

English country house is about not trying too hard. It makes everyone feel happy and relaxed." She sums up contemporary ECH as "high on charm, low on posh".

That said, its roots are most definitely posh. The formula we think of as typical dates back to the postwar revamp of the surviving stateries by Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler's decorating business. The interiors firm, acquired in the 1940s by the American heiress Nancy Lancaster, made over her Oxfordshire home, Haseley Court, and created the



The full English

template for country-house chic, designed around entertaining.

Lancaster still has her fans today, notably Lady Annabel Astor, chief executive of Oka (also fairly posh — you may know her as the prime minister's mother-in-law). The company's catalogue features schemes inspired by Lancaster's genius, with uncluttered, low-key decor, antiques and textiles, and splashes of red. "When you look at her work, there is nothing dated," Astor says. "She used colour, a lightness of touch and a sense of scale to create the unexpected."

Today, the style is equally at home in country and town, period and contemporary architecture. The penthouse at Battersea Power →

£5,310

Set on 18th-century bronze castors, the Temple House Sofa (L200cm x D75cm x H78cm) has a black stained beechwood frame and hand-stitched buttoned upholstery. The price excludes fabric. virginiawhitecollection.com



£2,876

An acrylic tub in the bathroom is so not Downton. From the comprehensive range of cast-iron rolltops at Aston Matthews, here's the Brunel (170cm x 70cm). It has a white enamel interior, a battleship-grey exterior and handsome rivet details. astonmatthews.co.uk

