

NEW
AND REVISED
EDITION

— THE —
**LAURA
ASHLEY**
— BOOK OF —
HOME DECORATING



ELIZABETH DICKSON, MARGARET COLVIN
DOROTHEA HALL & PETER COLLENETTE

— FOREWORD BY —
LAURA ASHLEY

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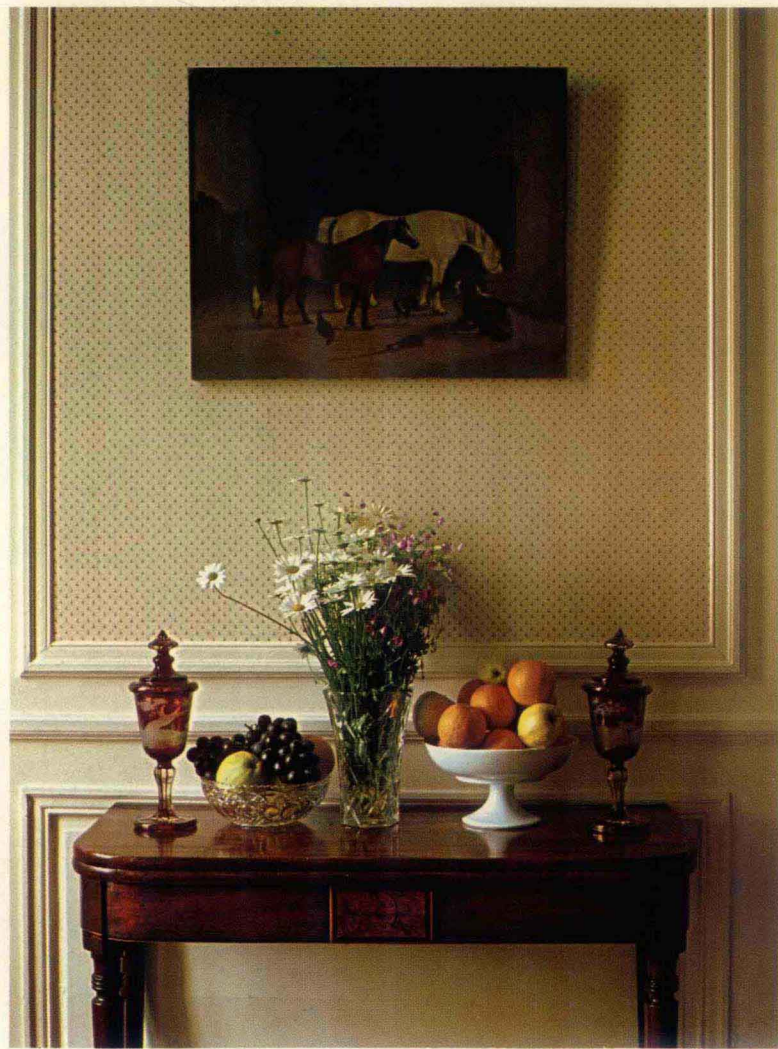
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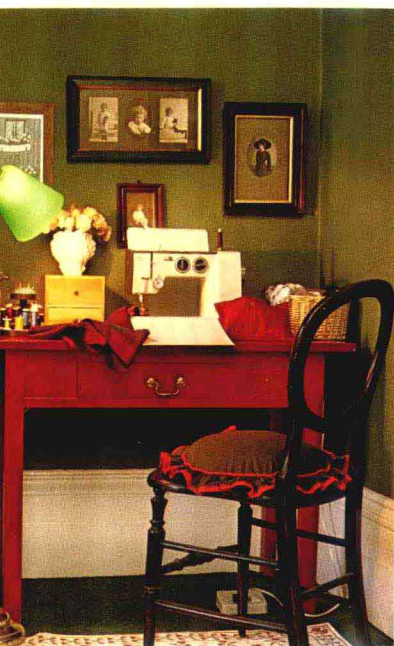
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LAURA ASHLEY AT HOME



No two homes in the world are the same, because everyone likes to put things together in their own way. When planning our Home Furnishing collections, I take into account the factors which are common to most homes, such as the part played by history and a love of domestic arts. Most of us live with one or more pieces of furniture from other times, old books, china and pictures, and this greatly influences our choice of prints for the collections. We aim to make them as timeless as possible.

