





THIS LIFE Zuzana Gibb

A lovingly restored period property in the Borders is both home and workshop to this wallpaper designer, as well as an endless source of inspiration

Text by Catherine Coyle Photography by Douglas Gibb





A former coaching inn, Castletoun House [top left] has been home to Slovakian-born Zuzana [right] and husband Matthew for the last seven years. The kitchen [below left] is the heart of the Gibbs' home. The house had fallen into disrepair and the couple's restoration project has seen them work to return it to its former glory. The WC [below] has period features while the lounge [above right], originally the hotel's dining room, offers a warm welcome, thanks to the fireplace and gilt-edged mirror above the mantelpiece





THIS LIFE



From a distance, Castletoun House exudes a certain air of austerity. Set back from the road, its façade is simple, unspoiled and intriguing; drive too far through the Borders village of Greenlaw and you could easily miss it, so discreet is its presence. At one time, it was a coaching inn, where court officials from the local town hall would be put up for the night. The modest, eight-bedroom establishment served this Berwickshire county town well – until, with the closure of the town hall, its demise seemed inevitable.

Enter Zuzana Gibb and her husband Matthew. The couple spotted the hotel for sale in a nearby estate agent's window. Impressed by the architecture of the village, caught up in the romance of the Borders scenery and eager to escape London, they quickly snapped up the opportunity to own a historic home.

Castletoun House was designed by the architect John Cunningham in 1834 (at the same time as Greenlaw's town hall). Zuzana and Matthew secured the future of this Greek revival building, but the town hall opposite their home has not enjoyed the same fate. Despite a lengthy ▶



Zuzana's hand-printed wallpapers subtly dress Castletoun House's rooms; for example, in the dining room [left] and the bedroom [right], offering a traditional yet contemporary feel to the place. The couple love to rummage through flea-markets and auctions in search of vintage finds



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campaign on the BBC's *Restoration* series back in 2006, the building, sadly, remains at risk.

"Castletoun House was built as a hotel but over the years it had become quite run-down," explains Zuzana. "When we moved in, there was nothing here." That was seven years ago and the couple's programme of repairs and renovation remains an ongoing challenge.

Echoing the mood of her home, Zuzana, a wallpaper designer, possesses an understated charm. Originally from Slovakia, she came to Britain by way of the United States and a spell studying fashion in London. "I wanted to study fine art at Chelsea but began with a foundation course where I was learning how to make textiles and to screen print. I was excited by the immediate, bold effect of printing and ended up being pointed in the direction of the fashion department," she recalls.

But, unable to sew and feeling uninspired by the prospect of pattern-cutting, Zuzana didn't thrive among the fashion students. She found she was much more drawn to the use of colour, and soon made a happier transition, into interior textiles. Today, working from the attic of one of Castletoun's outbuildings, she runs Kerdova Print, creating distinctive, hand-made wallpapers.

Hints of her work can be seen all over her rather commanding home. Rather than using Castletoun as a full-blown showroom, she prefers a more subtle approach, with examples of her hand-printed wallpapers blending beautifully with the house's period features.

Since her patterns are simultaneously traditional and contemporary, the Kerdova Print collections are difficult to categorise. Their uniqueness lies in their range of colourways, transforming heavily patterned repetitions into fresh, modern wall coverings. Where Zuzana's debut collection had a distinctly traditional feel, her second is graphic, bolder and more confident.

It's clear that the kitchen is the heart of this home. Two bouncing, marmalade-hued labradors, Suki and Lieshka, ("Suki is 'little Zuzana' and Lieshka means 'fox' in Slovakian," says Matthew) snuffle around the farmhouse dining table, the creamy Aga radiating a comforting warmth. On the wall is one of Zuzana's latest designs – a jade-and-pistachio combination called 'Spot the Difference' that merges effortlessly with the laid-back surroundings. Out in the hallway, the light changes dramatically – a dinky stained-glass cupola illuminates the passage – and huge concrete flagstones lead to a grand reception area. ▶



WHAT ZUZANA LIKES

My **favourite fleamarket** is London's Greenwich Market, especially on Sundays. You can find everything there – from vintage clothing and antiques all the way to modern art and design.

My **favourite smell** is puppies – my dog had 12 last year and I was in heaven!

I **always feel inspired** when I see retrospective exhibitions focusing on a particular artist. The recent Pollock, Kandinsky and Warhol shows were particularly enjoyable.

A well-made, spicy Bloody Mary is my **favourite cocktail**.

My **dream destination** is the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Jessica Ogden is my **favourite designer**. Her approach to clothes design is what I aspire to have with my wallpaper.

My **biggest indulgence** is expensive lipstick. I don't wear it often but, when I do, I like it to be the best quality.

My **favourite comfort food** is my father's chicken broth and my mother's langosh (a Hungarian flat bread).

My **favourite cooking tip?** Find a husband who can cook. If that fails, always buy top-quality balsamic vinegar. We get ours from Valvona & Crolla in Edinburgh.

My home town's **best-kept secret** is the tiny New Palace Theatre. It can seat just 30 people at a time. But the audience gets the chance to see old silent movies to the accompaniment of live organ music.

The **ultimate adrenaline rush** was horse-riding on a beach in Ireland. I had never galloped before and was absolutely terrified, but it was great fun.



Zuzana's favourite piece in the house is a painting of a boy [right], found in a fleamarket and probably painted by an amateur some time in the 1930s

Still very much a work in progress, Castletoun House, as Zuzana points out, is a hearty abode where dogs play, family members gather and villagers meet. "This house likes to have company," she laughs. "Even when every room is occupied, it never feels crowded."

The well-travelled couple love nothing more than to rummage around markets and auctions, though they are careful not to seek out pieces for their home, Zuzana instead preferring interior *objets* to "be found".

A snaking glass thistle chandelier takes centre stage in the velvet-draped dining room, a fleamarket find on a trip to Belgium. In the lounge (what would once have been the hotel's dining room), the building's original fireplace and vast gilt-edged mirror compete for your attention. Your eye is immediately drawn to the views from the floor-to-ceiling windows that open to the rolling farmland and Catmoss Hill beyond. This is where, after a bracing two-hour walk with their dogs, the couple enjoy Sunday afternoons watching old movies by the fire. This room is particularly dear to them since it is where they exchanged their marriage vows three years ago.

Outside, most of the last few years have been spent restoring the stables and south-facing cottage, with Matthew taking on the majority of the building work himself. Zuzana's studio is tucked away in the eaves of one of the outbuildings. Self-contained and warmed by a wood-burning stove, it is where she often finds herself working into the wee small hours. It's an inspiring place. Canvases are propped against walls and samples of new designs are tacked to boards. A quilted satin rose-adorned throw is draped casually on the sofa. Two retro 1940s leather-and-metal chairs picked up at London's Greenwich Market fit in perfectly – all evidence of this designer's magpie propensity for vintage finds that are given a new lease of life in just the right environment. ■

Kerdova Print, 07931 901 956, www.kerdovaprint.co.uk