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THE COOL LIST

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SUMMER GETS SWEET

CANDY CUSHIONS, **BUTTERFLY MIRRORS**, HUMMINGBIRD WALLPAPER,
TWINKLING TREE LIGHTS & A VERY BIG HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

GARDEN SPECIAL: SPARKLY TERRACE TO MODERN LAWN






TWO OF A KIND

THIS PAGE: the study in the London warehouse conversion – the perfect place for a relaxing read on the Habitat day bed.

OPPOSITE: James and Christopher's modern touches with a twist: retro-shaped dishes from Ikea teamed with vintage bottles; and fairy lights piled up in a vase to make an intriguing lighting feature. "We've got loads of these lights scattered around," says Christopher.



Architects James Soane and Christopher Ash know how to make a home from home. They've exported their easy-modern style from their city pad to their new country house in a chocolate-box pretty village – and they're determined to show the locals a thing or two about contemporary design, too. By Jenny Dalton. Photographer Graham Atkins-Hughes

town



THE OWNERS

Along with four other architects, James Soane and Christopher Ash (below, from left) make up the four-year-old Project Orange – one of London's most chilled out and up-and-coming architectural practices. Partners at home and work, they are currently designing the new Myhotel in Chelsea (which opens this September), but their first project together was their converted warehouse flat in Clerkenwell – done on a strict experimental budget. They are a hilariously comic duo, who describe their look as 'eclectic'. But do they ever disagree style-wise? 'Ah, I can see where you're going with this – you've got that wicked journalistic glint in your eye. So no, we never disagree,' insists James. Their other home is in Lavenham, Suffolk. 'The fascinating thing about the country is that you can't choose to edit your relationships the way you do in the city,' says Christopher. 'You're forced to socialise with whoever happens to live there – and that's really fascinating. You have to be much more open.'




TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: the fire escape was 'colonised' to create an urban outdoor terrace; an old shelf unit from Brick Lane Market found a new lease of life as a bathroom cabinet; a large door to the left of the corridor shuts off the bedroom/bathroom area; the sliding one (right) leads to the study. The 'Hill House' chair is by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. **MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT:** Christopher made the maquette

in his college days. 'Maybe someone will spot it and it will eventually get built,' he laughs; the bookshelf above the Habitat sofa in the living room was custom-made by a joiner. A friend decided to colour-coordinate the books at a party. **BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT:** one of a pair of German utility sinks in the bathroom. The taps are from CP Hart; James (left) and Christopher.

THIS PAGE: one wall of the study is covered in graphic 'Circles' wallpaper from the Ut Möritz range at Brian Yates. 'We'll have to change it soon - I keep seeing it in your magazine and people will think we copied it,' laughs James.





James Soane and Christopher Ash

are firm believers in village life. And not just in the Suffolk countryside, where they bought their tiny weekend house a year ago. During the week they reside and work near London's fashionable Clerkenwell Road, where hip girls sashay by in their slouchy jeans with asymmetric fringed bags and hair; and cool design and architecture types flit from the neighbourhood deli to the local pub on foot or, at most, by bike. In fact, James and Christopher only venture outside EC1 to visit clients. 'Using public transport is quite a novelty,' says Christopher. 'Mainly because I get the chance to read a book.'

There are down sides to having every aspect of your life on your doorstep, however. Just around the corner from their converted warehouse home (brick walls, wooden floors and happily dishevelled urban comfiness) is the Project Orange office and, >

THIS PAGE: the headboard (with built-in reading lights on either side) in the London bedroom was made to James and Christopher's design. 'People always find it a challenge!' says James of the clear glass door that separates the bedroom and bathroom from the main corridor. **OPPOSITE:** the living room in the Suffolk home. Oars, bought from a junk shop, rest on top of an Arts and Crafts cabinet – a present from James's parents. 'We removed the mouldings on the front to simplify it,' says Christopher. The wall lights are buys from The Conran Shop.

country





THIS PAGE: mementos and vintage finds make for a relaxed 'countryish' look on the living room mantelpiece. The Victorian hurricane lamp was a present from James's godfather. **OPPOSITE:** the antique chest of drawers in the living room was intended for the bedroom, 'but we couldn't get it up the stairs!' says Christopher. The leather armchair is a Habitat piece.