For me, the more faded and mellow the interior, the more beautiful it is. I long for a newly-decorated room to "settle down". Hand-made patchworks, needleworks, rag rugs, lots of lace and white starched linens (together with old-fashioned smoothing irons) are all bliss to me. I have lived with slate floors for preference, strewn with gum boots, dogs and children and at the same time somehow managed to maintain the ritual of the dining room and the complete peace of comfortable bedrooms. These things turn a living environment into a home.

Many of the photographs in this book have been taken in my family homes. These have ranged from Welsh Victorian to 17th century tailor's establishment, from remote Welsh hill farm to Regency London house, and now an 18th century French chateau. Every one of these homes has been a joy to decorate, although I

am more of an applicator than a decorator, tending always to go for effect rather than a perfect finish. And although I love the simple cottage look, I have also flamboyantly attempted elaborately swagged curtains and festoon blinds, with results which could politely be described as amazing. I believe in the end it's not the stitches but the feeling that counts!

This book has been designed to help bridge the gap between the shop shelf, laden with an enormous choice of items for the home decorator, and the bare rooms or old decor of your home. Should you have curtains or blinds, wallpaper or paint? Which prints and colours should you choose? The first part of the book is packed with rooms decorated in a variety of styles to inspire you. Or you may know exactly the effect you want, but be at a loss as to how to achieve it, in which case the second part of the book tells you how to decorate and make the soft furnishings shown in the first half. We at Laura Ashley hope the book will give you many hours of happy browsing and help you transform your house into a happy home ...

Laura Ashley



Above left: Laura and Bernard Ashley's 18th century home in Picardy, France.
Above: The library, with decorations chosen by Bernard Ashley.
Right: A view of the salon showing the harmonising colour schemes of the Aubusson rug with the fabrics.
Above far right: The dining room and (above centre) a table laid for more informal breakfasts in the old card room. As these photographs show, Laura Ashley's timeless prints and soft colours look as good in elaborate, formal surroundings as they do in a simple rustic cottage or urban family home.



THE SECRET OF STYLE

The way in which you arrange and decorate your home is the natural and outward expression of your individual style. Your very own style is closely integrated with your outlook on life, and so therefore it becomes a definite reflection of your personality, just as your handwriting gives a hint to the reader of what kind of person you are.

Again, just as your tone of voice conveys to the listener how you are feeling today, or the expression in your eyes reveals a glimpse of your true spirit to the careful observer, so the manner in which you choose to design your surroundings allows insight into your character.

Your style may be borrowed partly from another person's way of doing things, simply because you admire or gently hanker after their way of life or talents. Or you may be a cheerful copycat of the way someone else has organized their domain and their individual style of dress. This means that you may be overlaying your ideas with a veneer of somebody else's, whether a barely detectable skin, or a glossy and easily cracked glaze.

There is no harm in that, provided that you do not let your own ideas on designing, decorating, dressing or even cooking and serving a meal remain totally inactive. If you let your own style lie completely inert, then the untapped energies will wither away, as does neglected love or a plant that is starved from a lack of light and water. Your style needs to be nurtured and polished, like all talents.

Practically no style can be entirely new: pretty well everything we look at and make is in some way derivative of something earlier. The tidy proportions of the child's wooden playpen are on the same classic lines as the basic structure of the ancient marble Parthenon, are they not?

You may decide that you have an urge towards something much more tricky than playing straight copycat to someone else's appealing ideas in dress or surroundings. This is the absorbing business of a pursuit to capture the elusive, intangible atmosphere that another person succeeds in spinning about themselves. With a few exceptions, to try to pin down that certain something, that magical ingredient

another individual possesses and then reproduce a carbon copy for oneself is just a waste of time. It is far better to see or hear something one likes and try to interpret it in another medium.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN STYLE

Where someone with style is likely to succeed, is with his expression through another medium of an atmosphere or experience the first person expresses. For instance, the talented composer will produce through his score his own interpretation of the essential qualities in a poet's verses. Or a fashion designer translates the colours and the spirit of a painting, which has influenced her, perhaps even subconsciously. This will be far more successful and satisfying than trying to reproduce style exactly as it is presented without any strain of the admirer's imagination.

What then is this quality (difficult to define), which we name as style? It is something that abides while fads, trends, fashions and notions shift or fade into oblivion. As a distinguished fashion designer, probably the very greatest, and someone who knew a thing or two about the art of living, is reputed to have said: 'Fashion passes, style remains.'

