

# TO THE MANOIR BORN

*Lora Munro's lifelong passion for dance, travel and collecting created the impetus for the start of a new adventure in France*

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## The Owners

Lora Munro and Rob Harwood live here with their daughter, Viola (2), along with eight heritage-breed hens and Roger the rooster. The house is run as a bed and breakfast ([manoirlaurette.com](http://manoirlaurette.com)).

## The Property

A 19th-century *maison de maître* (manor house) with a large garden and swimming pool. The salon, dining room, kitchen and one bedroom are on the ground floor. Upstairs, there are five bedrooms with en suite bathrooms.





**THIS PAGE** The main salon, originally three wine cellars, has the feel of a quirky, private club. Lora and Rob have furnished it with comfortable leather armchairs and a deep velvet sofa. The neon sign is a memento from Lora's Brighton days and came from the set of a production of *Tristan and Iseult*. **RIGHT** Stone steps lead up from the main salon into a sunny dining room.



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eyond its quintessentially French facade, Manoir Laurette, the boutique guest house that Lora Munro runs with her

partner, Rob Harwood, has a distinctly bohemian atmosphere: a heady mix of family heirlooms, brocante finds and colourful curios gathered on Lora's travels, combined with kitsch flamenco memorabilia everywhere you look. 'I've been collecting things for years,' says Lora. 'I used to keep them in a lock up, waiting for the right home, which turned out to be here, in France.'

With a history as colourful as its decor, Manoir Laurette has variously been used as a coach house and an *épicerie*. 'The house is instantly recognisable as a *maison de maître*,' says Lora, explaining that its elegant symmetry with central front door and tall, painted shutters is typical of this style of building. Inside, the rooms are square with high ceilings and, while the proportions might feel quite grand, in reality, says Lora, 'they are small enough to feel comfortable.'

The 19th-century manor sits within a tiny hamlet of just 10 houses and a steeped church that has long been a place of pilgrimage. It is an idyllic location, says Lora. 'We are surrounded by fields of sunflowers and vineyards ►



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producing Bordeaux and Côtes du Marmandais wines.'

It's a far cry from her previous life in Brighton, where Lora ran a prosperous performing arts school. 'The more successful the business became, the more my own personal creativity became stifled,' she admits. 'Moving abroad and opening a hotel had always been my dream: I love to travel and I'm attracted to the quirkier side of life, whether that's a shabby, art-filled Moroccan retreat or a Portuguese mountain-top goat hut.'

Five years ago, single and about to turn 30, Lora felt ready to start a new chapter in her life. She decided to create a unique guest house that would also double as her home. Having looked at over 40 houses in France, Lora came across Manoir Laurette while on holiday. 'It felt both overwhelming and liberating!' she laughs. 'I fell in love with Bordeaux and this house ticked every box. At the entrance, there's an iron gate that opens to a sweeping tree-lined driveway. I love the contrast of this with the laid-back simplicity of our kitchen garden, apple orchard and wildflower meadow.' For the next two years Lora travelled back and forth, ►



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The existing kitchen units were smartened up with a coat of Calke Green by Farrow & Ball. Lora added a new worktop and a Belfast sink. The farmhouse table in the kitchen is English and came from an antiques shop in Arundel; a wide, sunny terrace runs along the back of the house; a pair of antique chairs from a local brocante, Lamothe-Landerron, sit either side of the woodburner at one end of the dining room. **LEFT** Stairs lead from the kitchen to the dining room. The round pizza boards are from AG Hendy & Co in Hastings.



*'I've picked up things from around the world. I shipped bathroom tiles back from Goa and a bronze basin from Mexico.'*







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CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP LEFT**

In the bedroom, a crewel-work bedspread from India is paired with an antique bed from Portugal; old black and white photographs decorate the upstairs hallway; the painted chest of drawers came from the Sunday antiques market in Bordeaux; Lora bought the Victorian washstand at Arundel Antiques Market and had it fitted with a basin she'd picked up in Mexico. **LEFT** Lora created a statement wall in the bathroom with Goan tiles.







managing the dance school, while overseeing essential repairs. It was during this time that she met Rob. 'We realised we wanted to build a life together,' says Lora. 'So, in 2016, I sold the dance school and we moved here fully, with our daughter Viola, who is now two years old.'

Once the renovations were complete, it was time for Lora to raid her lock up. 'My theatrical background has definitely influenced the design,' she laughs. Guest bedrooms, with names such as The Gypsy Queen and The Icon, clearly relate to Lora's abiding interest in the performing arts, while the main salon has the air of a quirky private club: a neon sign hangs on the original stone wall and visitors sit on worn leather armchairs beneath colourful chandeliers. 'I've always had magpie tendencies,' says Lora, 'but my style has evolved here.' She describes her aesthetic as being eclectic and, with the exception of the bedding and mattresses, everything has been sourced on an ad hoc basis.

'I've picked up things around the world – I shipped bathroom tiles back from Goa, a bronze basin from Mexico and I've used wine crates to create bath panels.' Mantelpieces, shelves and ledges are home to folk art figures ▶

**ABOVE** A former bedroom was turned into a stylish bathroom featuring wine crates in place of conventional tongue and groove panelling. **THIS PAGE & RIGHT** Lora's flair for theatrical design is evident in the guest bedrooms, each of which is individually named. Traveller (right) features walls papered with vintage newspaper. The bed is from The Cornish Bed Company and the cushions are from Rume in Hove.



## HOMES Offbeat Country

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Deep green metro tiles make an impressive feature wall behind a tub from The Cast Iron Bath Company. Lora had a ceramic basin

fitted into an antique dresser to create an unusual bathroom unit. The Icon bedroom is papered with posters from *Life* magazine.

and other curios that Lora has picked up in flea markets and local brocantes, and here and there flamenco dresses hang from mirrors or the backs of doors. In many of the communal spaces, Lora simply scraped back the walls to reveal layers of historic patina. 'We have a huge respect for provenance,' says Lora, whose colourful aesthetic works with the manor's simple architecture.

Manoir Laurette finally opened its doors in June last year and the couple haven't looked back. 'There's only one thing we miss,' says Lora. 'A great country pub!' Though the wine in the area more than makes up for this and Rob, who used to work in the wine trade and was once a specialist cheesemonger, now shares local delicacies with their guests through informal tastings. They also organise trips to nearby Sainte-Foy-la-Grande – one of the finest gourmet markets in France – and advise on the best local brocantes and other secret spots. 'We love life in rural France,' says Lora. 'It can be hard work physically, but the beauty we open our shutters to each morning gives us clarity.' ■

