

The petite kitchen is given depth and a sense of space by using a rich, deep burgundy colour drench



# A NEW LIFE in the OLD WORLD

Moving halfway around the globe has set interior designer **KATHERINE MALOUF** on a journey of discovery

**WORDS:** Kate Houghton  
**PHOTOS:** Elle Brotherhood

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atherine Malouf grew up in Melbourne, Australia but has now found her happy place in Marple, in a house built in a year when the British were still sending convicted felons to those distant shores.

'I met my husband, George, when he was visiting Australia. We married and moved to London two years later. When I was expecting our first child, Adeline, we decided to head back to Melbourne so I could be close to my family. In 2020, when Covid hit and we were all locked down we felt very lucky to be able to escape to a small cottage we had in the countryside outside of Melbourne and fell in love with the lifestyle, so much so that we decided to sell our city home and the cottage and bought a 50-acre property in the country. I had always worked as an interior designer but decided that if we were going to live on a farm I should lean in and run it as a farm. We had a small herd of miniature Scottish Galloway cattle and took in rescue horses too, as well as a huge kitchen garden.

'It was an amazing few years. We had our second daughter, Audrey, in 2022, and in 2024, we brought both girls over to visit their grandparents, who live in Marple. It was a really special time. We went to a wedding in Barcelona, we spent time with George's family and I could see all the benefits of raising the girls in the UK, not on a small farm in Melbourne. As a family, we're all about exploring and travel and discoveries, and that is so easy here – Europe is right there, close by; it's just really opened our horizons in this respect. We decided to move to the UK and make a life here.'

At first, Katherine and George looked at potential homes in Macclesfield, for the convenience of the commute to London for his new role, but quickly decided that if they were moving to the UK to be close to George's family, they should really be looking in Marple.

'I had a vision of the kind of house I wanted,' Katherine says. 'I was deep into series two of *Bridgerton* and I really wanted a period home, with all the period features, the high ceilings and the deep windows. There are homes in Melbourne built during this period, but they're nothing like the ones here – I wouldn't want to live in one, put it that way.

'We scoured Rightmove to find possible properties, all from our home in Melbourne. I only found two I liked – and this wasn't one of them initially, as I wanted more than four bedrooms, thinking I'd need the space for



Katherine Malouf is looking forward to launching her interior design practice in Cheshire



A magnificence of Victorian architecture



Contemporary touches sit well alongside the vintage Lincrusta on the walls



The drawing room is a screen-free haven

## 'I want my home to reflect *my style*, a little bit quirky, eclectic, romantic but playful'

when my family visit. It has a coach house in the rear, though, and I realised this could work as an annexe when we have guests, so when we flew over we came to have a look – and loved it.'

The coach house is now in full use, the first floor as Katherine's home studio where she is launching her eponymous interior design practice and the ground floor as George's father's pottery studio – kiln and all.

'It's lovely to have him there,' she says. 'Working for yourself can be quite isolating, so having someone in the space is great and he's the loveliest man, too.'

Their new home, built in 1857, was Katherine's first interior design project in the UK, and a thoroughly enjoyable learning curve.

'It was in fine condition but hadn't been updated since the 1980s,' she says. 'A previous owner had added double glazing (and cleverly maintained all the stained-glass windows) and the kitchen was up to date, but the décor was very tired and the bathrooms needed replacing. Luckily – and I appreciate now this is sadly quite rare – all the original features I wanted were in place, from the stunning tiled floors in the hallway to the coving, ceiling roses, the balustrade and even textured wallcovering in

the hallway, which I have learned is Lincrusta – and is still being made.

'My only real disappointment is that when they fitted a new kitchen at some point, they put down new, heavy-duty floor tiles – and I don't know if they simply laid these on top of the Victorian tiling or lifted it up. I daren't look, but really want to know...'

With mainly cosmetic changes being needed, Katherine found herself taking on her first interior design project in the UK and falling in love with the industry here.

'It was a sudden realisation – things are actually made here,' Katherine says. 'In Australia so much is shipped in from China, but here you make it – and so much of what I wanted is made locally too. There were a few of the original cast-iron radiators remaining in the house, but the rest had been replaced. I discovered Castrads, in Stockport, who not only make period-style radiators, but were able to refurbish my existing antique radiators. There's the original range in the kitchen and I found a company in Yorkshire that can refurbish it and make the flue safe to use. The standard of bespoke joinery – the detailing and craftsmanship – is so much better than we had in Australia. It's been a very exciting voyage of discovery.' >

The snug, designed for family time



Katherine was inspired by the original fireplace tiles in her colour choice for the dining room



A warm yellow makes for an inviting dining space, and the handpainted blue borders add a touch of playfulness

## *‘Lucky* – and I appreciate now this is sadly quite rare – all the original features I wanted were in place’

Katherine decided to keep the existing kitchen units and refresh that section with a colour drench encompassing cabinets, walls and ceiling, choosing a rich deep burgundy red – Smith and the Devil from Coat Paints. She contrasted this in the dining area with another Coat Paints choice – Arctic Roll, a soft custard yellow that glows in the sunshine.

‘I want my home to reflect my style,’ she says. ‘A little bit quirky, eclectic, romantic but playful and not being bound by any particular aesthetic style. I asked the painter to hand-draw borders on the ceiling and around the window in a blue paint – he was terrified, but I assured him I wasn’t looking for perfection in a room where we eat with our children, and he’s done a beautiful job.’

Elsewhere Katherine has united period style with contemporary comfort, such as in the formal living room, where a blue colour drench wraps in the original moulding and allows the colours of the stained-glass windows to glow, while comfortable furniture choices support the room’s purpose – reading, relaxing and nothing digital.

The snug has been given a wash of pale, rose pink and a cushion-piled sofa encourages family gatherings.

‘I took the colour for the dining room from the gorgeous original green tiles in the fireplace,’ she says. ‘The artwork and accessories were left to me by my uncle, who was a renowned chef in Dubai and reflect his love of travel and our Lebanese heritage.’

Katherine has completed most of the changes she wants to make in her own home and is itching to go again, establishing her own interior design agency and hoping to quickly build a client base.

‘I would love to work on more period homes,’ she says. ‘I have built a wide network of excellent trades and learned so much working on my own property. There are so many beautiful, period properties around this area and it would be wonderful to work with a client and their personal context in a home where we can respect the historical context, too. I can design around a single piece of artwork or furniture or work on a blank canvas. In Australia I worked on highly contemporary domestic and commercial interiors, and lots of restaurants, too, so I can really deliver whatever the client seeks.’

‘I can’t wait for the first call to come in.’ ●