

Exercise - Plan a country house refurbishment



Figure 1 *The Vyne*, National Trust. (National Trust, 2015).

For this exercise I must imagine that I've been asked to advise on the refurbishment of a country house. The building can be of any period.

I must:

- Limit my scheme to a set of three or four rooms and show these on a ground plan.
- Specify the period and the location of the building.
- Include a thumbnail sketch of the present inhabitants – the people who have commissioned me.
- Include any European paintings or works of art, irrespective of cost, but make choices appropriate to the history of the house and the taste and lifestyle of its occupants.
- Consider if I will have an integrated approach and have common stylistic schemes running throughout; or whether I will vary the style of the rooms to reflect the preoccupations of the principal user?

A word about the new owners of *The Vyne*:

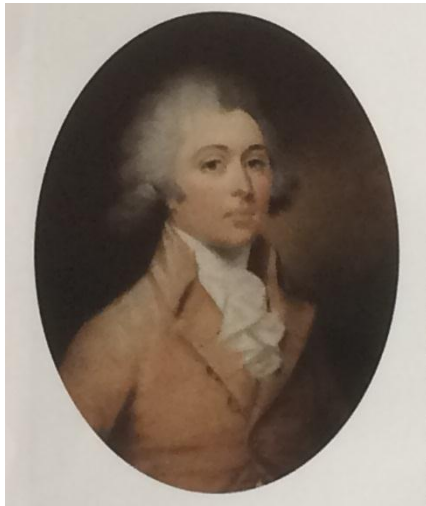


Figure 2 Portrait of Lord Henry Clavering, c.1811, by Emma Smith. (National Trust, 2015).

The new owners of *The Vyne*, Lord Henry and Lady Grace Clavering, have asked me to redesign several of their rooms as they are in want of modernisation and reconfiguration. They have a son and a daughter of ten and twelve years. The rooms currently look tired and are in need of an update.

The Vyne is a former Tudor palace situated in the village of Sherborne St John, on the outskirts of Basingstoke. The area is wooded but with large expanses of fields and there is also a very picturesque lake on the edge of the property. The views of the environs from the house are breath-taking. My task is to redecorate several of the rooms to meet the needs of the family and to suit the history of the property.

The rooms that I will be redecorating are: the Saloon, the Drawing Room and the Library. The spaces will be restored to reflect the various preoccupations of the inhabitants and also styles will be introduced to reflect the age of the house and the desires of the proprietors. The year is 1811.

The Vyne itself is a mixture of styles and shapes as parts of the original Tudor structure remain such as The Oak Gallery, but the majority has since been demolished in favour of a more habitable home. One of Lord Clavering's ancestors added a portico to the front to unify the building and from the outside it looks very grand and impressive. Thus the family have commissioned me to implement a scheme to reflect their need to

entertain their distinguished guests but also to balance this with a comfortable abode. Their aim is for their mixed use rooms to provide the comfort and solace that they require.

The Floor plans - The proposed ground floor layout:

The Library

Its main purposes:

- The family would like the library re-designed in order to provide a respite from the noise of their guests.
- As a private space suitable for contemplation.
- I propose that it is situated at the end of the house, away from the noise from the Dining Room and the Saloon.
- It will be chiefly used by Mr Clavering in order to manage his accounts and to balance the books. It is also a room for learning; so tomes will be readily available for use.
- The owners would like the room to have dark wood panelling and comfortable chairs.

The Drawing Room

- A space for pre and post-dinner entertainment
- A room with a feminine feel.
- An elegant, spacious and stylish domain.
- It needs to be convertible e.g. into a ballroom from time to time.
- This is essentially a more open and public space than the library which is for use by the family.
- It is the perfect entertaining space for the ladies of the house.

The Saloon

- A room for the gentlemen of the house and their guests.
- It doubles as a room for billiards and/or cards.
- It is multi-functional and is the ideal room for use when the weather is foul outside.
- The interior needs to have masculine appeal.
- Hunting pictures and heraldry would be suitable interior decorations.
- The men can have a smoke and share a few drinks away from the ladies.

