





A family affair

Christmas for Cherry Menlove means spending time nestled in her 18th-century farmhouse in West Sussex with her closest family

PHOTOGRAPHS ALUN CALLENDER FEATURE KATIE HALLETT



‘Christmas Eve is my favourite day of the year,’ says Cherry Menlove. ‘It’s the anticipation of what’s to come. Each year my husband Robert and I collect the turkey, go for a pub lunch and then come back home to get ready to greet our families, who arrive in the early evening. This year there will be 17 of us: three generations from both mine and Robert’s sides of the family.’

Home for Cherry is a big part of the festive season and living in an 18th-century farmhouse near Petworth – complete with beams, open fire and enough rooms to host the whole family – makes for what she describes as ‘the perfect country Christmas’. This year will be even more special as it will be her and Robert’s first Christmas with their seven-month-old twins, Anaïs and Ned. ‘I’m already making them their first stockings in preparation: white felt with embellishments, embroideries and their initials sewn on,’ she says.

A family home

The couple relocated from Surrey to the storybook-like brick house last year, drawn to West Sussex’s big skies and open countryside. They knew they were after a period property

‘Living in an 18th-century farmhouse makes for the perfect country Christmas,’



Previous page Cherry made the stocking calendar hanging above the living room fireplace, as well as the green bow cushions. This page, clockwise from top left: ‘I try to make a different wreath for the door each year. This year I went for white feathers adorned with tiny white parcels,’ says Cherry; the Christmas tree is decorated with pastel baubles; the family loves spending time cosied up in the 18th-century farmhouse over Christmas; Emma Bridgewater plates have been teamed with John Lewis glasses



Cherry recently painted her pine dining furniture white to keep the room as light as possible. She made the chair backs from Designers Guild fabrics



and one that would be suitable for bringing up a family. 'The sense of homeliness drew us to the farmhouse – we saw it as a place where you could walk in the door and just relax,' explains Cherry. The traditional decor didn't put them off either. 'We felt we needed to balance the dark beams with light flooring and so switched the green carpets for cream ones, which immediately lightened things.' One of Cherry's favourite changes was transforming a small room around the back of the kitchen from a bland office into a walk-in pantry. The room was a real dream come true for me as I love to bake. We used wooden shelving trimmed with 1950s-style fabric to store jars filled with baking ingredients. The finishing touch was adding my own labels to them.'

Eye for restoration

Throughout the house, Cherry has kept the majority of the furniture and accessories white, pairing high street items with restored vintage pieces and her own handmade designs. 'I love thrifting and have been creative with furniture since I was a teenager – it's so much more satisfying to find something in one state, imagine how you can transform it and then see the plan through,' she says. With so many furniture]



This page, clockwise from top: The white rocking chair in the kitchen is from Laura Ashley. The other chair was found by the side of a road; a collection of vintage tins are displayed in the 1950s-style pantry; Robert has created a Union Jack motif from Fired Earth tiles; Christmas treats make great use of Cherry's china. Facing page: An Agfa, pale green cupboards and stone floor create a cosy country feel in the kitchen





makeovers on the go, Cherry eventually decided to show her creations online and, in 2005, launched her own website – a venture that has since become a full-time occupation. And how does Robert feel about Cherry's continual hunt for new projects? 'He loves it! In our previous home there did come a point when he said, "We've run out of space, you can't buy any more," but my style has evolved and I've become much more choosy. During the week he works in London as a banker but on weekends he enjoys helping out,' she says.

Time to relax

Christmas for the couple begins on 1st December: the tree is dressed in green and pink baubles – 'We want to steer away from anything too trad' – a handmade stocking advent calendar is stretched across the fireplace and candles are scattered throughout. During the rest of the month, Cherry works on preparing all the festive food, from mince pies to sausage rolls, so that by Christmas Eve she can unwind. 'We get so excited about Christmas that we just go all-out,' she says. 'The loveliest thing is having enough space for everyone to settle under one roof – we don't change out of our pyjamas much!'

To see more of Cherry's projects, visit cherrymenlove.com



CHERRY'S FAVOURITE ANTIQUES

1930s eiderdowns (above)

'I've collected them from various antiques shops in the area and have also bought some on eBay. They look lovely piled in bedrooms.'

Vintage travel trunks and suitcases (page 35)

'I love old trunks and suitcases. In the nursery I've even created a miniature wardrobe for Anais and Ned using one.'

Antique linens

'My favourite is a stone-coloured antique French linen tablecloth that I found at Garden House Antiques in Petworth.'

Vintage dog (page 28)

'My favourite Christmas "decoration" is my vintage dog called Dave. I found him in a great shop called Utter Clutter in Leominster. As he gets older, we have to stop the children from riding him around the room!'

Above Cherry has stuck to mostly white furniture in the master bedroom. Left: A washstand from a charity shop in Arundel has been used as a dressing table. Facing page, from left: 'I love flouncy curtains and found these in a junk shop in Leominster, Herefordshire,' says Cherry of the bathroom curtains; a chest found in a charity shop is used as a mini wardrobe to store Anais and Ned's clothes in the nursery. Cherry loves fairy lights and keeps them up all year round.

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