Let us try to pinpoint the essentials. First, style is constant. Trends hurtle along as if they were bright comets pelting by, perhaps to reappear to some, who happen to be in the right place at the right time, to view again decades later, and perhaps in the course of time to burn out and disappear entirely. Fashions are taken up and dropped, some disappearing without a whimper into obscurity, and others faithfully recurring in an upwards spiral.

Each time a fashion reappears, its interpretation is slightly different, and appropriate to the relevant decade, rather as a ballad can be sung in a different tempo, and with a fresh meaning, as it is passed down from the repertoire of one generation to the next. The same experience is presented again and again with a new face for the new recipient to feel and evaluate.

For an example, take one of the popular design elements of this decade, which is the revival of the method of dressing windows with



festoon blinds. For several years the plain holland blind was almost synonymous with shiny laminated surfaces, chrome and glass furniture. Straw roller blinds and café curtains then turned up in ginghamed bistros and in young couples' kitchen-dining rooms. This half-the-window café curtain style was part of the standard home decoration scheme, along with the Tiffany style lamp and all the trimmings of fake art nouveau, down to the purple painted front door. Now, pad along to the watering-holes and living areas of the chic, look up at the windows, and, lo, the ruched blind which stems from an earlier century is well and truly reinstated, with its deep frill, plus a glimpse from the street side of the window of the required piping in a different colour. The shape looks complex to make.

If you want to learn how to make these ruched blinds (otherwise known as festoon or Austrian blinds) then turn to the instruction section on page 97 and find out all about the topic for yourself. Anyway, for years the feminine festoons were deemed fusty by some.



Left: The robust pine cupboard makes a handsome alternative to contemporary assembly-line kitchen storage units for keeping glass and utensils. The green and white scheme conveys a restful ambience. A ceramic plant-shaped candlestick echoes the leafy patterns on wallpaper and lampshades. The rustic appeal of the butcher's block table, wood-handled cutlery and pine floor is offset by the crisp formality of the pleated shades and linen mantelpiece runner.

Below: Objects that cost little but look good. Jolly shapes like a horseshoe upturned for luck and a chandler's lantern plus the deft composition combine to unlock the secret of forming a good collection.



you like the feel of the textures you enjoy the sight of? Study how objects succeed or fail in their relationship one to another. See how fresh garden flowers, or wild, like cow parsley, harmonize with old English chintzes, whereas the stubby cactus will jar – the latter, on the other hand, looks good with geometric prints or the bold stripes of a cotton Mexican rug.

Try to keep a fresh eye. If you can retain a sense of wonder like a young child, then you do receive visual images much more clearly, and keep them bright in your mind's eye for far longer.

Try this exercise. Look at an object as if you are seeing it for the very first time, with what one might call the virgin sensibilities. Practise this, and you find that you will be able to revalue the things – trees, a garden gate, a jug – that are already very familiar to you. Imagine the enthralment of someone very young and small seeing at eye level, in the early morning, a drop of dew cradled inside a half-open umbrella of lupin leaves. Each time you make a fresh, innocent discovery like this, you evolve and

Now they are all the rage again: the wheel has come full circle.

THE KEY TO STYLE

But where does this talk of ruched blinds fit in with the subject of style? The connection lies in the way the concept is interpreted by the user. A voluptuous fashion like the one referred to would look out of place and very uncomfortable in a brisk masculine type of office. Frills nudging up against the computer terminals? Hardly – it would be almost as incongruous as a person clad in spacesuit top with Victorian lacy drawers and wellies. But imagine a high-ceilinged bedroom with light from large north facing windows and solid traditional furniture. The room badly needs something to soften its austere atmosphere. Combine ruched blinds with dress curtains of lace, for a light diffusing, feminine effect and you have achieved style.

If you feel you do not possess a definite sense of style and plan to go ahead and develop one, then sit down first and collect your thoughts. Are you sure there are not several interesting

ideas ticking away in your brain, just longing to get out and express themselves?

Never be afraid of experimenting with different styles in order to develop your own.

FIND INSPIRATION ALL AROUND

Never give up trying. Keep your eyes open; be aware; observe. Study the interiors in genre paintings in galleries – the details in paintings that depict scenes from everyday life whether contemporary or from an earlier generation can sometimes be an inspiration. Ferret about in antique shops and never be afraid to ask what you do not know. Try to notice how the people whose sense of style stimulates you arrange their own possessions.

