

AS SEEN IN

PERIOD LIVING

TRADITIONAL HOMES, INTERIORS, GARDENS, ANTIQUES & RENOVATION



READERS' HOMES

SPIRIT OF CELEBRATION

Jan-Eric and Jennifer Österlund have embraced rural family life in this magnificent 14th century manor, which comes into its own at Christmas

FEATURE CELIA RUFY PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL RYAN-GOFF



48 PERIOD LIVING DECEMBER 2011



OPPOSITE TOP The medieval manor is unusual in having never been extended OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT This fine oak door dates from the 1500s and is thought to be the work of William Sherman when the manor was owned by his family. Jan-Eric and Jennifer Österlund with Eric Gregory and Mikee. The ottoman was made by clockhouse-furniture.co.uk and covered in Brocatello by Zoffany THIS PAGE The fireplace in the great hall was installed by William Sherman; his initials and those of his wife are carved as part of the frame. The Finnish tapestry above depicts the story of St. Ursula in the city of Rubens

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READERS' HOMES

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It's hard to imagine a more traditional setting for Christmas festivities than a 14th century manor house in the heart of the English countryside. One of the joys of living in an ancient home is imbibing the spirit of celebrations past, here spanning more than 600 years. This home in rural Devon is a typical medieval hall house, and one of the best preserved still being privately occupied by a family. In its Tudor past it was among the estates of the Duke of Suffolk, and King Henry VIII is believed to have spent the night here in 1497.

Fast forward some 500 years and Jan-Eric Österlund, who comes from Sweden, bought the manor in 2000 when he was looking for a country retreat beyond the capital commuter belt but not so far from his base in London to make the journey an inconvenience. 'I'm very English in loving walks,' he observes, 'and Devon has a splendid landscape for a walker. And as I'm also a keen sailor, I appreciate being so close to the sea.'

OPPOSITE Four men were needed to carry the impressive tree into the great hall and a wooden frame was specially built to support it safely. The door on the left beyond the tree leads into the library

KEY FACTS
Location Devon
Period Grade II listed manor house built in 1380; it has never been extended and is a typical medieval hall house
Owners Jennifer Österlund and her husband Jan-Eric, who invests in private equity, live with their son Eric Gregory and Jennifer's niece, Mikee. They have two dogs: Nalle, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, and a Newfoundland called Chucky



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'The house has had alterations – windows and fireplaces were changed in Tudor times, and the plaster frieze in the great hall is Jacobean'

The charm of this manor house particularly resonates with Jan-Eric because it was built before important properties became overblown in scale. 'It's incredible that this house has never been extended since it was built in 1380,' he says. 'It has seen a few alterations over the centuries, however: some of the windows and fireplaces were changed in Tudor times. And the plaster frieze in the great hall is Jacobean, during the period when the Sherburns, who were a family of wool merchants, owned the house.'

With the exception of the great hall, all the rooms in the house are of comfortable domestic size. 'My architect did warn me that I would only be able to use the great hall in summer,' explains Jan-Eric, 'because it would be impossible to heat it adequately in winter.' His pragmatic remedy, adopted wherever in the house it has been possible given its Grade I listing, was to install underfloor heating. And it has

worked splendidly; now the great hall can be used all year round, and it comes into its own at Christmas when its lofty 30ft ceiling height accommodates a magnificent 20ft tree.

As well as installing the heating, there were other important remedial works that Jan-Eric attended to in the first three years. He replaced cement-based exterior render using lime products, damp-proof courses were improved, wiring was renewed, and the interior walls were replastered and repainted.

To help him choose colours and furnishings in keeping with the period of the manor, Jan-Eric contacted interior designer Serena Scarright. They worked together on an idea to link the main living areas in a related palette of terracotta and gold with accents of colour specific to each room.

