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# THE AUTUMN EDIT

WE REVEAL WHAT'S NEW, WHO'S WHO  
AND THIS SEASON'S NEW FABRIC COLLECTIONS

## The Rebirth of an English Country House: St Giles House by the Earl of Shaftesbury and Tim Knox (Rizzoli, £40)\*\*

**M**y very first visit to St Giles House in Dorset, the subject of this book, was one of the most memorable and extraordinary I have ever made to a great country house. I must have been taken there in around 2004, when it seemed as if this remarkable building, which had been in the ownership of the family of the Earls of Shaftesbury for more than 350 years, was about to come to a catastrophic end. I remember picking my way through rooms that were partially dismantled, their panelling heaped up in piles; I walked through the library with its collapsing bookcases and beautiful leather-bound books tumbling off the shelves into piles on the floor. In one room, stacks of full-length family portraits were streaked with white pigeon droppings. Outside, the house was scarred where wings had been shorn off, the gardens overgrown and unintelligible.

That this beautiful and fascinating book could ever be written is quite extraordinary; the reversal in fortunes of this important house seems incredible given the state it had fallen into. The credit is due to the co-author of this book – Nick Ashley-Cooper, the 12th Earl. He inherited the house in 2005 at the age of only 26 and, in 2012, he became the first earl to live there since 1961.

In an extremely candid and engaging memoir at the beginning of the book, the Earl describes his early life and the tragic events that led to him giving up a successful career as a DJ in New York and taking on the mantle of an English aristocratic estate owner. Extraordinarily, as a child, he never

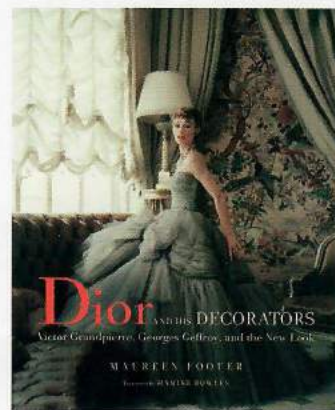
went inside St Giles House and he describes his first magical encounter with the chaotic hulk that he had inherited.

One of the great things about his narrative is that he fulsomely acknowledges all the help, support and inspiration that enabled him and his wife, Dinah, to pull off one of the most stunning country-house rescues of our generation. Nick's older brother, Anthony, who died only a few weeks after inheriting, is credited with beginning the revival of the estate. Historic England (then called English Heritage) and the team of professionals that Nick engaged also come out of the story well.

However, it is the personal commitment that shines through these pages, and this should be an inspiration to anyone contemplating even a modest restoration. Few will have to deal with the Earl's appalling legacy of leaking roofs, rampant dry rot and the scars of partial demolition. But we can all learn from his sensitive restoration.

For example, instead of meticulously reproducing every inch of lost panelling in the dining room, he has left great areas of exposed brickwork as a reminder of the traumas that the house has endured. It is both a clever reference to the past and a surprisingly effective treatment for an otherwise potentially lugubrious room.

For anyone interested in country houses, conservation, restoration or interiors, the story of St Giles House will inspire and amaze. The finished result is beautiful and traditional, yet also strikingly modern in execution and finish. All this is shown off brilliantly by Justin Barton's lovely photographs, while the history of the family is expertly covered in a section at the back written by Tim Knox. **Simon Thurley, historian**



**DIOR AND HIS DECORATORS: VICTOR GRANDPIERRE, GEORGES GEFROY, AND THE NEW LOOK**

*by Maureen Footer, with a foreword by Hamish Bowles (Vendome, £50)*

The world fell in love with Christian Dior on February 12, 1947 – the debut of his seismic 'New Look' collection – and continued for 10 years until the couturier's death at 52. Dior the man was balding, plump and shy (a 'bland country curate made out of pink marzipan', thought Cecil Beaton). But Dior the taste-maker was a tour de force. He recognised, early on, the power of a visual vocabulary in creating a brand. Although Dior headlines, this is the story of his two anointed decorators, the connoisseur Georges Geffroy and the less well-known Victor Grandpierre. Both began in fashion: Geffroy as a designer with Patou and Grandpierre as a photographer. Maureen Footer spins a terrific story, weaving into their rarefied world of passementerie and *peau de soie*, tales of the fabulously rich: the López-Willshaws, the Guinneses, Charles de Beistegui, Baron de Redé. The stories bowl you along on a puff of pink chiffon; the facts are eyebrow-raising. At Maison Dior, standards were so high that 17 seamstresses might share a sewing machine because almost everything was done by hand. And for Geffroy, the *dernier cri* in good taste was 'a handsome Spanish butler'. Who knew? **Robin Muir** □

