



Good for the sole

Beyond the brochure

This designer's home is so relaxed, you can walk on her white floors wearing shoes

Scene 1: interior, day. Title music fades. Carson, the butler, opens the front door of Downton Abbey: "Good morning, Lady Violet. Lord Grantham is expecting you — you will find him chillaxing in the media room. May I assist you in removing your shoes before you go through?"

Lady Violet: "You what? Is the ancient seat of the Granthams now one of those Hindoo mosques?"

Carson: "Her ladyship has decided it will reduce the cleaning bills if everyone stops treading mud and dirt from the heavily entailed estate into the house." DRAMATIC PAUSE. "Downton Abbey is now a shoe-free zone."

Lady Violet rolls her eyes and clutches her pearls: "Oeuargh! I think I'm turning Japanese!"

Well, why not? It's common practice everywhere from eastern Europe to Asia: ambulance crews in Japan will pause at the doorway to remove their footwear before rushing inside to administer life-saving treatment. Now it seems more of us are overcoming our traditional British reserve and demanding that friends, family and the washing-machine repair man take their shoes off before they cross the threshold.

I recently adopted the practice myself, having spent a fortune on smart new flooring. I've got a basket of Ikea slippers by the front door — the more stylish version is Moroccan leather slippers from the souks of Marrakesh, but *chez moi* it's Sweden's finest, via Croydon. So far everyone has been obliging, with a surprising number saying that they always do it at home themselves. I think it could become one of those things, like not smoking indoors or scooping your dog's poop, that becomes the general rule, with transgressors increasingly courting serious disapproval (if not actual legal proceedings — yet).

I was already bending down to unlace my boots when Camilla Johnson opened her front door to me: I'd seen the estate agent's pictures, and her semi-detached house in southwest London looked so pale and spotless, I assumed she'd be all over the shoes thing. But that white flooring throughout the ground floor is easily mopped stone, so she was chilled: keep 'em on was the message.

Camilla, who is an interior designer (camillajohnson.com), is adamant that the four-bedroom end-of-terrace house is "a home, welcoming and lived in", for her partner, Julian Banks, a

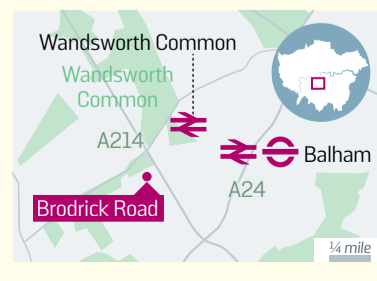


Walk this way There are no slippers by the door in this tasteful house in southwest London's Nappy Valley



Brodrick Road, London SW17 £2.7m

What you get A four-bedroom house — five if you count the office in the basement — with a 90ft garden
Who to call Carter Jonas; 020 8767 7711, carterjonas.co.uk



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financial printer, and their children. But she is something of a perfectionist in matters domestic. So, when she did a big upgrade a couple of years ago (total cost: a wallet-draining £400,000), she got the builders to move the fireplace in the front room by a foot or so to make sure the room was still symmetrical after they'd extended the kitchen into the long London-terrace sitting room.

The ground floor of the property for which she paid £850,000 in 2001 now has the pleasingly symmetrical posh sitting room and a big kitchen-dining-living area, with french doors to the 90ft garden. It's seriously smart, what with the stone floors offering the caress of underfloor heating and the Harvey Jones kitchen, which has super-smooth silestone work surfaces and fancy carpentry. Everything is painted in the palest mossy-grey hues of Little Greene's Portland Stone. "The whole house is different shades of it," Camilla says. "There's not one piece of white paintwork in this house. I hate white."

The couple also dug out a basement, creating a deluxe utility room, a wine store, a shower room and the study, which could easily be used as a fifth bedroom. All the bedrooms have been reconfigured to accommodate ensembles, and everything is in what the late, great Kenny Everett would doubtless have said was "the best possible taste" and the agents would call "immaculately presented throughout". With bespoke sofas, curtain fabrics so opulent they're practically three-dimensional, and co-ordinated cushion covers, this house reveals a strong sense of its creator's style and sensibility. Though we both wondered who could find the astounding asking price — it's what the agents said it was worth, she insists — even for one of the most fashionable streets in southwest London's famous Nappy Valley.

Camilla recently started decorating show homes for developers. Quite different to doing real people's houses, she confides. She also gives me a handy tip: people often want to buy the show home with all its furniture, which can be a good deal (her show-home sofas are handmade), but you should never, ever buy the beds. Cheap rubbish, apparently.

ASK THE EXPERTS

The solicitor

I live in an area with a blanket tree preservation order (TPO). As a result of the storm just before Christmas, a number of trees came down in my garden. I have commissioned a specialist to advise on what work needs to be done. If any of the trees cause damage to my neighbours' property or injure anyone, would I be liable?

TY, by email

You have a duty to ensure that trees on your land do not cause injury or damage to other property where you know or ought to know such injury or damage is likely to occur. This might include ensuring that large trees are pruned so they do not cause damage to foundations, or taking steps to ensure that damaged branches do not fall onto the land of others. Your duty is to do what is reasonable in your circumstances. Taking the advice of a tree specialist, then acting on their recommendations within a reasonable time, ought to discharge your duty. Unless carrying out work on a tree covered by a TPO is urgently necessary, you must get the local authority's consent first. If you do proceed without consent, make sure you have evidence (photos and, ideally, a written report from your tree specialist) that the tree was dangerous, and notify the council as soon as possible.

Ed Cracknell is a solicitor at Russell-Cooke LLP; russell-cooke.co.uk

The builder

We recently had a single-glazed sash bay window refurbished and repainted. The cold weather is causing terrible condensation, with water pooling on the sills. We live in a Victorian maisonette in a conservation area, and have been refused planning permission to fit double glazing. What can we do?

AD, by email

Condensation is caused by too little ventilation, too much moisture and not enough heat. You could fit secondary glazing to the inside of the window, as this does not require planning permission and will improve sound and heat insulation. It is better if the existing window is not sealed up or fitted with draught excluders, as this can create a condensation trap in the cavity between the windows. If it has been sealed, you should fit a trickle vent to the secondary glazing, as you can then control ventilation and prevent condensation. To reduce the moisture in the air, keep bathroom doors closed, use the extractor fan and keep the kitchen door closed when you cook.

Hugh Best-Shaw is a director of DCM Residential; dcmresidential.co.uk



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