

Travel By Design: Charlotte's Folly is a fairytale for grown-ups with storybook pastiche from designer Emma Ainscough

Unique interior schemes are becoming a major factor in how we choose the places we stay. Here, we ask designer Emma Ainscough about the stories behind the aesthetic of Charlotte's Folly



Unique Homestays

It's rare for a staycation to be so transportive that, in just two nights, you've forgotten about your real life. But Charlotte's Folly, a raspberry-hued gingerbread house in the heart of the Bradford Estate, Shropshire, has an other-worldly quality that seems to invite and envelop you into its fairytale. This is partly due to its private hire nature, it's a self-catered property and available to rent from its owners, Viscount and Viscountess Newport, via [Unique Homestays](#). Having the place all to yourself and enjoying long soaks in either of the tubs or roasting marshmallows on the fire certainly adds to the fantasy. But it's the interior design by [Emma Ainscough](#) that really helps you fall through the looking glass.



Garden at Charlotte's Folly Unique Homestays

Emma started her eponymous studio in 2020 and won *House & Garden's* Rising Star award this year thanks to her honest, playful, pattern-filled style. While she has worked chiefly on residential projects, she recognises Charlotte's Folly as a welcome opportunity to push herself creatively. "In a client's forever home, they need to ponder over every item, but with this cottage, I was invited to run wild and do my thing, so I was given a chance to try out some ideas that I've been looking forward to using for a long time," Emma explains, nodding to the statement striped dining room which has been floating around in her head for years - but more on that later.

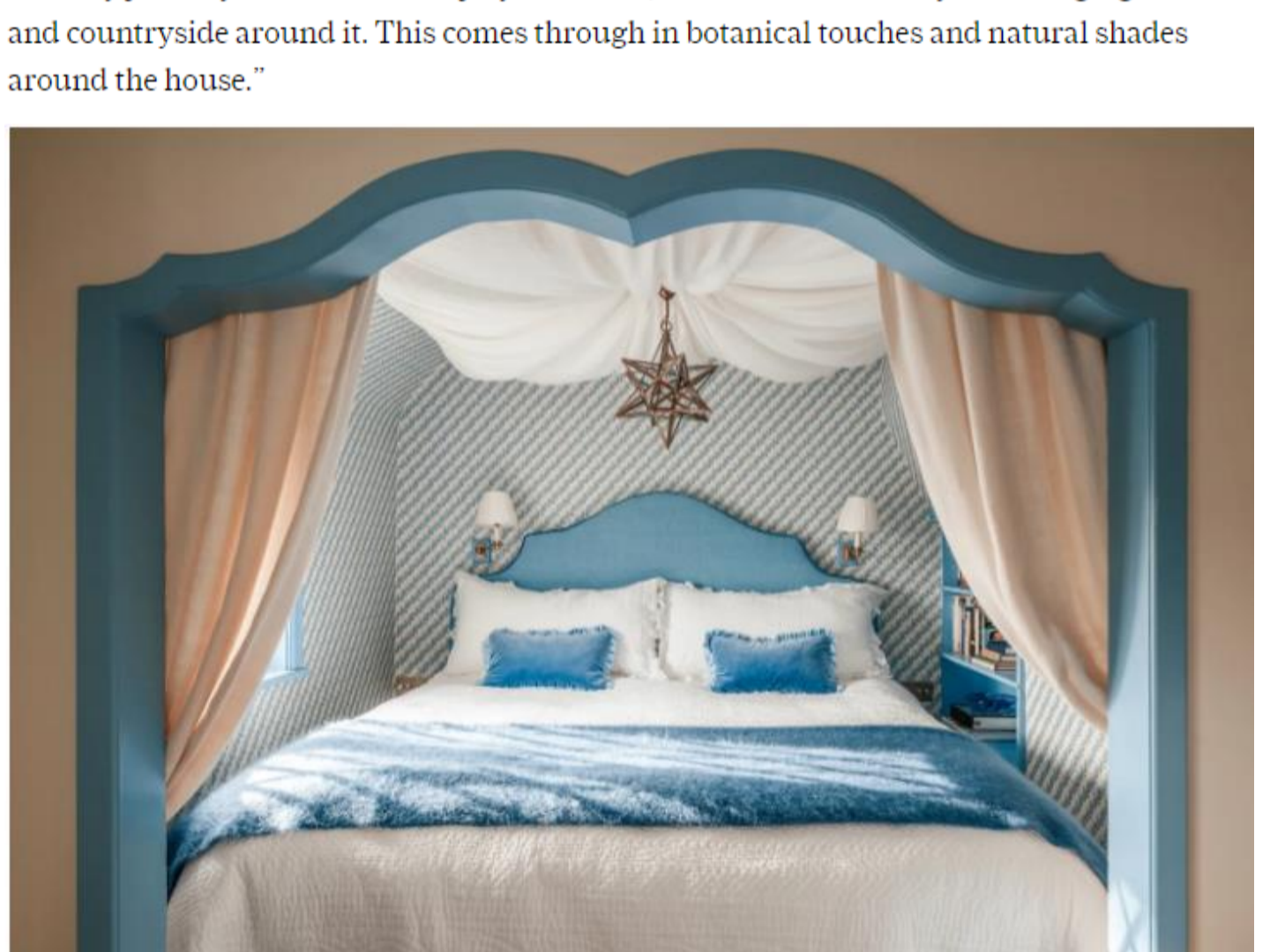
Charlotte's Folly is an enchanting vision of eccentricity and imagination, balanced with liveability and comfort, created within social media's impact on a project's success. Here, Emma shares why she didn't want to fall into the 'Instagram corners' trap while also plotting out those hero moments that inevitably turned heads.