Visit historic houses, scrutinize the way that the pictures are hung, how the collections are grouped and the pieces of furniture arranged.

How is your sofa arranged in relation to the space in the room? Does it look inviting to sit on or is the total seating arrangement rather static? Are your colours mixed to create an atmosphere of warmth or detachment? And do



Left: Rose-red lacquer paint for walls and a narrow arched window create a study corner. Postcards of early skyscrapers echo the turret shape and the cast iron wall bracket reaffirms gothic tracery. A green wood cupboard stores more bric-a-brac.

Right: Cheerful tones of warm reds, orange and a clear yellow, spiked with lime, for the bedside manner. Flowers bloom on the walls, the chairseat, the wooden Russian dolls, gypsy shawl, petal wreath and within the pine frame. The curvy glass shade enhances a vigorous colour scheme.

Far right: The walls of a flagstone-floored room are washed pink with curling garlands of leaves and fruit stencilled in misty, opalescent tones. This backdrop lends a romantic, softening edge to the furniture. The Victorian deck chair covered in chenille is placed beside a mahogany-topped pub table.

Below right: Curtains skirt the recessed shelving to make an easy solution for hide-away storage, and hessian upholstery puts the formal upright chairs into a country perspective.

how of finishing off the job in the way that a professional does.

This book is also about another aspect of style: achieving a certain splendour on a budget. This is the art of making decisions about where you are prepared to compromise in your own interior decoration. What luxuries or objects will you forgo in order to save for what you want to have eventually? What are your priorities? One person was too busy and not sufficiently in funds to choose the right wallcovering for her new home for two years. Family, job, dog and dry rot all jostled first for attention. Consequently, the evenings when she did get round to inviting friends to eat were illuminated by candlelight, since she had not finalized whether the lighting was to be spots or a standard lamp, and the walls were a roseate pinky plaster, unrendered, of course. Yet with the addition of a big bowl of roses in the centre of the table and the silver polished, she found herself on the receiving end of compliments about pink-walled Italian villa interiors. It is worth waiting for what you want. If you long for blue and white china, then do not be deflected into settling for something plastic instead of waiting for the willow pattern. Find a stylish way of bridging the time gap: say a china junk shop plate for each of you, perhaps each of a different design, but pretty enough to eat off happily every day.

TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Pride in the way we look after our homes is not just a monotonous routine of cleaning under the beds. Pride in surroundings is keeping the place looking fresh, but lived-in, in extracting real use out of objects rather than adopting the attitude of treating them as long redundant effigies. This will take you a long way towards achieving style. Lack of pride in your home

consolidate your own sense of personal style.

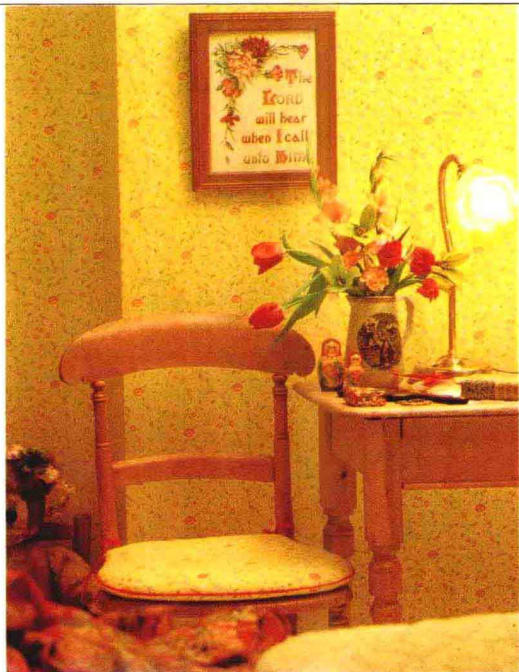
Another aspect of style is economy of line and design. Beauty can certainly be portrayed ruffled, flounced and exotically draped, but the first step towards style is to pare back to the essentials before piling on any extraneous additions.

In the restoration or decorating of houses this does mean mentally and often literally stripping a place back to study the shell or the bones. It means scraping away perhaps five layers of paint applied over generations, or dismantling a wall to reveal an original fireplace hidden away for years. All this is similar to the commonsense notions of clearing the decks before washing up the dishes, or moving the furniture out of the room before you have a blitzkrieg of a spring clean. Or sartorially speaking, it parallels the maxim that if in doubt about the way you look, then subtract the accessory you have added, rather than des-

perately piling on the bits and bobs. Of course, you can go frilly and add the razzmatazz if you so wish, mixing tartan with paisley prints and candystripes, but approach with caution.

