



Homes & more

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Nordic DNA

A Highland retreat realises its beautiful potential





Designer extends summer's lease



Achnahatnich House has seen the light without losing its DNA thanks to the ingenious Fanny Ward

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The latest addition to Hidden Highland Retreats is possibly its most secret one yet; even the locals don't know it's there.

Tucked away behind a gate at the end of a very long road, Achnahatnich House, which is part of the Rothiemurchus Estate, is the perfect lesson in seclusion. Whilst it was built in 1900 as the main house for tenant farmers on Achnahatnich Farm, it has a long history as a holiday home. In the Forties the tenant farmer used to rent it out to

holidaymakers in the summer, which was quite common in those days if you had a house of that size.

The same reasons that made the house popular then are also making it popular now as, after a sympathetic renovation, it is again available to visitors seeking an escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

However, tastes and requirements have changed somewhat since 1946 and when the owners of the estate, the Grant family, decided to renovate the farm house, they brought in London-based stylist and interior designer, Fanny Ward to bring Achnahatnich into the 21st century.

Having worked her magic with several

Above: the house on the left secluded from the farm buildings. Opposite, clockwise from top left: yellow furniture in the snug; the radiant hallway; the sitting room; the kitchen; through the dining area window; as seen from surrounding hills



other properties on the estate in recent years, Fanny was delighted to take on the project.

“The Collie family had lived there for such a long time and the house was very loved, very homely but very dark,” Fanny explains. “And, whilst many of the rooms were painted yellow, it had no light. My first challenge was to get in as much light as possible.

“I reconfigured partitions to create one large kitchen-snug, but I realised we still needed more light and I fitted an interior window between the kitchen and hallway. It’s something you see in a lot of Georgian properties – borrowed light. I love the effect it creates, looking through into other rooms, it makes the space much more interesting. I also used lots of mirrors to bounce the light around, and white gloss. A good quality gloss paint really helps reflect the light.”

Formerly a four-bed property, Fanny reconfigured the space into three bedrooms creating an en-suite shower room for the ground floor bedroom, and upstairs, changing bedroom number four into a glamorous en-suite with French doors and a bath with a view.

Although the layout now worked, the property was still missing something. “It needed bones, and that’s why I panelled large areas of it; that brought in this Scandi feeling,” says Fanny. “The house already had a very Scandi feel about it which I think is due to the Scottish light, the birch trees and the lichen – it’s very Norwegian. The panelling just accentuates that ambience. It makes the house more interesting, more lifelike and gives it texture. With the light that now floods in, the panelling throws off different shadows all the way down the entrance hall. I think it’s my favourite vista from the snug right through to the sitting room; the way the light comes in via the stairwell.”

Shutters also add to the Scandi vibe and again have been used liberally. “I love a shutter and have used them where I can,



Clockwise from above: the bathroom; through a bedroom door; a chandelier over the staircase; one of the three bedrooms; a cosy corner to curl up with a book

although downstairs, I’ve used curtains in the sitting room as it’s cosier. I’ve also gone for wallpaper in the sitting room rather than panelling, again for cosiness although with underfloor heating and the wood-burner, guests will always be toasty.”

When it comes to comfort, Fanny has ensured that guests will have no complaints with handmade beds, luxurious linens, paint by the Little Greene Paint Company and fabrics from William Yeoward but it’s the little details that Fanny thinks are the most important. “Houses have to have energy and the details are important otherwise it’s bland. I think every detail matters. I’ve added a few old pieces that have come from properties around the estate, to add character as well. Also, if everything is too perfect, I don’t think it feels comfortable and it’s difficult to relax. And whilst I don’t carry swatches of material with me, I do carry colour in my head. When I spotted these yellow dining chairs, I thought they created a little bit of a memory of the people who

lived here. I think that yellow was in the DNA of the house.”

This ties in with what Hidden Highland Retreats are all about. As well as providing luxury holiday accommodation on the estate, their aim is to let guests experience the interdependency of the people, the land and the wildlife and become part of it if they so choose.

It would be easy to stay at Achnahatnich, enjoy its seclusion and never see another soul, but you’d be mad not to avail yourself of the many activities that the estate offers, including going out with the estate’s biodiversity manager and taking part in the workings of the estate. The history of the people of Rothiemurchus, the land and the animals are part of Achnahatnich’s DNA, just like yellow. For guests it’s a unique opportunity to stay here and be part of that.

Achnahatnich House is available to let through Hidden Highland Retreats, www.hiddenhighlandretreats.com

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