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CLASSIC *revival*

Marston Luce's house in Washington is an object lesson in subtlety and style

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PHOTOGRAPHS JODY STEWART

LIVING ROOM
Marston found this 18th-century trumeau mirror in a Paris flea market.
Similar mirror, Spencer Swaffer Antiques, 01903 882132, spencerswaffer.co.uk. **Similar slipper chair**, the Stratfield, £1,680, Sean Cooper, 01264 811008, seancooper.co.uk.

LIVING ROOM

"An open fire is an important accessory to entertaining," says Marston, whose Federal period mantel is from 1810.

Similar fire surround, Chesney's, 020 7627 1410, chesneys.co.uk. **Similar sofas and chairs**, Hamilton range sofa, £4,130; chair, £2,450; both Beaumont & Fletcher, 020 7352 5594, beaumontandfletcher.com. **Bespoke birdcage**, Rayment Wirework, 01843 821628, raymentwire.com.

EXTERIOR

Colonial-style houses are typical in this part of Washington, DC. Minor alterations to the door and porch have enhanced the front elevation.

DINING ROOM

Floor-to-ceiling windows were installed to introduce more light. "I replaced a single door into the kitchen with pocket doors that slide into the wall (below right)," Marston explains.

Curtains in Vervain Rennie 02, £125.20m, Alton-Brooke, 020 7376 7008, alton-brooke.co.uk. **Similar antique Oushak carpet**, Persian Carpet Gallery, 01798 343344, persiancarpetgallery.co.uk.

With its cottage ornée good looks and surrounding woodland, you could be forgiven for assuming that Marston Luce's home is set in the middle of the countryside. You would be only partly wrong; it is in the middle of sprawling Rock Creek Park, a woodland that cuts a swathe through the northwest part of Washington, DC.

It was the woods that look in at the windows and the large garden behind that attracted Marston and his late wife Julie to the property, when they were planning a move in 1991. "Rock Creek is like a great lung for the city," Marston explains, and it is abundant with wildlife, "which is another reason why I love the place", he says. The house is also a short ride from Marston's antiques shop in Georgetown, the 18th-century part of Washington, DC, where he deals in French and Swedish furniture and decorative pieces.

Built in 1929, the building is in a style known locally as Center Hall Colonial, which Marston says sums it up perfectly. "These houses have a classic layout, with the hall down the middle, living room on the left, dining room on the right and kitchen behind that." If that sounds rather predictable, then Marston agrees.

Many of the changes that he and Julie made to the building in the beginning involved removing the details that contributed to its plainness. A front door was replaced and a keystone added to the porch to give interest. The staircase had an industrial balustrade that did visual battle with its surroundings so Marston designed a replacement in a

KITCHEN

"The kitchen cabinets are in the softwood, burr, which is similar to the wood of Christmas trees," says Marston.

Similar cabinet style, Henley, Neptune, 01793 881144, neptune.co.uk. **Similar polished concrete worktops** (far right), White & Reid, 023 9264 1641, whiteandreid.co.uk.

STUDY

The comfortable sofa and antique French painted screen give the study the relaxed look of an alternative living room.

Similar flooring, Oriental Sisal E103 in Light Honey, £52sq m, Crucial Trading, 01562 743747, crucial-trading.com. **Similar pendant light**, Curly Oakleaf chandelier CL354, £1,520, Bella Figura, 01394 461111, bella-figura-uk.com.

MAIN BEDROOM
Combining shutters with white pull-up blinds provides privacy without any loss of light. The bathroom (below right) tucks off the sitting area.

Similar Victorian metal four-poster, Victorian Brass Bed Company, 01730 812287, victorianbrassbeds.co.uk. **Bed hangings**, Vine F0065 in Seafoam, £189m; **lined with** Small Check in Seafoam, £30m; both Chelsea Textiles, 020 7584 0111, chelseatextiles.com.

"Decorating and furnishing is something that has happened over a span of years, without forcing the pace. It's a bit like brewing tea; you need to let it steep."

rustic version of Chinese Chippendale. They stripped black stain from the pickled oak floor in the hall and kitchen, polished it to reflect the light and so began to transform the house into something that is anything but bland.

With a keen understanding of architectural detailing, the Luces adopted a pick-and-mix approach, adding a Gothic cornice in the hall and living room, and replacing a plain plaster ceiling in the dining room with a coffered ceiling. The high 1920s mantel in the dining room was badly proportioned, so that was taken out in favour of one in carved wood dating from 1850, originally from Rhode Island.

Alongside the winning architectural mélange ran an understanding of how the scale of rooms could be improved by emphasising verticals, so tall bookcases were built in and windows enlarged. "Houses were built differently in the 1920s," Marston observes, "and the focus then was on keeping heat in. We found the windows here were small and

GUEST BEDROOM

Marston enjoys Gothic furniture and his collection includes the American Gothic Revival side chair.

Curtains (below), **bed valance and cushions**, Pomeroy 9000/02 in Pumpkin on Natural, £70m, Blithfield at Tissus d'Hélène, 020 7352 9977, tissusdhelene.co.uk. **Similar mirror**, The French House, 020 7371 7573, thefrenchhouse.co.uk.

HALL

The simplicity of this scheme directs attention to the early 19th century papier peint on the wall. Its title, Les Musards, an idiom for idlers, refers to the well-dressed throng milling about on the street outside a book store.

often too high in the walls. In the living room, we replaced a pair of small windows with glazing down to the floor and installed French doors as well. Then we built a pair of bookcases up to the ceiling. Changes like these, and leaving most of the windows unadorned, have opened up rooms and made them lighter and more transparent."

The dense woodland at the back of the house could not be fully enjoyed until they took the decision to extend along the back of the house, almost to its full width, which yielded an additional seating and breakfast area. "The house is on a sloping site," Marston explains, "so rooms at the back are elevated and the outlook is dramatically beautiful from spring to fall. In the winter snow, it's like being suspended in lace."

The kitchen was redesigned two years ago and is now arranged around an island unit that has a worktop cast in concrete with ammonites scattered through it. "Anyone who visits the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History can buy these there," Marston reveals. "I also asked the man who made the counter to set into it an intaglio ring that I had bought for Julie in Paris 25 years ago, so I see that every day.

"Although it has five bedrooms, this is quite an intimate house," Marston adds. "Decorating and furnishing is something that has happened over a span of years without forcing the pace. It's a bit like brewing tea; you need to let it steep to get the best cup." ■

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