

# COUNTRY LIFE

MAY 14, 1998

EVERY THURSDAY £2.50

## SUMMER GARDENS

Spellbound by a sumptuous  
Devon garden

Great amateur tradition  
of the British rose

## PLUS

HRH the Prince of Wales  
builds at Highgrove

Tour of the Lord Chancellor's residence



0009-3485(199805)203



## ALL THE CRAFTS UNITE IN THE PRINCE'S HOME

Completed this month, and published here for the first time, the Orchard Room provides accommodation for events at Highgrove. HRH the Prince of Wales's country house, MICHAEL HEAL enjoys the thoughtful design and inspired craftsmanship which make it a happy addition to its beautiful setting.

**W**HEN HRH the Prince of Wales asked Charles Moore to design Highgrove's new Orchard Room he set a considerable challenge. During the past few years, the Prince has held an increasing number of official functions at Highgrove, his country house near Tetbury in Gloucestershire. Dinner and reception for the many charities he supports have been added to a programme of events that includes some 200 private guests invited to visit the garden every year. Since the house is not large, functions have had to be accommodated in stables. A more suitable, permanent setting was clearly needed.

The Orchard Room is the result. Its chief function is to accommodate events ranging from lunches and dinners to concerts and seminars, but it is also a place where visitors to the garden can have a cup of tea and buy plants. So it needed to be a building which would seem welcoming to an old lady in severe lingerie who has just interrupted the garden in the rain



**1-10** Mike Cuff's version of Paddy Woodhead, Highgrove's 'signature factor', is shown in the picture dedicated to the Orchard Room

as well as a millionaire in evening dress enjoying a first-class dinner.

More importantly of all, it had to respect a setting of exceptional sensitivity. The site chosen by the Prince, following

discussion with Mr Moore, lies on the west of the house and its unique cedar tree, both clearly visible from the Orchard Room across the drive and garden wall. To the north are stables of the Duke of Cornwall's Cornwall Huntstallings, which house a prize herd of Aberdeen Angus beef cattle. To the west are fields, and to the south and east an outbuild from which the building takes its name. It was essential that the Orchard Room respect the scale and materials of the farm, yet own architectural enough to form an ornament to the garden and wider landscape.

From a distance, it is evident how the geometry Mr Moore has noticed the apparent scale of this substantial building by building up its profile, producing a frequent ribbon of windows realized by the vertical columns of the raised Cornishstone tiles. Closer to, the fragmentation gives direction

(Page 3 - The Orchard Room from the drive (Facing page) 3 - A view from the bridge





4—The ante-room, with the doors open to the principal room on the left. The plasterwork has an apple-branch motif.

in the way the building offers a remarkable amount of visual variety. In plan, it is relatively simple: a large oblong divided internally into two principal spaces, an ante-room along the west front and the Orchard Room itself, which faces south under three steep gables that express the three aisles into which it is divided. The loggia that runs across the west and south fronts curves out on the east to a small wing containing a shop, which looks towards the house (Fig 2). The kitchens and lavatories are on the building's north face, opposite the farm.

Mr Morris's novel achievement is to have created a building which seems perfectly comfortable looking both towards the Prince of Wales's country house on one side and a cottaged on the other. He has evolved a vernacular Classicism pitched between the high architecture of the house and the local building traditions of the farm. This is evident in the most striking external feature, the loggia's short, bulging columns of Bath stone (Fig 3)—from the Limpley Stoke mine—which sit on square bases built of locally quarried rubble stone. They immediately suggest a source close at hand, the

fat Tuscan columns of Tetbury's mid-17th-century Market House—the Cotswolds' architectural traditions have been the guiding force in the Orchard Room's design.

The quality of the craftsmen brought together by Mr Morris from his native East Anglia and by the Gloucestershire builder Roger Williams is evident in the confident handling of materials: Cotswold stone dressings, from Stanley's Quarry at Moreton-in-Marsh; eaves, beams and gutters of green English oak made by Scope Joinery, a Norfolk firm (the gutters are lined with copper); wrought-iron gutter brackets forged by a Suffolk blacksmith; and honey-coloured lime render, which at the rear of the building has been limewashed white for variety.

