOMES &  
INTERIORS  
ARTS &  
CULTURE  
FOOD &  
DRINK  
EVENTS

## ROYAL ASCOT

History shows glitz and  
glamour will return



# FABULOUS FURNISHINGS

Tor Saer founder of Westcot House chats to Hester Grainger about her former career as a magazine editor and how upholstering can give your furniture a new lease of life

## Tell us where your love of interiors and furnishings came from?

I have always loved beautiful fabrics and was lucky enough to spend my childhood in a beautiful Queen Anne rectory. This gave me a fondness for older buildings with old sash windows. We had working shutters at the rectory and even now I love it when I come across the old working shutters in a Georgian home. I've always been interested in fabrics and as a child used to visit Liberty in London with my mother and could spend hours in the fabric department just soaking up the incredible prints there.

## What were you doing before you set up Westcot House?

My previous job was as a magazine editor. I worked for many years putting together magazines, heading up a team of art directors and editorial staff and working to produce glossy magazines for a range of clients.

I loved the role and often think that the work I do now is quite similar. I'm creating something beautiful in collaboration with a client from conception to finished product. I love every step of the process and the people I get to work with.

## What services do you offer?

My focus is on unique and bespoke soft furnishings, so I provide everything for the home. From curtains and blinds, to upholstery, beds and headboards, valances, cushions, paint and wallcoverings. Everything I provide is made to measure. So I will visit a client's house and discuss each room – whether it's a simple window treatment for a room or a whole house scheme. I will put the same passion into each project and work with the client to create something that they are ultimately happy to live with, for many years to come.



## **‘I’m creating something beautiful. I love every step of the process and the people I get to work with’**

### **Who are your usual clients?**

My clients are usually private individuals who are renovating residential properties – I’m lucky to have worked with some lovely older houses but I also work in modern interiors. I have recently been commissioned to furnish a new generation Pilates gym and a Georgian country pub with rooms.

### **What do you love about your job?**

Absolutely everything. I love working with clients in beautiful houses, I love the people I meet and work with, and I love the fact that I get to handle and create with gorgeous fabrics.

I get enormous pleasure from seeing a project from conception to finished project, especially when it involves the work of talented craftsmen and women. The upholsterers I’m lucky enough to work with, have learnt their skill over many generations, and my curtain makers are highly skilled in the precise work that is involved in handmade interlined curtains. They all put their heart into their work, and so do I.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

I’m inspired wherever I look. There are just so many talented designers and Instagram has opened a whole new world of people to follow. There’s Kit Kemp for her use of colour. Ben Pentreath for his work with antiques, and the fact that in his own words, his rooms don’t shout “interior designer”. Susie Atkinson and Sims Hilditch who create interiors that I just adore and of course the classic interiors of Jane Churchill which never seem to date.

Fabric designers I love include many of the smaller houses including Alice Sergeant, Rapture & Wright, and Sarah Hardaker, who print all the fabrics to order using old fashioned block printing methods which are fascinating to watch.

### **What are your top tips when furnishing rooms in your house?**

Focus on a key colour that you love. It might be in a painting or a piece of furniture and try and use that as an “anchor” for the scheme. In a recent house, my clients had a beloved painting featuring vivid oranges and yellows. We were able to bring in these colour accents without overpowering the room, by anchoring it with softs greys at the windows.

If you have a loved old piece of furniture, give it a new lease of life by restoring it. A client had an old nursing chair recovered in the most gorgeous Lewis & Wood velvet. ➡





**'I will put the same passion into each project to create something that they are ultimately happy to live with, for many years to come'**

It's now one of her most favourite pieces of furniture and it has a history, which is so special to her.

**What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?**

Not to get rid of the "brown" furniture. A lot of people decided a few years ago that antiques had had their day. Trawling antique shops for a beautiful chest of drawers or a bedside table seemed to be numbered. Now they are having their well deserved renaissance. They never went away, of course, but there is something so grounding about a good piece of antique furniture, perhaps something that's been inherited, that really make a difference in making a house a home.

**Which is the favourite room in your house and why?**

The kitchen! It's where all life is. I work one end of it, and have my "office" space and all my fabric books to hand. My red setter, Rosie, sleeps under the table next to me and when the children are home from university it's where they all congregate with friends.

**What do you do when you aren't working?**

I walk the dog, garden when the weather is OK and do a bit of running while listening to podcasts. My work is such a pleasure that you'll often find me trawling through an interiors magazine into the early hours or finding inspiration on instagram so I'm not sure I can ever say I'm not working.

**What are your furnishing no nos?**

Don't skimp on the bed or the sofa. It's worth investing in good quality, especially as we spend so many years of our lives in bed. Secondly sometimes you need to let the space breathe. Less is more. Knowing when to stop adding to a scheme, is just as important as knowing what to add. But at the end of the day don't forget this house is someone's home. There will be dogs on the sofas and children's drawings on the walls. Don't be too precious – life is for living not just for looking. I love a beautiful interior but I also love that my clients will sit on that sofa, draw those curtains, plump up those cushions and lie in that bed, so make them all as comfortable and inviting as possible. 1

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