LEFT: Christopher in the living room – the old wooden table was in the house when he and James moved in, and is the only object that remains from the previous occupants. The adjustable pendant lamp was a lucky junk shop find. On the wall is an unexpected touch of frou-frou in the shape of a feather wreath. 'It came from a rather chichi little shop in the next village,' says Christopher.

BELOW: the wooden summer house at the end of the garden house was bought from B&Q and customised. 'We removed the original boards and fittings because they were too Hansel and Gretel, and replaced them with simple wooden planks, which we just painted,' says Christopher. **BOTTOM:** the sweet-looking house front, seen from the street.



James admits, the worst thing about being just two minutes from work is that it's difficult to resist popping in at weekends, evenings and early mornings to tiddle with a plan or modify an idea. 'You rarely find excuses not to work all the time,' explains Christopher. 'Especially as we have a study/office at home, too. We thought the only way to escape was to remove ourselves from that environment entirely.'

Finding their home in Lavenham, therefore, was all about searching for something 'completely different to Clerkenwell'. Although they found their ideal place quite by accident. 'We decided to take a holiday in England, because I'd been travelling a lot with work,' says James, almost apologetically. 'Christopher remembered visiting Lavenham with his parents when he was about 11, so we decided to drive through it out of curiosity.'

They both fell in love immediately with the area's quite ostensible chocolate-boxiness. 'It's so *The Truman Show*,' says James, grinning. The total opposite of London, but still a fantastic place. There's a great French restaurant a couple of minutes from home, and a local bakery where we get fresh bread every Saturday morning. We love it.'

So then the search was on for a house. 'We quickly discovered what we could afford,' says Christopher. 'And this was the third place we saw – basically a really tiny Victorian two-up/two-down, sandwiched in the middle of a row of four houses. It wasn't perfect, but we bought it as soon as we realised it was in one piece.'

They then set about creating more space by adding a kitchen extension onto the back, which gave them an extra room and let in loads of light in the process. It was all done in >



THIS PAGE: the kitchen is in the new, modern extension that James and Christopher had built at the back of the house. "Originally, there was no proper connection between the house and the garden," says Christopher. "We wanted something really open, so we designed it with a set of French windows." The kitchen units are from Ikea, while the beech splashback and worktop are from Junckers.



their distinctly modern style, which James reckons is in complete contrast to their country neighbours. 'I think our local builder was definitely "surprised",' says James. 'But he was brilliant and completely unfazed by all the things we wanted. Such as the very modern rendering system with built-in insulation – he'd never seen anything like it before, and it took him a lot longer to do the work than he thought. But I think he was quite pleased to have learned something new. He said he'd be using it in other homes in the future.'

The overall look isn't that different to their London home. 'They're both very simple,' says Christopher. 'We don't really have a house style – it's more about context. In Lavenham we wanted something very contemporary but with traditional materials, like the terracotta floor tiles in the kitchen and the brick terrace outside. We've also juxtaposed brick floors with a very modern leather chair, whereas in London, we've put a battered leather one against raw brick walls.'

Now keen to get stuck into another personal project, the boys are looking for a new-build plot in Lavenham itself. 'What's a shame about the countryside is that there's not enough contemporary design out there. We'd really like to show that modern living is not something totally alien to rural areas – but at the same time, we don't want to just copy an already existing style and make it contemporary. We'd want to do something totally original.' And how would the villagers feel about that? 'I think it would be something of a cause célèbre,' says James, wickedly. We can't wait.

DECO
Project Orange, 1st Floor, Morelands, 7 Old Street, EC1 (020 7689 3456; www.projectorange.com).



THIS PAGE: the Lucienne Day-designed bedding came from Habitat, and the poster on the wall is what James terms 'free art'. They were handing them out at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, so we took one and had it framed.

For stockist information,
turn to page 144.