

The ENGLISH HOME



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THE Georgian HOME

As part of our series on familiar British housing styles, we explore the merits of the homes that shaped the greater part of the 18th century, noted for their elegant proportions and symmetrical detailing

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE



Named for the reigns of the first four King Georges of England, encompassing the years 1714 to 1830, Georgian architecture is largely defined by its classic elegance and understated detailing. Marked by symmetry, proportion and balance, the style of these buildings varied over time, from Palladian to neoclassical, red brick to stucco-fronted. Townhouses were known for their grid-like uniformity; country houses for their width and relative shallowness, often nestled in landscaped settings. Greek motifs, influenced by discoveries of ancient buildings in Europe, were popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Renowned architects such as Sir John Soane and John Nash rose to prominence during this era, celebrated for their considered, pared-back take on architectural design.

GOLDEN TOUCH

Often built according to the principle of the golden ratio, which focused on producing a pleasing dimensional relationship between the width of a building and its height, Georgian homes tend to feel considered and proportionate. Windows are plentiful and were frequently built below waist height, necessitating the addition of wrought-iron balconies. However, window taxes were prevalent during this era, meaning that many were bricked in over time, a feature still evident today. “These homes have a subtle grandeur inspired by the restrained and rational elegance of Palladian architecture,” explains Tim Gledstone, partner at architecture and design company Squire & Partners. “Rooms are sequenced to flow naturally from one to the other. Details including cornices, architraves and skirting can be restored and replaced using modern technology such as 3D moulding.”

The proportions of these homes lend themselves to pared-back decor and considered reconfigurations. “I enjoy their high ceilings, excellent square rooms and balanced layouts,” says VSP Interiors’ Henriette von Stockhausen. “These buildings are especially suitable for growing families as many contain four bedrooms on the first floor. Several interiors still have intact detailing like panelling, ornate fireplaces and plaster corning too, together with wooden floors and even, on occasion, original paint colours.” ▶

ABOVE LEFT This Georgian country home is defined by its pared-back and perfectly symmetrical facade.

FAR LEFT A classic, tall Grade II listed Georgian townhouse, renovated by architecture firm Squire & Partners.

MAIN IMAGE The architectural detailing has been restored in this townhouse renovation, overseen by interior designer Nicola Harding. Antique and bespoke pieces complement the spirit of the building.

TRADITION REVISITED

The intuitive layout of Georgian homes makes them relatively simple to update for modern living. “Their symmetry makes them a joy to design around, particularly as they are often laid out with a central staircase,” says interior designer Pia Pelkonen. “It’s always worth trying to preserve and enhance any period features - coving, skirting, ceiling roses, fireplaces, internal doors, original tiling, and even hardware are all details that enhance the character of a period home, so they are worth elevating.”

There are, of course, drawbacks when it comes to renovating a property from this period, whether that means navigating a listed status and seeking advice from a qualified heritage consultant at an early stage, or having to rethink the position of key rooms. “These homes often feature dormer windows and pitched ceilings so extending upwards can mean limited ceiling height,” says Pelkonen. Extending outwards tends to be a better option and if the property is listed or in a conservation area it will probably be expected that an extension is sympathetic to the original style of the house. In cases like these, orangery-inspired extensions are popular additions to living or dining spaces. “However, if there are no restrictions,” adds Pelkonen, “there is something quite elegant about creating a sleek and minimal contemporary extension, such as a simple glass cube, in pleasing contrast to the original architecture.”

Kitchens are often a key room to rework. Many of them were sited towards the rear of these properties, accessed via long servants’ corridors, reflecting their purpose as out-of-sight hard-working rooms. “These days, we often relocate them or add a new space for a larger kitchen,” says von Stockhausen.

Bathrooms are another key consideration, as modern requirements often demand more than one. “Rather than dividing a beautifully drawn room to create a slightly unsatisfactory, meagre bathroom, I’d always suggest sacrificing a bedroom to make a generous bathroom for the family,” suggests interior designer Max Rollitt. “I’m also finding that though it has been fashionable to open up spaces and knock through walls in recent years, reinstating traditional partition doors and building walls instead can be a useful exercise.” ▶

ABOVE RIGHT In this scheme by VSP Interiors, antique pieces, including a rich tapestry and rug, lend a nod to the heritage of the building.

RIGHT The corning and panelled doors have been elevated with a restrained colour palette in this Georgian country home by Sims Hilditch.



LEFT Lofty archways like this inject a graceful feel. This scheme, by Alice Leigh, features a softly contemporary built-in banquette, proving how adaptable to modern life Georgian homes can be.

ABOVE Interior designer Henry Prideaux’s understated approach to this sitting room allows the bones of the space, including flooring, sash windows and fire surround, to sing.

BELOW The symmetrical furniture and accessory arrangements complement the balanced interior architecture of this room by Sims Hilditch.

