



My humble ABODE

Beautiful homes from around Scotland

Who: Sarah and Will Leslie live with their two year old son Harry at Wardhill Castle. **What:** A 12th century castle that's been in the Leslie family for 900 years. **Where:** Aberdeenshire.



We got married three years ago and moved up from London, this is my husband's family home. I'm originally from Yorkshire and grew up in the countryside so as a child I always envisaged I'd end up living in the country.

When we moved back so my husband could take over the running of the estate, my parents-in-law were still living in the house, so we moved into a flat towards the back of the house. We stayed there for around a year before moving into the main house and Will's parents moved out. When Will's parents took over the house 30 years ago, they did a lot of work decorating and getting rid of dry rot from the previous generations and so when we moved in there was quite a lot of refurbishing to do.

It's been a huge project, one section of the house was totally derelict, the ceilings had fallen in – there were dead birds, no carpets and no heating. It had just been locked up for a number of years. One of the first things we did was put in a big biomass boiler, which meant we could use more of the house and we put radiators in the rooms that didn't have them.

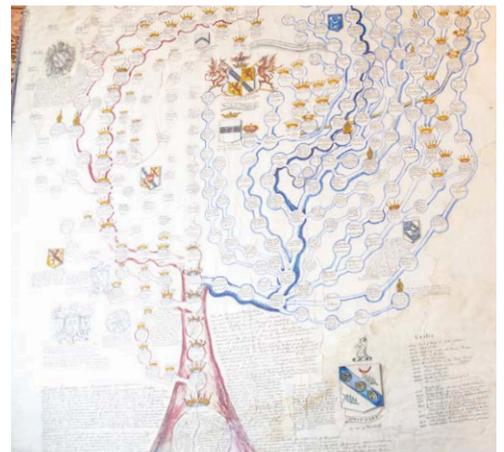
We cleared out the derelict rooms and converted them into bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms. I was a chartered surveyor previously, so for me planning things like plumbing and electrics was quite easy and we have saved a lot of money because I understand building work, but the interiors side I have had more of a mental block. I'm having to learn about colour charts, things that interior designers know all about but I need to research.

The thought of doing three or four new bedrooms from scratch without a starting point was difficult for me. I went to the curtain





exchange in London (there's one in Edinburgh too), which is a place where people can buy and sell curtains, and I managed to find an amazing pair of curtains that fitted. So I used that as inspiration in one of the bedrooms. In another room I found a beautiful tapestry rolled up under a bed, which I hung above a bed and I tied in the curtains and cushions with that. We've discovered all kinds of amazing things around the place, previously my mother-in-law found a family tree rolled up behind a radiator which she made into a coffee table. (Pictured below).





The house used to be a bit bigger, some of it was knocked down in the 70s so a lot of the furniture was just shut away. We were really lucky as that meant that we had a lot of furniture here already that I could use in other rooms.

The wallpaper in the library is 100 years old and the curtains are from the Paris Embassy. Meanwhile in the drawing room, the wallpaper was put in for my father-in-law's 21st but I think it still looks amazing. The curtains in the drawing room had been there for 150 years and came from the Paris exhibition but they were shredded so we need new ones. They will be huge and expensive so I can't make a mistake, I'm looking through Pinterest and lots of house magazines quite a bit at the moment!

One challenge was finding an upholsterer to come and re-cover the sofa in the drawing room, it came in through the window 50 years ago, so unless we wanted to take the window out there was no way of getting it out!

There's so much history to the house, we have a bedroom called the Spanish room because the bed was gifted by the Queen of Spain to my husband's great granny who was her lady in waiting. There are so many old trunks in the house, they are everywhere. I haven't managed to get through them all yet. Some of them I opened and they have papers from the 1730s in them! I opened and just closed them and thought I'd deal with them another day!

The Lairds bedroom is my favourite room, the light is beautiful and I'm really into blue tones so I find it really calming and peaceful. I have to stop myself as everything could end up blue. It can be a tricky colour as it can end up cold.

I wanted the look of the house to be traditional but not too old school, I want to keep it modern and fresh. I bought loads of new lamps and used cream carpets to offset the dark furniture and make the place lighter and bright.

Since we moved in we have been trying to diversify to bring in income to support the running costs of the house. So we have a glamping pod, we host weddings and we also let it out for events too. I love that side of things; I really enjoy entertaining.

We still have work to do, the electrics haven't been worked on since the 70s. All the ground floor rooms don't have lights – it's all candles in the chandeliers so any light comes from the lamps. We are working on it so that soon when you come in and hit a light switch the light will come on – that will be revolutionary for us.

The castle is available for exclusive use hire, to include a chef, butler and piper. Highland games and other activities can be arranged such as whisky tastings, fishing, shooting or golf. Contact Sarah Leslie for further details on sarahleslie@icloud.com or 07734425282. See www.wardhillcastle.co.uk

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