

The Sunday Telegraph - 3 April 2011
Stella Magazine Feature





Plot luck

A 19th-century farmhouse that had languished untouched for decades is now the perfect location for a film producer to unwind. By AMANDA HARLING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL

'It was an Alice in Wonderland moment,' says the film producer Gabrielle Tana, recalling the time she first saw her farmhouse in Hudson Valley, New York. 'We drove down the track through a wood and all one could see was creepers hanging off the overhanging branches - it was like a tunnel. Eventually we emerged into the open and there was the house and an old barn. I was captivated.'

The four-bedroom, Federal-style, 19th-century farmhouse hadn't been lived in for decades. 'After the Second World War farming round here became uneconomical and families just abandoned their homes and moved to the city to find work. The place wasn't even connected to the



electrical grid. Initially, I made do with solar power and a generator and, although it was romantic and magical during the summer, after three long winters I gave in and had power installed.' Roads round here are eerily quiet: 'It's a two-and-a-half-hour drive into the city, which keeps the commuters away but for weekends it's not that far.'

Tana, who was born in California and spent her childhood in London, uses the house for holidays and weekends, unless she's taking a break between films: her latest production, *Coriolanus*, directed by and starring Ralph Fiennes, will be released this year. 'For the past couple of years I've been travelling backwards and forwards between New York, Los Angeles, London and Serbia, where

we filmed *Coriolanus*, but this is home,' says Tana, playing with Lola the cat, one of two who have the run of the place when she's away.

Tana made few changes to the house in those first few years. 'I kind of let myself be guided by the place itself. I found the quietness and remoteness of the setting inspiring and I loved the simplicity and refinement of its Federal architecture, so I didn't want to furnish it in rustic style. Nadia Ghaleb, an interior designer and great friend who is based in New York, has a fantastic eye for vintage furniture and objects, and together we bought a lot of things for the house.'

Where possible Tana made a point of retaining the original decorative details, including battered

Main picture: a 19th-century gilded mirror hangs above the wood-burning stove. The two portraits by Yves Oppenheim are of the owner's friend, the photographer David Seidner. Opposite top: the house seen from the grounds. Opposite bottom: the pink bedroom is hung with the India paper by Cole & Son



Clockwise from below: Lola the cat in the hall, which is painted in Blackened by Farrow & Ball; an antique bath and Colefax & Fowler paper in the bathroom; the kitchen table was found at Decorative Living in London; the attic bedroom with a paper by Colefax & Fowler

paintwork and the fragments of old wallpaper, which still clung to the walls in places. 'When I turned the little bedroom next to mine into a bathroom I told the decorators to be really careful not to damage the 1920s powdery-pink wallpaper - they thought I was mad but it's an integral part of the house and I loved it.'

A friend's summer wedding held at the farm some years ago provided the impetus for the next stage of the project. Tana was busy working on *The Duchess* at the time, so she asked the British interior designer Paul Williams to help. He picks up the story. 'The architecture was the starting point for everything - elegant in an understated, quiet sort of way - and it was obvious too that whoever lived here in the past obviously had a thing for wallpaper - even the linen cupboard was lined with it. So it was no surprise that we chose hand-printed archive wallpapers for the three guest rooms. It's that English country house thing - fashions come and go but the best interiors are just timeless. Gaby must have seen dozens of them while trawling through locations for *The Duchess*.'

An artist and friend, Claudia McNulty, was given the task of matching new paintwork to old in the sitting-room and bedrooms. 'Most clients would have wanted the cracked old paintwork rubbed down and repainted, but not Gaby,' says Williams, pointing out two seemingly identical doors in the sitting-room. 'To improve access to the new downstairs bedroom I'd knocked through

'Whoever lived here had a thing for wallpaper - even the linen cupboard was lined with it'



the wall and installed a new doorway next to the old one, which leads to the back stairs. Claudia was asked to match it as closely as possible, but what she's done is amazing - it's impossible to tell which is old and which is new.'

Williams has continued to help with successive stages of the project: converting the barn into a self-contained guest house, sourcing fabrics, planning the furniture layout, mixing treasures from the Tana family home in London with clever finds from local antique shops. Like the brilliant producer that she is, Tana only works with the best, but one thing is for sure - the house is the star. ●

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