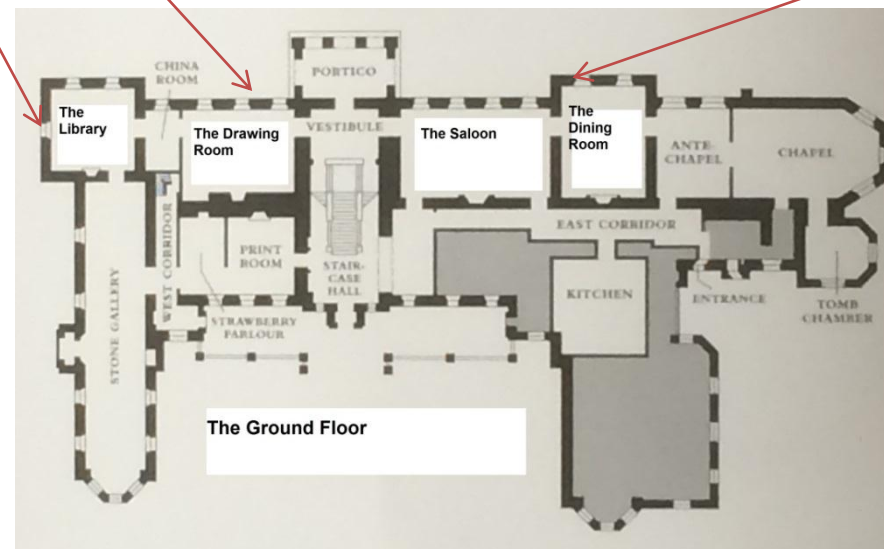


Figure 3 An adapted ground plan from the National Trust (National Trust, 2015).



The Library - the proposed design

The library will occupy the room furthest from the Dining Room on the ground floor. This will ensure that the owners can have some peace and privacy, away from their guests.

The room will have wood panelled walls and floor boards for warmth and cosiness. This is in keeping with the remnants of the Tudor layout and decoration seen elsewhere in the house. The Oak Gallery upstairs is also panelled in wood, so this scheme runs throughout the house.



Figure 5 A bust of a Roman emperor collected by an ancestor of Henry Clavering while on his Grand Tour. (Musson, 2005).

As is traditional in similar private libraries, there will be several busts of Roman emperors/important writers such as Julius Caesar and Homer to emphasise the status of the owner and their superior good taste. It also emphasises the fact that this room is a place of learning. These casts will line the book case.

Lord Henry Clavering and his son are ardent fans of the English landscape as they both enjoy

outdoor pursuits such as hunting, shooting and fishing. This needs to be reflected in the interior of the Library and the Saloon as these are their main rooms. So the new interior will incorporate works by the Swiss artist J.H. Muntz and the local English artist Stephen Elmer. Elmer's work is highly appreciated by Lord Clavering as the former is from Farnham, a nearby town. Mr Elmer is renowned throughout the country for his exquisite paintings of game, both dead and alive. He creates these especially for the aristocracy in the style of the Dutch old masters. Elmer's painting entitled: *Cock and Hen Black Grouse in Landscape* is ideal for this room as it embodies the spirit of the owners and their love of the outdoors. The rich earth colours will also harmonise the lovely wooden tones of the interior. The interior and its paintings, drawings and busts will look splendid

with a fire lit in the grate on a cold and wet day.

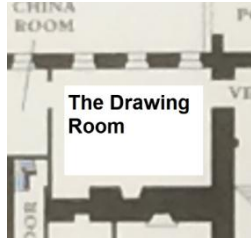
Lord Clavering is very fond of his Roman portrait busts as he inherited them in his youth from an ancestor. Like his relative he too embarked on a Grand Tour of Italy in his youth. Therefore these busts remind him of his studies in Europe and his passion for classical and mythological art and architecture. The Claverings inherited the drawing by the artist J.H. Muntz from a relative; they wish to retain it for sentimental reasons. It also ties in with the theme in the next room, the Drawing Room.



Figure 4 A drawing of *The Vyne* from the west, c. 1750s, by the Swiss artist J.H. Muntz. This is an idealised view which reveals the chinoiserie bridge designed by John Clavering. (National Trust, 2015).



Figure 6 *Cock and Hen Black Grouse in Landscape*, by Stephen Elmer. Date unknown. (The Athenaeum, 2000-2014).



The proposed design of the Drawing Room

This is a large and expansive space ideal for a variety of pursuits. The ladies of the house will use this room predominantly as they are expected to entertain their guests pre and post-dinner. The room will be used by all for receiving the guests initially but the intention is that this room will be multi-functional. Due to its situation at the rear of the house it commands charming views of the landscape and the fishing lake beyond.



The ladies of the house have stipulated a more feminine interior scheme, in particular the use of several bolts of beautiful crimson and white Italian brocatelle material instead of wallpaper. Lord Clavering visited Italy recently to research ideas for their new home and returned with the lovely fabric amongst other items.

Due to its sumptuousness I feel it would look stunning on the walls and for the curtains as well. The ceiling will be moulded in plaster in exotic Greco-Roman floral motifs, in keeping with the recent archaeological excavations abroad. There will be some gilding to enhance the delicate and fine swags of "husks" (Musson, 2005), to characterise the era.

