

Pale walls and a neutral, linen curtain fabric ensure that both the view and the bespoke and colourful pieces of furniture can make a statement

### We LOVE...

How the happy-making tropical mix of colours brings the outside in and feels cheerful no matter how harsh the weather or bleak the landscape is in winter



# A MAXIMALIST dream

Growing up between Ireland and Holland meant the owner of this seaside hideaway in Cork had long dreamed of creating a base in Ireland for her Dutch husband and their young son, where they could spend time together with family and friends

WORDS ALISON GIBB PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS WAKEFIELD

When Dutch-Irish owners Emily and Ger first acquired this property, a 1960s three-bedroom bungalow, overlooking a quiet bay, near West Cork, in 2020, it was almost derelict and a full remodel and reconfiguration was required. They hired an architect, completely gutted the property and the windows, roof, and even walls, were all tackled. The house was a building site for nearly three years, with the pandemic slowing progress down even further. Towards the end of the process Emily and Ger engaged interior designer Sean Symington, to add some heart and soul to the design. Well known for his ability to juxtapose vivid patterns and colours, creating schemes that are dazzling in their

individuality, they found Sean, who is based in Bath in England, through his website. Coincidentally, even though Sean was born and raised in Toronto and now lives in the UK, his mother is first generation Irish and is from a town only a few miles up the road from the property. "My mother, who moved at 19 to Canada was part of the Irish diaspora in search of opportunity and employment," he explains. "There, she met my father and has been living in Canada ever since." Emily and Ger had no idea about Sean's connection to the area when they first enquired through his website, but it turned out that his entire family on his mother's side (uncles, aunts and cousins) are still in the area and that he had spent many summers here on holiday with his mother. "I hold dual citizenship with Ireland and

## HOW TO CREATE A COHESIVE LOOK IN A SMALLER PROPERTY

**1 Ceilings should be white** Try to keep ceilings light for an airy feel, even if you are decorating with strong tones and patterns everywhere else. This will raise the space and make a room feel bigger. In this property we were able to install vaulted ceilings and rooflights in the main rooms which made a huge difference.

**2 Use a 'red thread'** Create a sense of cohesion throughout your home with either a colour that you favour, commonly called a 'red thread', but it might be

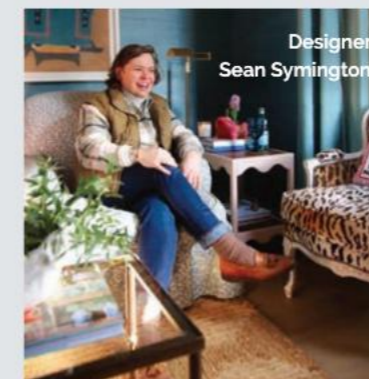
green, black or yellow, or use a design motif that you are drawn to. This could take the form of a wallpaper design, or a fabric that you have fallen in love with.

**3 Make the most of art** Artwork creates natural starting points for an interior scheme. Pull out colours from a favourite painting hung in the room and use them to make unexpected bold colour choices for paint, fabrics and furniture.

**4 Go built-in** Bespoke furniture is practical as well as beautiful. You can

save space by having something made to measure which is useful, as well as design savvy, in a smaller scale property.

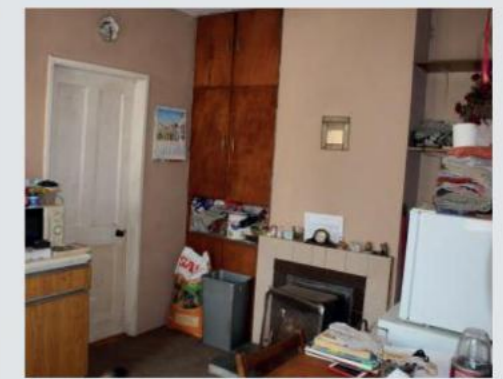
**5 Don't forget flooring** Rugs can give a room a strong identity and are easily replaced if you want to ring the changes. Choose vibrant colours and fun patterns and switch them around for a refresh with the seasons. You might want to use a warmer tone in autumn and winter and change it for something fresher and crisper for spring and summer.



