

RESCUE

Known for their restoration of historic buildings in Scotland, conservation architects Nick Groves-Raines and Kristin Hannesdottir relished the challenge of saving Lamb's House in Leith, where they now live and work



MISSION

TEXT CHARLOTTE FAIRBAIRN | PHOTOGRAPHS DAVIDE LOVATTI | LOCATIONS EDITOR LIZ ELLIOT



BOTH PAGES The family's living space is on the first floor of the house, where the dining room (opposite) adjoins the sitting room. Here, there is an eighteenth-century Florentine chest with pietra dura panels, which Nick inherited from his great aunt



Like so many ports, Leith has enjoyed high days, heydays and some spells in the doldrums. The same could be said about Lamb's House, which, when it

was built in 1610, was one of the finest merchant's houses in Scotland. It was built by a Hanseatic merchant called Andrew Lamb and has enjoyed similar fortunes to those of its setting. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, it was the grandest house in the Edinburgh port of Leith. But by 1930, it was semi-ruinous and, by the Seventies, had become an old people's day centre leased from an overburdened National Trust for Scotland. Three decades on, the house was in desperate need of attention. Thankfully for its ghosts, things came full circle when, in 2010, following a narrow escape from a property developer, it was bought by the conservation architects Kristin Hannesdottir and Nick Groves-Raines.

Nick came to Scotland from County Down to read architecture in the Sixties – in order to study at a RIBA-registered college, he had to cross the water. 'It was either Liverpool or the College of Art in Edinburgh,' he explains. 'I had a great-aunt in Edinburgh, so there it was.' At that time in Scotland, the demolition of great houses was commonplace. Factors that decided their demise were varied – spiralling maintenance costs, the aftermath of the war, punishing death duties – but the outcome was the same and, if you ask Nick why he became a conservation architect in particular, his answer is unswerving: 'I couldn't bear seeing things being razed to the ground. And I still can't.'

Meanwhile, in 1968, Kristin had left her native Iceland to study the same subject at the University of Edinburgh. 'A few years later, I was in the Weavers' Workshop, a café in the High Street next to John Knox House, and I met Nick.' The two joined forces almost at once, first romantically and then professionally. They have since been instrumental in reinvigorating much of Scotland's architectural heritage. These include: Edinample Castle, Peffermill House and Liberton House for their own use; Fenton Tower and Forter Castle; and great Adam houses including Yester House and Arniston House.

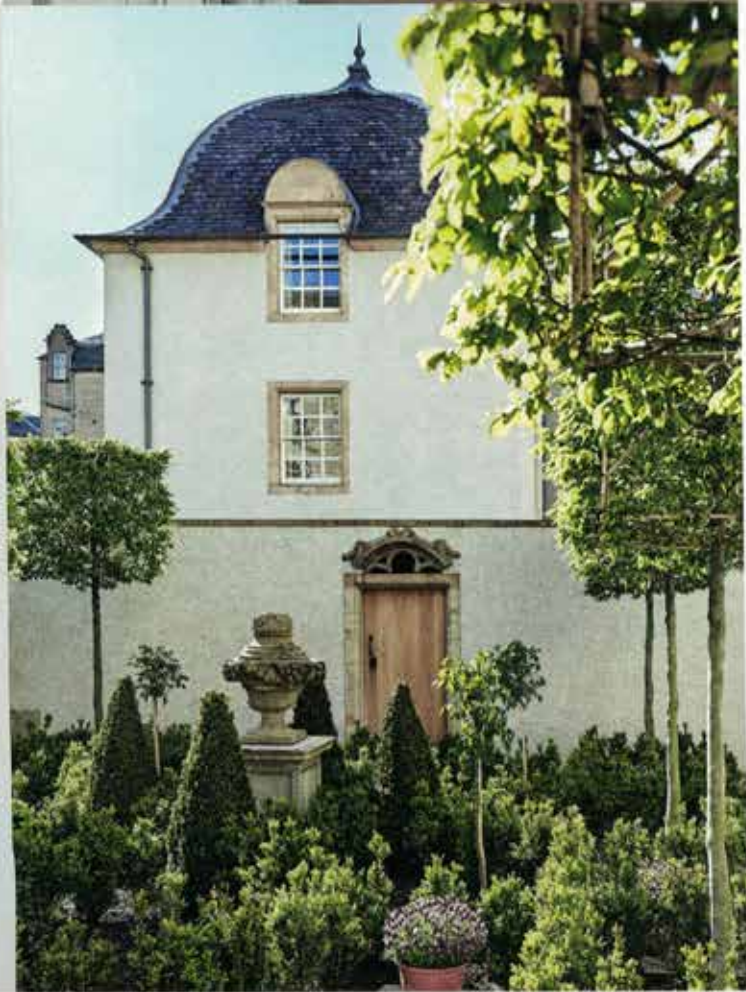
When Nick and Kristin took it on, Lamb's House was a

The layout of the sitting room has been planned to take advantage of its original features, with chairs and sofas arranged around the opened-up fireplace and facing the half-shuttered windows

shadow of its seventeenth-century self, an uneasy whole thanks to its many guises over the years. A lift shaft was stuck onto the back; a public hall extension built in 1960 jutted out of the front; doorways had been raised and the fabric on all five floors was brittle. The Groves-Raines team – which includes Gunnar, their son, Andrew, their son-in-law, and a staff of 22 – set to work. Siberian larch was used for the roof timbers, handmade Hungarian glass for the windows and antique Swedish pantiles for the roof. All were chosen for being as similar to the original materials as possible. The slop sinks on each landing were unblocked, doors were lowered, fireplaces reopened. The trademark half-shuttered windows – echoed in Culross Palace in Fife – were reinstated.

Given the size of the house and the expense of its rejuvenation, Nick and Kristin's first move was to create space for the architectural practice, which they did by building a new extension to the west. The Icelandic Consulate – Kristin is honorary consul – took up residence on the ground floor. With the exception of a small upstairs flat, the family inhabits the rest of the building, with their living space on the first floor and bedrooms on the upper floors. A perfect neo-Georgian annex

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The kitchen. The original staircase. The front of the house. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT A bedroom in the new pavilion. This has an ogee roof. The pavilion's half is painted in Farrow & Ball's Archive colour 'Terre d'Egypte'





complete with ogee roof was finished in 2015 and is used as a holiday let. To add modern to old in the world of conservation may seem controversial, but Nick makes no apology: 'If the extension sits comfortably with the original building, where is the issue?'

This approach - to incorporate the contemporary among the venerable - is apparent throughout Lamb's House. A Florentine chest of drawers here, a Georgian mirror there, a bold oil painting of a silver bowl on an unframed canvas - the latter done by Kristin herself. Pieces of pewter lie on the kitchen table, a former laundry table retrieved from Holyrood. 'We have tried to keep the interiors as uncluttered as possible, a problem given the number of paintings we own,' says Kristin. 'We aim to have only things that are either useful or beautiful - preferably both.'

Some 400 years after Lamb's House was built, Nick says proudly, 'The building has rediscovered its status as one of the finest in Scotland' □

Groves-Raines Architects: 0131-467 7777; grovesraines.com. The Pavilion at Lamb's House is available to rent for up to six guests; visit lambspavilion.com

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Kristin's studio has a barrel-vaulted ceiling in Siberian larch. A reclaimed, re-enamelled bath was added in the bathroom. In an attic room, the box bed is painted in Farrow & Ball's 'India Yellow'. OPPOSITE The main bedroom