If you are bored with the way you have decorated a room you may want to know how to remedy the situation without having to start entirely again and we hope you will find some ideas among the pages here. Or perhaps you are looking for the answers to all sorts of light-hearted but nevertheless burning questions. How can you give the garden chairs a new look? When should you pipe or would it be altogether more fun to flounce? Just what is a corona and how do you drape it?

Supposing that there is a form of decoration that is new to you, say the art of machine patchwork, or how to attach fabric coverings to the wall surface, then refer to the second half of the book and you will find out how to set about your project, plus the extra know-



soon becomes neglect, and one step from that is to decay.

The doyen of interior decorators, the late John Fowler, whose work included more than one generation of royal households, had one golden rule for people when they first set up home. 'Pig it', he would say. In other words, never be afraid to wait. After all, it is you who are going to live there. Find out about your home before you decide on any details of decoration. Make friends with the place! Consider what colours you really do notice through the downstairs windows, and what materials will harmonize with them. Observe where the sunlight falls. Make life easy for yourself and the people who live with you. Are you tidy or messy? Do you need lots of coathooks or would the clothes be better shut into a cupboard? Is there room to line up the wellington boots by the door, or do you never wear them?

Style is discrimination: deciding what features of the house you are going to keep, and knowing what is worthless and to be discarded. Style is implementing any careful restoration that is needed before adding the extras. Style is looking at the colours of nature to see what shades go together: look at a pheasant's feather or the tones of seashells.

Remember that good home decoration is like putting together the right clothes or balancing the right ingredients for a simple, satisfying meal: the enterprise requires some money, usually a good deal of time and certainly patience. This book is designed to help you make the best use of your potential as a home decorator.

Of all the objectives you may have in your life, the ability and the determination to create a warm, welcoming and attractive home is one of the most worthwhile and precious.



ALL ABOUT KITCHENS

The kitchen is the central force around which most households spin. Now this axis can either be a jolly space where everyone rushes in and helps themselves to whatever it is they want, or it may, over years of habit, have become the cook's autonomous power-house, where only the most intrepid of compulsive biscuit tin rummagers will dare to tread.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

This resilient core of kitchen from which the vital household energy generates is the place where the stove burns, raw ingredients are coaxed into meals, the waste disposer digests, and the steam rises. All human life is here, as often as not decked out in rubber gloves and cotton apron, but there can be room for gladrags too. All sorts of clothes are worn in the kitchen, including wellington boots if the

draining board and sink unit is not fitted out with a wide enough lip at the near side, so that the washing up water slops over onto the floor – an occasional design drawback.

The kitchen of tomorrow is a room that will warmly serve many purposes: it will have to, as the home becomes increasingly more expensive to heat and living costs force us to live in a smaller, simplified space. As it is, the room here and now calls the tune as the most important, lived-in and appreciated space in the home. It is, potentially, a space for daring experiment.

Of course, not everyone is tethered to the stove, as if by some mystical earth mother's umbilical cord. Many folk view without interest the chains of office bestowed on he or she who presides over the *batterie de cuisine*. The significance of the kitchen, its layout and

Below left: Modern, laminated fitments, a ceiling hung shelf unit, a spotless cream floor and a pale leafy bough wallpaper that rampages over all the walls and even the ceiling: all these combine to give this fully fitted kitchen a sophisticated colour scheme with creamy tones perfectly matched even to the row of crocks on top of the wall cupboards. The window has a pair of tailored Roman blinds.

Right: The space has been reclaimed from a pantry in a French château to make an efficient up-to-date kitchen leading off the main dining room. The china and glass in constant use are stored on open, new pine shelves, and the cooking and work table is the centre of operations.

its position in the home, largely depend on one's lifestyle and social attitudes towards food and its preparation. A person may have already passed the middle years without learning how to boil an egg, yet be content to go merrily on with no more advanced knowledge than how to decant the birdseed. At the other end of the scale, you find some who have been schooled in the domestic sciences before reaching the age of majority, and who are already in possession of many well-tried gems of kitchen lore.