This impression of craft skills of the highest calibre serving a tightly controlled design is even more emphatic inside. The two main rooms have been given distinct characters by materials as well as detail. In the ante-room (Fig 4), the eye is immediately caught by the plasterwork's twining apple-tree branches, which are not moulded but were hand-modelled *in situ* by Suffolk plasterer Steve Welch. In the corner

by the entrance visitors will be greeted on chilly days by a roaring fire: since he did not wish to insert a chimney at this point, Mr Morris has created a tall stove of the sort of rustic Baroque form encountered in Scandinavia. Underfloor central heating is also provided.

The ante-room is separated from the principal room by limed-oak doors. Feeling that traditional raised and fielded panelling for the doors would be too smart for such a building, and that vernacular bead-and-butt was too humble, Mr Morris designed a square pattern of reeding which is tactile and catches the light in a subtle way (Fig 6). Thinking that he had achieved something rather original, Mr Morris was slightly abashed to see shortly afterwards a virtually identical design on an old door in Bruges.

Tall columns built of bands of dark Guiting stone and light Bath stone divide the main space into three aisles of three bays (Fig 5). The aisles rise to high curved vaults of trefoil form which incorporate oval windows under the south-facing gables. These columns have an additional practical function, for they allow spaces at both

ends of the central aisle to be divided off to create serving areas. Reminiscent of experiments in rural Classicism by Lutyens or Plečnik, the columns are designed by Mr Morris to be one grade below Tuscan, the most primitive order in the Classical hierarchy. Each is six times the height of its diameter (a Tuscan column has the proportions of seven to one), and has no capitals or bases, just rings of bosses and dimples to mark where they would be.

On the north wall are the doors to the kitchens and above them a gallery for musicians. Tall glazed doors, which can be completely folded back, open to the terrace to the south; the doors to the east, which provide views over the fields, open onto a space for a marquee which can be erected on this front to provide extra accommodation. A frieze of turned balusters runs round the room, concealing the openings of the ventilation system. At the Prince of Wales's suggestion, the balusters were made of Worcester Permain applewood from an orchard at Sandringham, so adding to the decorative theme of the Orchard Room. Other suggestions made by the Prince include refinements to the design of the wrought-iron chandeliers in the principal room, which he felt needed thicker arms than those in the smaller space of the ante-room. The lighting is carefully controlled: there is no unflattering downlighting, just uplighters and chandeliers, which can have their electric fittings adapted to take candles for a softer effect.

The final touches have been supplied by the Prince: works of art, carpets and decorative objects from his private collection furnish the building, giving it warmth and an intimate, domestic quality, so that visitors will realise that, although designed largely for the Prince's public functions, the Orchard Room is also part of his home. Its completion was marked with parties to thank those who provided both materials and skills for its construction, as the Prince felt that those who had laboured with such pride to a tight deadline should christen the building.

At the Prince's request, the Orchard Room has been dedicated to the memory of Paddy Whiteland, who for most of his life, and well before the Prince's arrival, was Highgrove's informal and deeply knowledgeable factor. An inscription under the loggia records the dedication; above it, a young stonemason, Nick Cuff, who was born in Tetbury and as a child knew Paddy, has carved a portrait of the man of whom the Prince once said: 'Everything I have done at Highgrove could not have been achieved without Paddy. I am forever indebted to him.' The portrait (Fig 1) recalls the Prince's comment that 'if ever Paddy were to shuffle off this mortal coil', he would 'have him stuffed and put in the entrance hall'.

*Photographs: June Buck/Duchy of Cornwall.*



5—The principal room: the rugs and paintings are from the Prince of Wales's collection



6—The chimneypiece in the principal room, and one of the limed oak doors, which have a square, reeded pattern