



The interior designer Veere Grenney has turned a neoclassical folly into an unusual country retreat. Giles Kime thinks it simply heavenly

Temple of delight



Clockwise from main picture: in the stately drawing-room, with its 15ft-high ceiling, 1950s furniture mingles with antiques and pieces designed by Grenney; when you sit in the window the water from the lake appears to flow under the house; a view of the dining-room through an oval window; the Palladian temple



Beauty, according to the interior designer Veere Grenney, is not just in the eye of the beholder but in his solar plexus too. 'When you walk into a beautiful room you should feel it rise in your chest,' he says with just a hint of drama teacher in his voice. It is a response which, he claims, is experienced by virtually everyone who has ever set foot in his 18th-century temple on the Tendring estate near the border of Essex and Suffolk.

It is here, amid neoclassical splendour on a small scale – the temple consists of little

more than a drawing-room, tiny kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and dining-room – that Grenney spends his weekends 'chilling'. But to judge by the immaculate interior, the recently restored canal, and the rose garden that provides blooms to match the pink and yellow colour scheme of the drawing-room, 'chilling' seems to be the last thing on his mind.

The temple is kept to this pitch of domestic perfection with the help of a resident caretaker and his wife. But it has not always looked so spruce; when Grenney took on the lease 20 years ago both interior and exterior were extremely tired. Since then he has restored,

decorated and redecorated it (the drawing-room has recently been given its third transformation since he moved in). Designed in 1750 by the architect Robert Taylor, the temple was originally used as a pleasure pavilion for the main house (now demolished); afternoons would be spent there watching people fishing in the canal below or hare-coursing in the surrounding country.

Taylor's interior remains impressively intact, particularly in the drawing-room where architectural details include a lofty plasterwork ceiling and four classical figures set in alcoves, representing the four ages of man. ➤

Three centuries later Grenney's own contribution seems restrained for a man in his line of business and consists of little more than a coat of pale pink paint (mixed to his own recipe), oyster-coloured silk blinds, and chunky matting from Waveney Apple Growers in Suffolk ('laying carpet in a room like this could have made it look like an embassy'). The pieces of furniture that he has chosen are similarly restrained and include a combination of simple antiques, some modern upholstered furniture and a few 20th-century Italian pieces including a glass chandelier and a floor lamp designed in the 1950s by Gino Sarfatti (furniture of this period is Grenney's particular passion).

Much of the temple's charm is derived from its view over an ornamental canal and lake set in rolling Constable country. Because the drawing-room floor is 10ft above the ground, the impression is one of being suspended above water. The drawing-room is flanked by two small wings. In one is a grand (if not massive) staircase and into the other Grenney has shoe-horned a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. In the garden are kennels that have been converted into a guest suite with two bedrooms and a bathroom.



Tongue and groove walls in the compact bedroom

Grenney is no stranger to lending his light touch to country houses; the team of designers at his London practice is usually engaged on three or four such projects, in addition to a similar number of London properties.

Brought up in Auckland, New Zealand, Grenney came to decorating late, having

spent his twenties travelling, being a waiter in London and dealing in antiques from a stall in Portobello market and a shop on Westbourne Grove. In 1981 he was offered a job as a designer by the decorator, Mary Fox Linton, then in partnership with David Hicks who had also leased the temple in the 1960s. After a stint at Colefax & Fowler he left to set up his own company in 1995 with a colleague, Annabel Evans.

Almost a decade later the pair's ability to combine a sleek, modern look with creature comforts has

made them some of the most sought-after decorators in Britain. 'We are very fortunate to have clients who have both money *and* taste,' he says in a way that suggests that he believes that these two blessings tend to be mutually exclusive. ●

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