Designer Sean Symington



BEFORE: The house was dated and in need of a complete overhaul





**KITCHEN** Pale walls and cabinetry add to a feeling of light and space. The walls are painted in 'Skimming Stone' and the cabinetry 'Pale Powder' both by Farrow & Ball. The rug is from Penny Morrison, Pennymorrison.com



**SITTING ROOM** With its bold mix of fabrics, textures and colour, there's a maximalist feel to this room which is kept cohesive with accessories as well as neutral walls and flooring. The eye-catching sofa is upholstered in gold velvet by Rose Uniacke, Roseuniacke.com while the cushions are made up in 'Wilde' in Forest Green by Colefax & Fowler, Colefax.com. The small tray is from The Lacquer Company, Thelacquercompany.com

The stools are upholstered in the same fabric as the cushions with an Oberon Bullion Fringe from Samuel & Sons, Samuelandsons.com. The bespoke ottoman is upholstered in 'Umberto' in turquoise by Schumacher with an Aria brush fringe in Ruby by Samuel & Sons. The brass 'Hardwick' table lamp is from Vaughan, Vaughandesigns.com with 'Tribal' pleated silk lampshade with a gold trim from Penny Morrison, Pennymorrison.com



Canada, so, it was super sentimental working on this project as I would visit my family every time I would come over. This part of Cork holds such nostalgia to me as a child when I would visit and hear all the stories from my mother's childhood in the area," he says. "I feel so at home when I am there. Visiting the house on site visits as the project progressed was a total joy."

Emily and Ger, who both work in the pharmaceutical industry, and designer Sean have also all now become good friends. Originally the couple bought the house as a base where they could spend quality time with family and friends. It also had to work for their for nine-year-old son Christian too. The house has subsequently become a wonderful destination for the family to come escape the hustle and bustle of city life.

They chose this property for its compact dimensions, wanting something manageable, but hoping to make it to feel larger as well and to maximise the stunning views over the sea as much as possible. So, vaulted ceilings were installed in the main living spaces and a corner sliding door was added to take full advantage of the view of the nearby bay.

The family's main home, in Holland, is in the busy city of Rotterdam and they also own a holiday house in Spain. Emily loves the fact that her uncles and nieces and nephews are all in the town nearby, "It is a real family orientated place with a great sense of community," she says. "It is so restful sitting on the patio gazing out over the sailboats. I love seeing our son playing skimming stones on the beach with his cousins."

Sean's design exceeded all of her expectations, and the house is now a stylish seaside bolthole, full of colour and character. The results are unique for the area, not typical for rural

**ENTRANCE LOBBY (LEFT)** Sean went bold in this tiny space, lining the walls with 'Chiang Mai Dragon' wallpaper in Jade by Schumacher, Schumacher.com. The bench has been painted in 'India Yellow' by Farrow & Ball and upholstered in matching fabric

The walls are papered in 'Haven' in green by Thibaut, with curtains made up in a matching fabric. The fitted wardrobes are painted in 'Yearbridge Green' by Farrow & Ball. The oversized headboard is upholstered in 'Honshu' in navy by Thibaut

with a luxurious velvet piping from Dedar in a shade called 'Oro'. Cushions and valance have been made in matching fabric. The nursery chair has been upholstered in a gold mohair velvet by Rose Uniacke with a fringe from Samuel & Son



Ireland at all. Sean eschewed local tradition for the project and looked to Europe for inspiration instead, the Mediterranean in particular.

The client's Dutch property, their house in Spain and their place in West Cork have an aesthetic in common that links them together; they wanted all three houses to reflect each other and feel like 'home'.

