

A scenic view of the Welsh countryside. In the foreground, a large, ornate stone urn sits on a wooden base, partially obscured by tall grass. The background features rolling green hills, a line of trees, and a clear blue sky with some clouds. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

A Tale From Wales

Despite a vibrant
personal and
professional life in
London, interior
designer Penny
Morrison and her
husband feel most at
home in the Welsh
countryside



INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Penny Morrison*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Miguel Flores-Vianna*
WRITTEN BY *David Masello*







OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS of houses we meet are just as important as those we have of people. When the interior and furnishings designer Penny Morrison and her husband, the noted art dealer, Guy Morrison, first walked into “a complete wreck” of a 1790 house in Wales, she discovered something she had always wanted in a home.

“I could see right through it from the moment we walked inside,” she says. I loved the house immediately, just for that—the ability to look from the front door out through the back to the fields, meadows, and views of the distant Black Mountains. I’ve been told it’s bad feng shui to be able to see from the front to the back of a house.” But for the Morrises and their now-grown son, she insists it’s been nothing but good luck and happiness since 1990, when they moved in after a two-year-long renovation.

Morrison points out, too, that this dynamic of transparency is more typical of traditional, narrower Scottish lodges, though their house is also typically country-Welsh in its architecture. The dwelling is a well-proportioned Regency Style residence, with thick white plastered walls, slightly pitched roof, a façade punctuated with three evenly spaced windows on two levels, and an entrance announced by a pediment and columns.

While Morrison was captivated by the bucolic views and setting that the 150-acre property embraced, she was not taken with the physical state of the house. “The structure hadn’t been touched since 1910 and everything needed to be redone—new roof, new windows, wiring, plumbing. We were only the third family who had lived there since the house was built.” It was rumored that the now twelve-bedroom house (it originally had sixteen bedrooms, prior to Morrison’s renovation) had been constructed by Baskerville miners for a prosperous family. “Then there’s talk of the whole *Hound of the Baskervilles* connection to the house,” she adds, referencing the famous Sherlock

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Holmes story, “as well as something far more poignant and ironic.” The house had once been destined for one of the sons of the family, but he had perished in the Boer War. The foundations for what would have been his separate home on the property are still visible—substantial enough, in fact, to be featured in a book about the lost architecture of Wales. “I was born and brought up in South Africa, where the Boer War took place, says Morrison, “and I find it both comforting and ironic that I’m now living here.”

Opening pages: Viewable from Penny Morrison’s Regency-era home, the distant Black Mountains mark the border between Wales and England. Previous pages: The drawing room uses Farrow & Ball’s Setting Plaster and features a George Smith sofa with fabric by Jean Muro. The pair of antique gilt French chairs is upholstered with a Claremont fabric. Left: A corner of the drawing room is furnished with a custom chair upholstered in a Claremont fabric and lamp from Geoffrey Bennison with a shade by Penny Morrison.





Left: The entrance hall is lit with two bronze lamps, fitted with Indian cotton shades designed by Penny Morrison. The Moroccan rug is vintage. Top and left: For the library, Penny Morrison chose her Arabella pattern for the draperies. The brass lamps are her design, as is the blue-stripe fabric on the chair. The room color is Farrow & Ball's Arsenic.

Shelves in the home's breakfast room are filled with colorful English jugs collected over the years from country antique shops. A light blue hue from Farrow & Ball serves as the perfect backdrop for the varied—and ever-growing—collection. The custom chairs by Penny Morrison are upholstered with her Gobi blue printed linen. The frame of the mirror, purchased at auction, is painted to match the walls.





This page: In the main bedroom, the canopy is by Manny Hopkins, as is the headboard, upholstered in fabric from Lelievre. Bedding is Matouk. Below: Another bedroom features Penny Morrison's Pasha. Right: The master bath includes a Kalista tub and wallpaper by Sarah Vanrenen.





“A home can become *too comfortable*
sometimes. An ongoing schedule of
freshening up is a good thing to do.”
—Penny Morrison

Morrison and her husband are decidedly elegant and cultured. Her interior design work, coupled with her work as cofounder of Irving & Morrison, the furnishings and accessories company she established with Carolina Irving, along with her own namesake line of fabrics, has made her among the most coveted and sought-after designers in Britain and well beyond. Yet, even though she and her husband maintain a fashionable London home, she admits that the Wales property is “what I consider home.” She spends half the week in London, and the other half in Wales.

“People are always asking, ‘What do you do there—it’s so remote?’ But I’m so busy here all the time. Everything in the country takes longer because it’s all spread out. We go for walks in the woods. There are amazing bluebells that bloom. All four seasons are beautiful with their own activities. In the summers, we’re outdoors dining in the garden. In the winters, it’s roaring fires in the library.”

A series of outlying buildings on the property house Morrison’s fabrics business, as well as serving as warehouses for her textiles and furnishings. All of the cushions and ottomans she makes under the Irving & Morrison brand are cut and measured in a facility on the property. “We’re surrounded by people, in that there are people working here, but, really, it’s incredibly quiet and unspoiled. We love that we’re six miles from the nearest villages.”

While she admits that her London home is far more formal and tailored, she feels that she can be more creative as an interior designer and designer of fabrics in the country than she can be in the city. “In London, I’m rushing all the time. Here I get bursts of creativity. I hate cooking in my small London kitchen, but here I can be creative, too, in the kitchen, thinking up new recipes. It’s a happy space, one of many in this home.”

Morrison has an uncanny ability to mix seemingly

competing patterns and fabrics, shapes and styles in her rooms and, yet, create rooms that are cohesive and defined. “What I like about decorating a country house is that it should never look decorated. It should look old and genteel, casually put together with a mix of obscure objects you love. In this house, there’s much more cluttering, more accumulation, and, as a result, everything’s much cozier.”

Although the house is vast, Morrison says that she and her husband (their son Ted, 26, is in London) “live totally” in the library and the kitchen, which includes an inviting breakfast room. The library, filled with books in white floor-to-ceiling cases, has views, too, out to the property. The kitchen, with an old-fashioned “cooker” includes a spacious pantry and larder, as well as red terracotta tiles on the floor. “Most kitchens these days are wood and marble tiles,” she says, “but these original tiles are so in keeping with the feel of the room and the house. Plus, they’re a pretty color.”

Despite the casual assemblage of furnishings and fabrics that define the many rooms of the home, Morrison undertakes a thorough freshening every two years. “We undertake a redo to keep the rooms up to date. Some of the old bathrooms, for instance, may look charming, but they can look too old. And as my fabric line continues to evolve, I’ve done up some of the bedrooms in those.” Given the number of bedrooms in the home, though, Morrison admits to sometimes not going into some of them for six months at a time. “Who cares if the house is too big for us? There’s a very cozy feel about this house. Even if I’m here alone, I never feel alone.” ■

Right: Although Penny Morrison and her husband have lived in their Welsh house for twenty-six years, she never tires of walks in the woods with her dogs. “As a designer, I’m more creative here than I am when I’m in London.”