This decorative scheme will be in the style of Robert Adam as they are highly refined and ideally suited to the interiors at *The Vyne*.

The furniture will be manufactured by the outstanding English firm Vile and Cobb, who have designed pieces for the King and Queen. In particular a Rococo style commode of crimson and golden colouring will be ordered to complement the interior scheme. The overall effect will be sumptuous and grandiose. The patron desires that the

Drawing Room is suitably impressive as it is the main area for entertaining guests, besides the grand old Tudor Oak Gallery upstairs. This room is ideal for soirees due to its size and aspect. The room itself is near to the dining room and is open to all of the guests. A choice selection of family portraits such as the one of Lady Clavering will adorn the interior, to enhance its romantic and elegant aspirations. The room could also be used to serve high teas.



Figure 7 A classical inspired ceiling decoration, after Robert Adam. (Musson, 2005).



Figure 9 Genoese crimson and white brocatelle - to be affixed to the walls of the Drawing Room. (National Trust, 2015).

Figure 11 Commode, c. 1762-1764 (made), William Vile. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London 2016.



Figure 10 Lady Clavering, by Allan Ramsay. (WikiArt (WikiPaintings, n.d.)



The proposed design of the Saloon



Like the Library the Saloon will also have a dark wood panelled interior with wooden flooring. This space is best suited to host the gentlemen of the house and their distinguished guests.

The Claverings are traditional in terms of their outdoor pursuits, so a painting of grouse by Stephen Elmer is perfect. The warm colours and the subject matter reflect the aspirations of the owners. They use art to cement their reputation and to showcase their wealth and status.



Figure 12 Still Life with Pineapple and Other Fruit (The Athenaeum, 2000-2014).

A still life by Elmer in the style of the Dutch masters will also suit the interior scheme as it implies that they can harvest huge varieties of fruits and vegetables from their estate. The plethora of game is also implied by their paintings. A beautiful textured eighteenth century chair will enhance their decorative scheme and tie all of the different shapes and colours in the room together.

I have also suggested the inclusion of a portrait of a well-respected ancestor as this is as effective as an illuminated family tree. Lineage is very important to the nobility so the portrait proclaims their right to live the way they see fit. The portrait is in the style of the portrait by the Dutch artist Anthony Van Dyck.

I believe that all of the articles and schemes will work extremely well together and reflect the aims and tastes of the owners. They like to appear understated rather than ostentatious.

Figure 13 An extraordinary George II Walnut wing armchair, English, c.1735. (RONALD PHILLIPS, N.D.).



Figure 14 Prince Rupert, Count Palatine, Anthony van Dyck, © Copyright The National Gallery, London 2016



Figure 15 Cock and Hen Red Grouse in Landscape, n.d., by Stephen Elmer. (The Athenaeum, 2000-2014)

Evaluation

To conclude, I have selected works of art which I feel are appropriate to the age and style of the property. The art also reflects the status of the current owners who although wealthy were far less wealthy than earlier owners of the property. Earlier owners of *The Vyne*, hosted Kings and Queens whereas the Claverings mostly entertained their friends, family and contacts connected to Lord Clavering's role.

My version of *The Vyne* explores themes or genres which were popular at the time. The Claverings like other aristocrats were hugely fond of outdoor activities such as hunting, shooting or fishing, which explains why works of this nature were popular. Paintings of game or hunting scenes were important tools in a gentleman's arsenal as they emphasised his wealth and status. Especially if the artist was known to have painted the game directly from the estate. This was sometimes the case for the artist Stephen Elmer as he created paintings of a wide variety of game which were supplied to him by the Bishop of Winchester or Lord Delaware.

During the 18th- 19th century images of the landscape were much coveted items as these too were used to show off a person's wealth and riches. This was a period when people were beginning to fence off their land and form the large estates that we know of today. So a landscape image depicting one's land and estate would have impressed current visitors to one's house and property.

Portraits of family members have also been included as they were equally as effective as illuminated family trees in demonstrating one's prestige and lineage.

The still life was another important theme as it was a reference to the Dutch still life, and still lifes of this genre were highly collectible in England at this time. I've included an English still life by Stephen Elmer; his version is exotic due to the pineapple which comprises part of the composition. Pineapples were difficult to obtain in this era and this is another clue to the prosperity of the owner. A painting such as this would have inspired awe in a 19th century audience.

I have carefully curated the rooms to ensure that they have the right level of impact on their audience and that each room matches the requirements of the owners.

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