

This page: Bringing the sunshine in, the drawing room was one of the first rooms where the couple added their inimitable artistic stamp. Opposite page: Kate Halfpenny in her kitchen – which was originally the dining room until the pair decided to flip them to create more room for cooking and entertaining



Home is where *the art is...*

For bridal designer KATE HALFPENNY and artist JAMES-LEE DUFFY, uprooting to an old Kentish vicarage has meant – alongside the endless repainting – ample and much-welcome at-home gallery space

WORDS GRACE CAIN

QUESTION: WHAT DO A WEDDING DRESS, a magnet and a rainbow layer cake have in common? Answer: all three are metaphors used by bridal designer Kate Halfpenny and artist James-Lee Duffy to describe their family home, a historic vicarage in Kent's oldest market town, Faversham.

The dessert comparison comes early in our conversation, as Duffy describes how the building has evolved over generations. "The original part of the house is from the 1300s, when it was probably a meeting hall. You can still see it when you look at the foundations of the cellar, the stone archway built into the staircase and parts of our son's bedroom," he explains. Over the centuries, this medieval core has been wrapped by further construction – from Georgian bay windows to, later on, a Victorian extension. "You can clearly see where each of the sections start and finish," says Duffy. "It's like a labyrinth."

It's been just over five years since the family moved here from a mews house in Camden. And although they had always dreamed of living somewhere where their son, Sylvester, could climb trees, they both acknowledge that they might never have taken the city-to-country plunge if they hadn't found this particular house. "It was like a magnet," Duffy remembers, and Halfpenny nods in agreement. "It captured us completely," she says. "When we first saw it – on a not-particularly-nice February day – it was very unloved. It had been empty for about seven >



“When we first pulled into the TURNING-CIRCLE driveway, it was like... WOW, a CHOCOLATE-BOX house”

years, so there was this weird, moody atmosphere. But when we first pulled into the turning-circle driveway, and saw the pretty front door and the huge tulip tree – planted by a Huguenot vicar – it was like...” she searches for the right words, “Wow, a chocolate-box house.”

A chocolate-box house that needed a lot of refurbishment. Fortunately, the duo knew what they were getting into – Duffy grew up dodging exposed nails in work-in-progress houses, and, between them, they’ve renovated four homes. “We’re currently redecorating the bathrooms, which I’ve found difficult because you have to commit to the materials and the layout from the beginning,” says Halfpenny. “Normally I’m very spontaneous.

When I design clothes, I can easily alter the drape of the sleeve or add extra frills, but once you’ve tiled a bathroom, you can’t change your mind. That’s only the case with bathrooms though – the rest of the house is exactly like a dress. You can repin it, restitch it and repaint it as much as you like. I don’t think we’ll ever be finished; it’s an ever-changing canvas.”

This house can (and has) been described in many ways, but maybe ‘canvas’ is most apt given that the pair are (in their words) “addicted” to accumulating art. And both recall the excitement of moving their extensive collection from an apartment where it was “too much” into a house where it was “not enough”.

“I think art has always been a part of our DNA; it’s where Kate and I really bonded,” says Duffy. They proceed to take me on a whistlestop tour of their love-story-slash-gallery-curation. Once upon a time, she collected bell jars and art by Tracey Emin, while he was a self-confessed Kaws (American artist and designer) fanboy. His Kaws figures ended up under her bell jars and the rest – as they say – is history. “Our tastes have definitely evolved since then,” says Duffy. “Mine is less ‘boy bedroom’ and more contemporary, but is still deeply rooted in skate culture. Kate has more of a fine-art approach. But it blends beautifully.”

Today, their collection ranges from gems they find in the local antique market to prints by the artist (and fellow Faversham >

TABLE TOPPERS



Smythson Notes Chelsea notebook £95



Fornasetti Vase Rossetti £1,090



Tom Dixon Bell table lamp £550



Trudon La Cloche bell jar, not including candle £85



Clockwise from left: the art-filled space (complete with ubiquitous Kaws figures) where Kate Halfpenny’s bridal designs take shape; James-Lee Duffy at work on ‘The Old Slugger’ in his studio; bell jars continue to play their part in the couple’s story





resident) Jeff Lowe. Taking pride of place in their son's room is an original by Kaws. "James recognised him at an art show back in 2016 when Sylvester had just been born," Halfpenny tells me, as Duffy looks sheepish. "He grabbed the baby from me, ran up to Kaws and asked him if he would sign something for our son. He drew one of his classic faces. It's one of our real treasures."

As creative director and co-founder of art platform Pavement Licker, Duffy has an extensive database of up-and-coming artists that has also proved advantageous for the couple's personal gallery. "We have some 1960s-style paintings by Fred Coppin, and also some incredible pencil and graphite drawings by Whitstable-based artist Patrick Morales-Lee," he tells me. "Kate and I are always looking at what is new and exciting." She agrees, but goes further: "Every piece also has to tell a story... there has to be an emotion to it. It's the same with James' work – there is such a narrative and sentiment behind what he creates because a lot of it has to do with childhood memories and nostalgia."

As you might expect, there are plenty of Duffy's own pieces throughout the house – some on rotation, but some unquestionably there to stay. "I normally want to keep it all," Halfpenny admits. "The one next to the robot in the back hall isn't even framed, because I took it from James while it was still wet and nailed it straight to the wall. That's not going anywhere."

Happily, Halfpenny and Duffy rarely disagree on matters of art – but this does leave them with another problem. "We're nightmares at fairs and markets, because we encourage each other," Halfpenny laments, her eyes scanning the room. "So now we have too much art." Duffy looks at her and furrows his brow. "Never." □

From top: The dining room in the one-time vicarage, with a painting of Halfpenny by son Sylvester (aged 6) overlooking a series of quirky carved wooden mushrooms on the mantelpiece; Duffy's 'Valentines' drawing perches above some of his prized Kaws figures

The Arcade, Lower Ground Floor; Home, Third Floor; and harrods.com

STATEMENT PIECES



Ginori 1735 Ganymede Palazzo Centauro sculpture with candle 190g, £1,595



De Le Cuona Vienna cushion £242



Laetitia Rouget Claudia candleholder £185

