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Lady Henrietta Spencer-Churchill



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By Nancy Robinson

St. Louis has an unusually large inventory of beautiful, architecturally significant homes in wonderful old neighborhoods—a fact that distinguishes it from many other major American cities and makes a lasting impression on visitors. We recently discussed the subject of preserving, modernizing and furnishing these homes with interior designer Lady Henrietta Spencer-Churchill, whose latest book, *The Life of the House: How Rooms Evolve*, debuts this fall.

LN: Many grand homes in St. Louis are at risk for a variety of reasons, most notably the large sums required to maintain them. What is your experience in this regard?

HSC: Most of the houses I have visited are very beautiful, both from architectural and decoration standpoints. They often have beautiful furniture and artifacts, which have been made or bought for the house and handed down for generations. Some may

feel tired with frayed and faded curtains and shabby paintwork, but this is all part of the English understated elegance. You are right in saying that some families now cannot afford the upkeep of the properties. Even worse, however, is when some new money comes along and rips out all the character of the house and makes it feel like a five-star hotel!

LN: What are the most common mistakes people make when creating the interior of a large, expensive home?

HSC: Making the rooms too large, thus un-inviting, and having too many rooms which have the same function (i.e. for TV-watching).

LN: What do you make of 'McMansions,' the architectural invention designed to impress on the outside by virtue of large scale and multiple elevations?

HSC: I think many newly built American homes can be and are very stylish. I have seen a lot of these, especially in the South around Atlanta and Dallas. But some of the pitfalls are trying to encompass too many styles within one building (i.e. a bit of Gothic, a bit of Tudor, a bit of French, etc.), which looks mismatched.

LN: Do you think it is a mistake to use modern furnishings in an older, classically styled architectural setting?

HSC: Personally, I prefer to use antiques and furnishings suitable for the period, but this is not always possible or practical. Certainly you can use contemporary art and the odd piece of modern furniture, but I think houses benefit from being authentically furnished.

LN: What is your favorite period style?

HSC: Georgian is my favorite and my expertise, having been brought up in a Georgian house and surrounded by many others. The scale and proportions are great and can be applied to large and small rooms. I like large windows and lots of light. Georgian architectural details are very elegant, and there is a plethora of choice. Equally, I love Georgian furniture and my favorite periods are Early Georgian, Palladian and late Georgian Regency. I am not such a fan of Neo Classical as it is a little too fussy and delicate.

LN: Any tips on how to furnish in the tradition of a stately home that will stand the test of time?

HSC: I don't think stately homes are necessarily the best example of good taste or timeless interiors. Often they are laid out as museums or showpieces and are open to the public so they don't reflect the true lifestyle of that period. To start from scratch today to furnish an important country house, you would need a large budget in order to acquire the furniture and objects that are suitable—that is, if you can find them. Newly built houses can be furnished with good, quality reproductions, which look very good and I use a lot in my work. But if possible, try and mix reproductions with antiques, which will have the patina. Most important, buy quality products that will hold their value and last and age gracefully.



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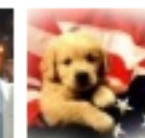
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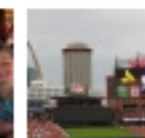
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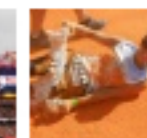
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