Serena also suggested that Jan-Eric might find antiques at comparable prices to the best modern

ABOVE The stonefield leather sofa in the library is from George Smith; the chair covered in honest fabric is from www.honestfabric.co.uk

OPPOSITE TOP The ornate iron gates are flanked by stone finials

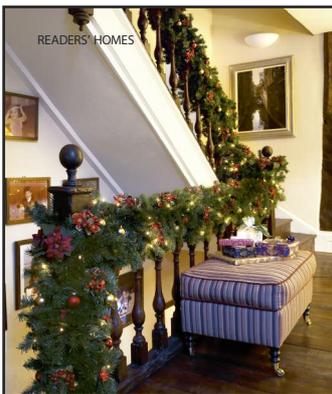
OPPOSITE With walls painted in Venetian Red by Zoffany, the formal dining room has an ornate atmosphere



READERS' HOMES

THE MANOR THROUGH THE AGES
Life in the manor in the early years revolved around the great hall. The family and their retainers would eat there and the retainers slept there as well. The family would have been afforded some privacy in its use of the parlour (now the library) and the private rooms above (known as the solar). There was a chapel, connected by the Bishop of Exeter in 1381, that is now children's and guest accommodation, and a kitchen in what is now the dining room. The drawing room was a pantry and the present kitchen was beneath the chapel.

'What has happened over the centuries,' Jan-Eric explains, 'is that animals were moved out to a stable block alongside, and successive families expanded their living space into storage rooms and the areas the animals vacated. For instance, our breakfast room and flower room would have been stabling. We in turn are continuing the process by now converting the stables next to the house to living accommodation.'



READERS' HOMES

reproductions, so they attended auctions together and she introduced him to warehouses and specialist shops for furniture and tapestries.

A couple of years later, when Jan-Eric married Jennifer in 2005, he was still using his London house as a main base. However, Jennifer much preferred living in Devon so they sold the city property and are now permanently settled in the manor with their son Eric Gregory, and Jennifer's niece Mieke.

'The house adapts very easily to exuberant family life.' 'It's so relaxed here,' says Jennifer. 'And we don't believe in adult-only areas,' Jan-Eric adds. 'We live in the whole house all of the time. In the great hall, the children love to jump from the knole sofa to the ottoman and throw cushions. We've adopted the same all-inclusive principle that prevailed in early

LEFT This oak stairway was added in the 17th century and replaced the very steep stairs that also served the minstrel's gallery

BELOW Jennifer chose the fabric to Margaret Bourke-White in a blue and gold colourway by Watts of Westminster to furnish the bedcover and the headboard of the bed in the guest room

OPPOSITE The four poster bed in the main bedroom is a Stuart interiors bed frame around a modern shell; the cream coloured hangings are silk from Turnbull & Gion



DESIGNER SERENA SCARRIGHT SHARES A DECORATING TIP
'Windows can be treated differently in a country house, especially when you're not overlooked. Here, all bedrooms have an elevated outlook so you can allow curtains to act as the frame, considering the view as you would a picture. Curtains can be luxurious, in a fabric such as silk, as long as they are subtle; a bold pattern in this context would be a distraction from the view.'

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houses, which didn't have the upstairs and downstairs mentality of the Victorian era: this is a family home and everyone who lives here or visits those living here is a part of the family.'

This is never more apparent than at Christmas, when Jennifer decorates the house in her favourite combination of red, green and gold. 'It takes me two weeks', she reveals, 'because I like to have decorations in every room, including those occupied by our guests.' Among the many visitors are Jan-Eric's four children from his first marriage who all come to stay with their partners.

'The Swedish tradition is to have a big meal on Christmas Eve,' he explains, 'when we serve lots of herring, salmon and ham, and light candles everywhere. And then on Christmas Day we become an English family, and enjoy a traditional roast goose or turkey and Christmas pudding.'

How ever Jennifer and Jan-Eric choose to celebrate, this grand old house can accommodate all the fun of the festive season and the whole Osterlund clan can feel a very special part of its continuing history. —

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT Jennifer aims to decorate every room in the house for Christmas — this reindeer ornament in her bathroom is Swedish. The linens on the floor and walls are from Original Style

LEFT The path leads to spacious gardens and parkland

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