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London's secret stately: one of Britain's grandest homes has been sitting quietly in zone 3 for 233 years

After a lavish restoration, Templeton House has new owners and a fresh look, says Hugh Graham



Templeton House

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include Kenwood House, Eltham Palace and Ham House. But one of Britain's grandest stately homes has been sitting quietly in zone 3 for 233 years, and most Londoners don't even know it's there.



Laps of luxury: sleek marble wetrooms

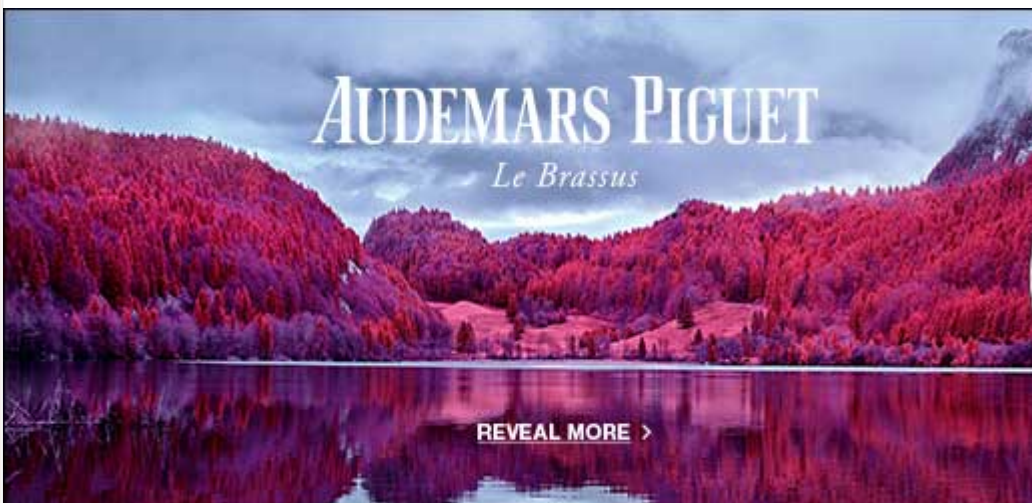
Set in three acres in Roehampton, on the edge of Richmond Park, Templeton House is 35,000 sq ft of Georgian splendour. From 1945 to 2012, it was a student halls of residence, and before that it served as a hospital in the First and Second World Wars.

But after a nine-year restoration to end all restorations, it's been returned to a family home for the first time since the 1920s, and the whole estate, from the interiors to the grounds, has been lavishly recreated, updated, buffed, sheened and polished — the project cost tens of millions. Its newfound grandeur reflects an illustrious past: the original owner, Lady Templeton, who built it in 1786, designed patterns for Wedgwood; later residents included Lady Cornelia Spencer-Churchill. Her nephew Winston Churchill stayed here for a year in 1919, and lived with his cousin Freddie Guest, whose son, Winston, later married the American socialite CZ Guest and named their Long Island estate Templeton.



“We’re filling some very big shoes of people who have lived here, and we feel very humble,” says Laura Rich-Jones, the new owner, along with her husband, David, 58, with whom she runs Richstone Properties, a luxury property developer in southwest London.

They live here with their three children, aged 11, 17 and 20, and four dogs, having sold their previous home, a six-bedroom 1920s house near Richmond Park, to live in Templeton House, which they bought in 2012 from the Froebel Institute. They fought off other developers who planned to turn it into flats or a hotel. “We walked past it for years and peered through the gates,” Laura says. “It’s London’s best-kept secret. To restore it is a dream come true.”



were cubicles in the loos). They spent the first few years planning, unearthing historical floorplans and working with English Heritage.



Door locks were recreated from 18th-century models and the verandah copied from one on Pall Mall

No expense was spared: £1m was spent on joinery; 135 windows were created with glass flown in from Japan; 1,100 pieces of ironmongery were crafted, right down to recreating 18th-century door locks. They bought 160 trees from Holland and Germany, and hired Todd Langstaffe-Gowan, adviser to Royal Historic Palaces, to landscape the grounds. Wedgwood was enlisted to recreate original mouldings meticulously; 30 antique chandeliers were rewired; Joa Studholme, of Farrow & Ball, supervised the paint colours, a soft palette of shadow whites, lime whites and off whites.



Mouldings were made by Wedgwood — for whom the original owner designed patterns

“We found craftsmen we didn’t know existed,” Laura says. Each brick was cleaned, repointed and hand-tinted over three years; a woodworker was flown in from Bali for three weeks to hand-turn the newell post; a specialist took 11 months to age a glass table just so; mirrors were regilded, but not too brightly. A new Doric portico was carved out of Portland limestone, marble was handpicked from Italian quarries and palazzos were raided for urns, plinths and columns. The 400-year-old oak floor, in a Versailles pattern, was brought over from Italy; a 300-year-old fireplace came from France. It took two years to furnish, from the Louis-something chairs to the Gustavian benches. “We’d discuss every curtain for hours,” David says.



The 41 bedsits have morphed into eight lavish bedroom suites

The 27 bedsits have morphed into eight lavish bedroom suites (from 600 sq ft to 1,000 sq ft each). It could be a National Trust home, until you walk into the sleek marble wetrooms: it's Brideshead for the boutique-hotel generation. Indeed, there are no draughts in this stately: those new windows are made with Pilkington Spacia, 6.5mm thick single glazing that gives the same thermal performance as double glazing. The walls are insulated with sheep's wool and there's even underfloor heating. The Roman spa, built under the garden, is like a bathhouse from *Gladiator*, its 25-metre swimming pool and bath flanked by columns, its steam room clad in tadelakt.



No expense was spared: 135 windows were created with glass flown in from Japan

It's all so exquisite, you're almost afraid to drink a cup of tea; it's hard to envision the rough and tumble of family life. The house is so big, they have a WhatsApp group so they know when dinner is ready. They mostly live in the west wing, away from the fancy rooms, in the kitchen and oak-panelled library, which bears signs of real life. (It has a TV.) Down below, the kids have a purple games room with a jukebox, a pool table and a neon sign that says "Chill". "Our house is very popular with their friends," Laura says.



The revamp includes a Roman spa with a 25-metre pool under the garden

But that’s a good thing. “We don’t want it to be a museum — a building needs to live,” David says. “I want to bring the place back to life, run it like a country estate.” To that end, they have six staff and are restoring nine outbuildings — including stables, so they can ride in Richmond Park. They’re planting vegetable gardens and orchards, and will let some cottages for income. Templeton House is also available to rent — for a week, a month or more — and will come with “Claridge’s levels of service”. They are coy about the cost, or where they will live if they have to vacate — David says they can move to “another property down the road”.

Indeed, they are not comfortable talking figures. “That’s not what we’re about,” David says. “I’m almost embarrassed to say that I live in it. I’m more interested in creating it.

“I don’t give a stuff about big cars and boats. I give a stuff about glazing bars. We’re passionate about property, and doing it right.”

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