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A 19th-Century Villa in Ireland Restored to Its Former Glory

With a mix of antique and contemporary pieces, Dublin-based firm Lyons Kelly brings the centuries-old space back to life

By Laura May Todd
Photography by Mark Scott



The most recent project of Dublin-based firm Lyons Kelly, the restoration of an 1840s villa on the outskirts of Ireland's capital, was a long time coming. Their client had grown up near the house and had long been enchanted by its regal stone facade and idyllic location at a tree-lined bend of the River Liffey. Despite living abroad for many years, he had always kept an eye on it. But when the house came back on the market several years ago, he was shocked by its transformation. Previous owners had carried out a gut renovation that hid its original features, including its stained glass windows and elaborate crown molding. They even covered the granite masonry facade and sanded down the ebonized wood floors. "The state of it depressed him," says John Kelly, who cofounded Lyons Kelly with Eoin Lyons, of his client.

As a passion project, the owner decided to restore the house to its regal former state. He had worked with Lyons and Kelly previously and knew their many talents. “I’m an architect, but I do mostly conservation projects, and Eoin is an interior designer,” Kelly explains. The pair, who have been a couple for 15 years, were not always professionally linked, but the unique combination of their skill sets, and Ireland’s stock of stately historic homes, meant that collaboration came naturally. They began working together a decade ago, “with nary a cross word since,” Lyons quips.

Their first order of business for the house was figuring out what was lost. Fortunately, clues were everywhere—a section of cornice behind a false ceiling in the bathroom; the outline of a doorway beneath a stripped back wall; the actual carved wooden doors, found discarded in an outbuilding. The rest of their piecing together came from their extensive knowledge of period houses, “but ultimately it’s not about making a museum,” Kelly says. They took creative liberties where they could.

Once the bones were restored, the duo began building up the new design. In the formal drawing room, for instance, they took cues from the bucolic views. “From that room, you’re looking out over the river,” explains Lyons, who incorporated the pastoral landscape by introducing subtle autumnal shades: flowing, rosy linen curtains; moss-colored armchairs by Bruno Moinard; and plush, rust-toned and turmeric throw pillows. Botanical motifs appear too, in the antique Italian chandeliers, formed of twisting metal branches and sprouting crystal leaves, and gilded Art Nouveau mirrors—one decorated with climbing vines, the other, wading herons. They kept the rest of the furniture relatively subdued in muted neutral hues—a camelback sofa by Michael Reeves, prim wooden Michael Mortel chairs from the 1940s, a handmade Donegal rug, and scalloped-edge wooden stools of their own design. They also added an occasional metallic element, like the wavy-brass Tom Faulkner coffee table that, according to Kelly, “catches the morning light.”

The dining room and study, however, were classified as “nighttime rooms,” Kelly says. “So we went for richer colors.” In the former, they started with the floral motif depicted in the burgundy, gold, and sage green rug by Irish designer Luke Irwin, which they matched with an olive-toned silk wallcovering, yellow Murano glass chandelier, oxblood leather chairs, and a 19th-century Georgian dining table that extends to seat up to 20 people. “This is his weekend house,” he adds. “So when he and his family are here, they’re often joined by many guests.”

In fact, to accommodate crowds of friends that descend on the home on the weekends, Lyons and Kelly carved out space for bedrooms wherever they could, including three on the ground level and four on the second story. They designed them to feel light and casual as a contrast to the comparatively formal shared spaces. The primary bedroom, which includes a dressing room and generous ensuite, is defined by hints of pattern, textured fabrics, and glossy, chestnut-hued antiques. “We wanted richness without being too fussy,” Lyons notes.

When the house is full, the owner and his friends and family make the most of the Irish countryside, walking along the River Liffey and exploring its surroundings. “It’s lovely and quiet at night; you can hear the water rushing past,” says Kelly, who adds that, in the daytime, you can spot foxes and herons along the grassy riverbanks. More than anything, the project has allowed their client to reconnect with the small-town life he left long ago. “The house is just a 10-minute walk from the village,” Kelly continues, “and more importantly, the local pub.”



The formal dining room is arguably the most dramatically rendered space in the entire house. Lyons and Kelly deftly mixed antiques from several eras, such as a glossy wooden Georgian dining table, a midcentury Murano glass chandelier, a 1950s-era mirror found at Carlton Davidson, and a 19th-century painting of Venice by Francesco Zanin.



In the drawing room, Lyons and Kelly chose warm colors that would complement the lush greenery that surrounds the River Liffey just outside the window. That included rose-toned linen curtains, mossy armchairs by [Bruno Moinard](#), 1940s-era chairs from [Michael Mortell](#), a white and taupe gradient patterned rug from [Limited Edition](#), a brass coffee table by [Tom Faulkner](#), and a patinated bronze floor lamp by Christian Liaigre.