

In the know

The latest news, advice and information for period homeowners

BY KAREN THOMAS

PL PROPERTY INSIGHT



Interior designer Cecilia Neal shares her advice on:

...the current trends in home interiors:

'I am keen on bringing back a sense of warmth, colour and comfort to interiors. I'm tired of "boring beige" and although one still sees it at all levels in the housing market, it really is done to death. I like to establish clean lines in well designed rooms with accurately sited electric points, so that lighting can be used to form shape and to accentuate colour. With a primed canvas like this, warm tones and interesting furniture can be added to best effect. In a period house, one or two key pieces may be contemporary and are highlights in a setting in

keeping with the age of the house. I like to use modern pictures well lit with antique furniture.'

...the key features to look for when buying a period home:

'The integrity of the structure – have parts of the old structure been destroyed in favour of less attractive newer additions? It may be difficult to reinstate in a listed building, given the strictures of planning authorities. This should be researched. Check that any visible repairs have been done in an authentic style. Is the roof in a healthy state? This also goes for any parts of the building which are of wood or lath and plaster construction. Look for signs of damp penetration or any sort of visible rot. Is there any undue cracking of plaster, for instance from door or window corners to ceiling?'

...what's worth investing in for your house:

'Conserve anything that is genuine in the house. Assuming that existing floors, wood or stone are in reasonable condition, and do not need to be replaced, I would buy the best insulation and draughtproofing you can afford.'



...what's worth spending on:

'Good chimney pieces, if possible old, but if not excellent reproduction pieces are available.'

...what's worth saving on:

'I would save by not ordering new built in joinery. If space allows buy an armoire and chests of drawers for bedrooms, and try to find panelling and shelving of an old library and have these fitted in a reception room. Many dealers specialise in this! Cecilia Neal, Meltons (meltons.co.uk)

MISTRESS OF THE TOWER

Balcary Tower occupies a beautiful coastal position on the Solway Firth and is about 1.5 miles from the village of Auchencairn in Dumfries and Galloway. The property was built around 1860 by Colonel Johnstone, the laird of Auchencairn House, as a home for – it is believed – his French governess and mistress. Standing sentry to Balcary Bay, the three storey castellated tower has a two storey wing with many character features both internally and externally. There are three reception rooms, four bedrooms and three bathrooms. The main living area has a glorious picture window with expansive views over the sea-filled swimming pool and across the bay to Hestan Island. The tower is accessed through an impressive pair of wrought iron gates and by a drive of just under half a mile, and is surrounded by attractive wooded grounds and gardens. The guide price is offers in excess of £850,000. For more details visit knightfrank.com.



TIPS WHEN VIEWING VICTORIAN PROPERTIES

David Lewis of chartered surveyors Grillo LLP (grillollp.com) has the following advice:

- The Victorians used cavity walls to fight damp and improve insulation. Builders used various methods to tie the two leaves of masonry together but the most common was the iron tie. Check them for signs of corroding, which can lead to instability, unevenness and cracks in external walls.
- Damp proof courses in walls were typically formed with slate or pitch and sand. Frequently, they were built too close to the ground, meaning they became covered by earth and paving, making them ineffective.
- Lead was commonly used for the underground pipes. Now we know that lead deposits in drinking water can damage health, so all lead pipes should be replaced. ➔