If you enjoy a degree of emancipation in your life with meals more often out than in, the kitchen may be lodged in your consciousness as some vague adjunct to the rest of your house or flat, a place seemingly full of sharp edges that you graze yourself on as you manoeuvre a path towards the black coffee. The colour scheme and layout will be irrelevant as they are seen only through a crusty fog of hangover. And then in the evening the kitchen work surface becomes the bar top, useful for fiddling with circular ice cubes, slicing lemon and as somewhere to dump dirty glasses before you sally forth to dinner.

RELENTLESS ROUTINE

On the other hand, the kitchen can be a splendid rallying point in the house where the clatter starts with a grunted communication about poached versus scrambled, then rapid departures all round to school, work, shop; the action continues with spin, chop, wash and so on, to reach, perhaps, a short lull after lunch while kitchen and owner rest on their haunches for a few moments. The yoke is soon slipped back on again for the next shift, whirling into full gear so that by the time that keys are heard in front door locks, the place is coasting along rapidly towards the evening meal, with yet more preparations in hand for the next day. Meanwhile children toil over homework in one part of the room, hamsters have been rescued from behind the floor brush, and neat packages have been retrieved from the vault of the deep freeze. In such a family setting it would be easy to slip into the habit of wearing a dressing gown all day long, sitting among the crumbs and marmalade all morning with feet up by the long pine table.







When you consider how to devise a kitchen and how best to make the space work for the occupant, it is sensible to think about how much time the person will spend there – and what, on the whole, the quality of that time will be. In order to receive the greatest benefit from the kitchen, the user must be able to impose a certain amount of self-discipline. And a discipline, however harsh, is easier to sustain if there is a stable framework to function in. A woman who grapples with the long hours of

isolation she is likely to find thrust upon her when she rears small children is going to spend much time kitchen-based. In order not to let her spirits waver, or to help boost her morale on the days when the sink seems particularly deep, the kitchen should be designed to be as integrated as possible with the rest of the home and outside world. Whatever the size and style of kitchen, one factor remains constant for all women with young children of pre-school age: they want to be positioned near their





Four glimpses of kitchen life, where the different rooms are very definitely the heart of the home. Far left: The dresser shape is formed by a set of pine shelves hung on open brickwork above a sturdy sideboard with deep drawers for storing cutlery and table linen. The terracotta and cream china is displayed against a backdrop of naturally harmonizing brick tones.

Left: The centre of family life, a large farmhouse kitchen in Wales where a lamb may stray in through the back door in spring and cats drink milk from their saucers by the Aga. The wicker cat travelling basket and picnic hamper make a simple composition with a row of shiny, time-honoured aluminium pans, cabbages and china pots.

Below left: A series of awkward connecting spaces now spread agreeably into one large kitchen and family area, floored and walled in gleaming modern tiles of warm terracotta and cream tones. There are two main tables, one which acts as a surface for the preparation of food, an island between the sink and stove and the storage on the other side, plus doing the job of sideboard. Then a straight-legged pine table is used for dinner, playing card or board games and doing jigsaws or homework.

Below: The stove is fitted into the old brick range and the combination of open brickwork walls both whitewashed and left plain is particularly soothing and pleasant to live with. Note the door with attractive stained glass panels and how the tall, rather narrow window appears even more so with the decorative arrangement of tall, thin bamboo birdcage and green plants.

mother during all their waking hours, irrespective of whether she is dealing with pans of boiling water, up to the wrists in flour, or trying to sandwich in an hour's study for exam finals.

GOOD-NATURED KITCHENS

Whatever the lifestyle and aspirations of the user, whether home-based or out of the house for a proportion of the day, the kitchen should be a pleasant place to return to, if it is to play any major role as a location in the household. A reassuring atmosphere is one that both soothes because of the quiet, unchanging order and sense of down to earth stability about the place, and at the same time sends the spirits soaring with the cheerful, cared-for appearance of attractive decoration and clean surfaces. Just one comment, in passing, on the subject of people's quirks and foibles about kitchen hygiene. It is curious how someone will invest substantial sums in planning and furnishing a kitchen and yet soldier on with the same clutch of ancient, cracked wooden spoons for cooking. Often enough, the cause is that it is easy not to notice the deterioration of an object in constant use, and while one is sympathetic to anybody who reaches for a kitchen utensil with the same automatic reaction as a Pavlovian dog triggered by bells, it really is worthwhile taking time off to stand back and take a thoroughly objective view of the state of play in the kitchen.