They are also keen contemporary art collectors and artwork by favourite artists are always the starting point for their décor schemes. Their modern art collection, pops of colour and unique contemporary pieces of furniture bind them all. The main space

in this house is clean, and gallery-like with neutral walls. "Pops of colour have been created by the art and the bespoke upholstery and reflects their other properties perfectly," Sean explains.

Sean went bolder in the bedrooms; they are smaller in proportion and provided him with an opportunity to layer punchy colours and exciting prints together to create a maximalist feel.

Emily and Ger wanted him to make a statement and had no problem being adventurous with colour. Sean has cleverly created common threads throughout the house by using similar fabric and

wallpaper motifs in various colourways. They weave the interior together and ensure that despite the fun and unexpected choices he has made, there is a cohesiveness which makes the house feel cosy and welcoming.

The landscape is stunning too so, of course, Sean wanted to bring the outside in. He has achieved this with his colour choices: blues, greens, yellow and corals, along with plants, extensive glazing and wallpapers and fabrics depicting exotic flora and fauna.

This is all the perfect recipe for a seaside home that serves as a unique family bolthole in Ireland and a showcase to the best of contemporary art and design. **H**



Walls are papered in 'Turnberry Trellis' in coral by Thibaut with fitted furniture painted in 'Dix Blue' by Farrow & Ball. The headboard, valance, cushions and the Roman blind are all made up in 'Chiang Mai Dragon' in Jade by Schumacher. The headboard and cushion piping are Linwoodfabric.com. Lamps are from Pooky.com

**BEDROOM (RIGHT)**

This room has a lighter mood, wallpapered in 'Clear Clouds' by Thibaut with woodwork in 'Vert de Terre' by Farrow & Ball. Curtains are made up in 'Bookend' in pink by Christopher Farr. The headboard, valance and cushion fabric are all made up in 'Honshu' in coral and green by Thibaut, a motif Sean has used throughout the house in various colourways. The 'Padworth Vase' bedside lamps, from Vaughan, are topped with 'Seema' raffia lampshades by Birdie Fortescue, [Birdiefortescue.co.uk](http://Birdiefortescue.co.uk)



Sanitaryware and tiles were sourced from The Bathroom Boutique in Dublin, [Thebathroomboutique.ie](http://Thebathroomboutique.ie)



## TIPS TO MAKE IT WORK

If you want some ideas on how to inject character into your modern bungalow, the following tips from designer Sean should certainly help the process



### COLOUR AND PATTERN ADD WARMTH

Don't be scared to use vivid patterns and colours in small spaces - they can really bring a house like this to life



### CURIOS AND ART BRING IN CHARACTER

Collections make a beautiful addition to an interior. Think interesting shapes, wall plates or botanical illustrations



### DON'T FORGET THE LITTLE DETAILS

Accessorise with stylish trays, candles and books. Details are important and it's worth spending a bit extra on them

## Sourcebook

- ▶▶ **Interior designer** Sean Symington, [Seansymington.com](http://Seansymington.com)
- ▶▶ **Fabrics** Colefax and Fowler, [Colefax.com](http://Colefax.com); Linwood, [Linwoodfabric.com](http://Linwoodfabric.com); Christopher Farr, [Christopherfarrcloth.com](http://Christopherfarrcloth.com) and Rose Uniacke, [Roseuniacke.com](http://Roseuniacke.com)
- ▶▶ **Fabric trims** Dedar.com; Samuel & Sons, [Samuelandsons.com](http://Samuelandsons.com)
- ▶▶ **Wallpapers** Schumacher, [Schumacher.com](http://Schumacher.com), Thibaut, [Thibautdesign.com](http://Thibautdesign.com)
- ▶▶ **Paint** All from Farrow & Ball, [Farrow-ball.com](http://Farrow-ball.com)
- ▶▶ **Flooring** Delforno Tiles & Timber, [Delforno.ie](http://Delforno.ie)
- ▶▶ **Art** Pieces by Arik Levy, [Ariklevy.fr](http://Ariklevy.fr) and Slim Aarons from [1stdibs.com](http://1stdibs.com)