What was your initial approach to the project?

"The building is beautiful, but it did need a lot of work. The exterior was grey and pebbledash, and the layout was so higgledy-piggledy that the spaces didn't flow. So, initially, we worked on stripping it back, moving some walls and nailing the limewash pink shade, which was hard to get right - we didn't want a Barbie house! We also added a white scallop bargeboard on the roof to embrace the idea of a gingerbread house.

"Once the bones were in order, I thought about approaching such small spaces. While designers often use lighter shades in a compact room to brighten it up, I felt leaning into pattern would make more of an impact. It's unusual for me to do a commercial project like this, and knowing that guests will only experience the interiors for a few days means you can do something more outlandish, which I loved.

"I'm also always inspired by nature. I visited the cottage every season, from golden October to a snowy January as well as in the July heatwave, so I felt influenced by the changing fields and countryside around it. This comes through in botanical touches and natural shades around the house."



Bedroom at Charlotte's Folly Unique Homestays

Did any difficult design decisions arise and how did you overcome them?

"I know that the blue bedroom with the tented bed gets a lot of airtime, and I love that room - but that canopy ceiling was the product of some problem-solving because the shape of the room was awkward. As a long, thin space, the bed felt too far away, and it would have been difficult for guests to get down either side of it. So, instead, I imagined a scenario in which climbing into bed would be a fun experience and contribute to the fairytale aesthetic.

"We built a platform for the bed, the little step and the faux wall around it. Once the decision had been made, the rest fell into place, including the star lamp, which I think works perfectly with the tented ceiling. I could imagine guests sitting in bed and drawing the curtains, with a vignette looking out to the log burner beyond the bed end.

"I was also keen to use [Howe at 36 Bourne Street's Folies Bergère wallpaper](#), accented with [Farrow & Ball's archive colour Bay Area Blue](#), and condensing the bedroom suited those design choices, too."



Dining room at Charlotte's Folly

Are there any key inspiration points to call out?

"As mentioned, I lent into using patterns in small spaces, and one of my favourite examples is the striped dining room. Years and years ago, I had seen a grainy picture of a run-down house in America with a brown and white striped room. To my memory, the walls were wooden, and the white stripes were painted on top, and as an avid stripe fan (you'll notice they pop up everywhere), something about this look appealed to me. When I walked into the dining room, I knew the moment had come to try it out.

"I discovered a wallpaper from Hamilton Weston called [Brown Paper Stripe](#). Quite literally inspired by manilla paper, it looks almost like a brown envelope, which set the tone in my mind as a chocolate box-style room, all wrapped up like a present.

"In this space, I wanted to focus on tonality, texture and a connection to the outside, so I chose natural materials in varying shades of brown. The table is from Lorforde, crafted from rustic timber, the pendant lights are hand-thrown terracotta from [Straw London](#), and I worked with a local florist called [Myrtle, Fox and Maude](#) on a dried flower installation to emphasise the natural textures in creams, rusts and oranges."



Bathroom at Charlotte's Folly Unique Homestays



Twin room at Charlotte's Folly Unique Homestays