

The Linen House

ULSTER TATLER INTERIORS VISITS A SYMPATHETICALLY RESTORED TOWNHOUSE SITUATED AT THE FORMER ANDREWS LINEN MILL IN COMBER.





Fiona McKelvie worked for many years for Liberty of London, managing sales of their fabrics all over the world, and since 2003 has run her own sales and marketing consultancy, working with clients such as Nina Campbell and Invest NI. Last year she set up her online antique linen business, McBurney and Black, focusing on Irish Linen in particular. Always maintaining her links with home, when the opportunity arose to buy the townhouse in the former Andrews Linen Mill it seemed the perfect spot for a bolthole from London.

Situated in the old stable block, the property has been very sympathetically restored by the construction team, keeping the original beams of the building and the splendid Scrabo stone exterior. As a result the interior exudes a feeling of nostalgia. One of the vertical beams in the living area for example appears to have been used as a height chart for the stable lads, with horizontal markings, and boyish signatures still adorning it. The interior, whilst offering every modern convenience, still harks back to its earlier use, paying homage to its industrial past, but with a bit of a contemporary twist.



Having enjoyed a career in textiles for over 30 years, Fiona has a particular interest in antique linens, primarily Irish Linen, and so was keen to integrate as much of the fabric into the property as possible. Fiona has incorporated predominantly Irish linens, both new and antique, into the furnishings. To complete this vision, she also worked alongside a local company, commissioning special linen pieces for the house.

The inviting living room features an exquisite mix of linens, from the unique roman blinds, which are made from an antique embroidered Irish linen tablecloth, to the window, which is dressed with unlined Irish linen muslin curtains. In addition dyed linen and linen damask have been used for cushion covers and the back button on a chair, which Fiona had reupholstered using an antique French linen. Dyed damask napkins are used to perfection to add a splash of colour to the neutral themed dining space. To pay tribute to the rich history of the property, Fiona commissioned local textile artist Deborah Toner to produce an embroidered image of the mill as it was in the early 1900s. All Deborah's work is embroidered onto locally produced Irish linen and made into cushions. Old advertisements for Irish linen are framed above a huge 8 ft long bookcase, one of a pair, which belonged to Fiona's father. To add a new lease of life to this statement piece, the bookcase has been painted using two of Fiona's favourite Farrow and Ball colours; Elephants Breath and Churlish Green.



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In the back bedroom, the second of the painted bookcases sits to one end of the room, with part of Fiona’s collection of vintage bobbins displayed on a book rest. A relaxed look is created with stonewashed linens. The bed is dressed with white and stone coloured linens and a chunky knitted cotton throw, which drapes to the foot of the bed. Unlined linen curtains filter the light, creating a soft ambience in the room. To complete the look, vintage slubbed French linen have been used to reupholster Victorian chairs inherited from her parents.

This beautifully restored townhouse combines touches of the traditional with elements of the modern, making it a wonderful home that also pays tribute to its roots. With a crisp, light interior perfectly complemented with fresh linens, this bright and homely property nestled in Comber is definitely the perfect bolthole for owner Fiona to escape the hustle and bustle of London life.

Just off the living area is the tastefully decorated kitchen. As Fiona was doing most of her planning for the property from London, she enlisted the help of Hanna Bros of Kilkeel, to complete the kitchen space. Hanna Bros of Kilkeel were successful in selecting a range of modern appliances, which not only allow Fiona access to the latest technology in the kitchen, but also complement the overall aesthetic of the property.

Moving into the bright hallway, Fiona has continued the linen theme by framing embroidered linen coasters and hanging them on the wall, whilst an industrial styled console table gives a nod to the previous life of the building. A lampbase, which is filled with vintage spools of linen thread, creates a stunning talking point in this space. The cloakroom, located just off the hallway, features Ordnance survey maps of Comber and Strangford Lough in 1900 are used as wallpaper panels.

Linen is also used to superb effect in the bedrooms. Located in the front bedroom is a vintage embroidered Irish linen tablecloth, which is used as a bedspread, whilst the headboard features a printed script design on white linen of old handwritten bills of sale and invoices. A handwoven IKAT bolster cushion sourced directly from the maker in Uzbekistan gives a pop of colour to the grey and white colour scheme, whilst a huge spool of pink Irish Linen yarn rescued from another redundant spinning mill also brings colour to the dressing table.

