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This historic manor house, at the heart of the Nyetimber sparkling wine estate in Sussex, has been thoughtfully restored to create a beautiful family home

TEXT ANNABEL FOLEY | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY
LOCATIONS EDITOR LAVINIA BOLTON



BOTH PAGES In the White Barn, where the owners held part of their wedding, Piet Hein Eek's 'Scrapwood' table, benches and stools reflect the all-white theme. The airy space is used for entertaining

The sound of corks popping must have echoed around the vines when Eric Heerema, the CEO and owner of English sparkling wine maker Nyetimber, married his wife Hannah in the stunning Medieval Barn on their estate in 2013, which is situated between the North and South Downs in West Sussex. The barn sits next to the Grade II-listed manor house in which they now live, sheltered on all sides by vine-clad hills and perched on the edge of a mirror-flat lake in its own beautiful gardens. With the oldest part of the house dating back to the fifteenth century, the estate has a rich history, including a mention in the Domesday Book and brief ownership by Thomas Cromwell. When he fell from favour, the manor was given to Henry VIII's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, following the annulment of their marriage in 1540.

There must also have been a few glasses raised when the work on the house was completed after two and a half years of renovations. When Eric bought the estate in 2006, the manor house was a warren of small, dark rooms on different levels and

certainly would not have worked as a home for a new family – the couple have two daughters, Genevieve Grace, who is now 20 months old, and Vivienne Constance, who's six months. The initial plans to open up the rooms and bring more light into the house were held up by the discovery that none of the walls were underpinned and, being built on the sandy soil of West Sussex, were at risk of collapse. Attention was immediately refocused on remedying this before any other work could be done. 'We had to get the function of the rooms right,' says Eric. 'It had felt very cramped and static before. We were also able to simplify the many different floor levels and lighten the dark beams.'

The couple had commissioned the Belgian designer and craftsman Joris Van Apers to make a table for the kitchen and, as they worked together, they realised they all shared a similar vision for the house. In 2010, Joris took over from another designer they had initially approached and he began to gradually work his magic on the house. 'We like our relationships to grow slowly and we like to win over clients while working on smaller items or projects in the house,' says Joris. 'Doing it this

THIS PAGE Erik De Maeijer designed the concept for the garden; the lake is original, and reflects the manor and surrounding outbuildings in its mirror-flat surface. The house is on the far left, with the White Barn in the middle and the Medieval Barn on the right. OPPOSITE The double-height Great Hall has a door out to the garden; it is furnished with sofas and chairs from Howe, which surround an oak ottoman designed by Joris Van Apers





BOTH PAGES Accessed through a door designed and made by Joris (below), the traditional country kitchen has an Aga and complementing units on either side, with the owners' collection of copper pans hanging along the length of the wall. Joris also custom-made the table, which is paired with chairs and a bench bought in Petworth by the owners. The texture and finish of the blue cupboard was achieved by coating it with about seven layers of blue casein paint (opposite)



way gives them confidence in us and allows us some flexibility.' The defining characteristic of the restored manor house is the use of reclaimed, natural materials, which have created a warm, gorgeously textured and beguilingly simple aesthetic. The entrance hall – the oldest part of the house – is like a sophisticated, more formal version of a boot room, with plenty of space for coats and cupboards to hide away the paraphernalia of country life. Joris custom-built the cupboards from wide, reclaimed oak boards. From here, there is a door leading off to the left, which takes you through the dining room and down steps to the double-height sitting room, known as the Great Hall, which has a door leading out to the garden.

Back in the hall, you walk straight ahead to the kitchen, the real heart of the house, and to the right there is a cosy, small room for watching television and relaxing. Upstairs, three bedrooms and two bathrooms branch off a large central hallway, where Eric and Hannah have a partners' desk to work at. There is a further bedroom and bathroom on the top floor under the pitched roof.

Joris used reclaimed oak throughout the house, replacing rotten beams in the high ceiling of the Great Hall and building most of the kitchen and bathroom cabinetry himself. It all looks original to the house. Yet, while the finish is traditional, there is something very modern about how uncluttered and functional the house feels. There are very few curtains; instead there are mostly shutters built by Joris. This might sound somewhat austere, but it does not feel that way.





The walls throughout have a seemingly simple white lime finish. 'We used five layers of lime paint to get the texture and the depth in the colour,' says Joris. 'A slightly different pigment was added to every layer, so each one has this subtle depth. It may look like plain white, but we worked very hard to get this tactile effect.' As a result the couple have little or no art on the walls. 'We felt it didn't need it,' Eric says. 'As the natural textures developed, we found ourselves wanting to keep everything as simple as we possibly could. We looked at bolder colours for carpets and upholstery, but kept coming back to something less dominant.'

There are personal touches that mean this simplicity does not come across as monastic. A tartan tweed used on the dining-room chairs, for example, is a nod to Hannah's Scottish roots and was also used on the tables at their wedding. They commissioned a local blacksmith, James Price, to make a surround including both thistle and tulip motifs, since Eric is originally from Holland.

Joris is also responsible for the interior of the White Barn. It is a gorgeous, airy space filled with Japanese rice-paper lanterns, which are meant to represent the bubbles of the Nyetimber sparkling wine – a great space for entertaining clients and friends. The manor is located at the very centre of the estate and the couple say it is at the heart of what they do at Nyetimber, and a wonderful sanctuary to come home to □

Joris Van Apers: vanapers.be
 Nyetimber: nyetimber.com



THIS PAGE ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP Under the pitched roof, a spare room has twin beds with covers and cushions in a Chelsea Textiles fabric. There is a bathroom at the opposite end of this floor. On the floor below is another bathroom, for which Joris carved a vanity top from a block of Belgian blue stone. OPPOSITE FROM TOP A view of the garden and the lake beyond from the house and White Barn. The decked infinity pool blends in with the lake

