



Simply perfect

These two historic Kent houses elegantly exemplify their architectural styles

SIMPLER and less ornate than buildings of the late-17th-century Jacobean period, more graceful and more decorative than those of the Georgian era, the distinctive small manors built during Queen Anne's brief reign from 1702 to 1714, remain among the most sought-after of English country houses.

Described by Pevsner as 'a perfect example of a Queen Anne house', seen from a distance, Leacon Hall at Warehome in Kent looks every inch 'a country house in miniature', says William Peppitt of Savills (020-7016 3789), who quotes a guide price of £3.25 million for the Grade II*-listed hall, with its idyllic 57-acre estate, handily located 7½ miles from both Ten-terden and Ashford.

Importantly, at a time when the implications of the new Stamp Duty (SDLT) regime are still being absorbed by the country-house market, anyone buying the Leacon Hall estate may well be able to benefit from the 4% rate of SDLT applicable to 'mixed use' properties, Mr Peppitt suggests. Alternatively, the estate can be bought in up to four lots, with the main house, the converted oast house and lodge



and the wonderful gardens and grounds created with input from landscape architects Marian Boswall and the late Anthony du Gard Pasley being offered separately from the farmland.

Elegant Leacon Hall was built in 1708 by the self-styled 'gentleman and grazier' Thomas Hodges, who supplemented his farming income with a rather more profitable trade in smuggling French brandy into England—an occupation that locals say funded the building of many a grand house in the area at that time.

The hall stands on a low hill called The Leacon, which looks out across Romney Marsh and towards Dun-

'A perfect example of a Queen Anne house': classic Leacon Hall at Warehome (top) boasts light and airy rooms that retain the house's historic character (below). £3.25m

geness, not far from the ports of Rye and New Romney. Hodges had two small windows built into the roof, one facing east towards Dungeness, the other facing west, at which candles would be lit to help guide the smugglers across the 12 miles of dangerous marshland between the coast and the house. He also commissioned a local craftsman—who had painted the Royal Arms and prayer boards in the Church of St Matthew, Warehome—to paint the arch to the main staircase depicting a lion and a unicorn that still survives, with the initials 'K H' and the date 1708.

The fact that Leacon Hall itself, let alone its interior, survived at all was probably due to the intervention of Lady Millais, the feisty daughter-in-law of the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Sir John Everett Millais, who sold the house to the father of a previous owner in 1941. But although he and his family moved to Yorkshire to escape the dangers of Hellfire Corner, as this part of Kent was known during the Second World War, Lady Millais stayed on and successfully resisted all efforts by the army to requisition the house, insisting that it wasn't hers to assign.

During their 10-year tenure, the present owners of Leacon Hall have



sympathetically refurbished the property while preserving its historic character and integrity. In fact, for Mr Peppitt, the only concession to modern living is the splendid kitchen/breakfast room with its extensive range of free-standing pieces by Fired Earth, which may be available by separate negotiation.

Typical Queen Anne features abound: high ceilings, heavy painted panelled doors with deep architraves and brass door furniture, sash windows, working shutters, exposed wood flooring and panelling and period-style radiators.

Smuggling funded many a grand home

Leacon Hall's manageable 8,288sq ft of living space includes an impressive reception hall, four fine reception rooms, a spacious master suite, seven further bedrooms and three bathrooms. The gardens are a captivating mix of styles—formal lawns flanked by beech hedging, deep herbaceous borders planted for year-round colour, an Italian garden and a walled garden—and, screened from the house by beech and yew hedging, a heated saline swimming pool with a paved surround edged with mature lavender is an irresistible magnet for bees and butterflies.

Almost 200 years after it was first conceived, the Queen Anne style of architecture provided inspiration for followers of the Arts-and-Crafts movement, notably Sir Edwin Lutyens, whose Grade I-listed The Salutation in the medieval Cinque Port of Sandwich, Kent, was built in the Queen Anne style for the Farrer family in 1911–12.

In 1889, Lutyens's mentor, Sir Ernest George, collaborated with Harold Peto to design one of Ramsgate's most iconic Arts-and-Crafts houses, the green-tile-hung East Court in exclusive Victoria Parade, for tobacco magnate Sir William Henry Wills, later Lord Winterstoke.

On Sir William's death in 1911, the house was left—along with a sizeable fortune—to his niece and adopted daughter, Dame Janet Stancomb-Wills, Ramsgate's first lady mayor and its great benefactress. Following



Its interiors (above) now painstakingly restored, Arts-and-Crafts East Court commands the Ramsgate sea-front (top). £2.35m

her death, her handsome Ramsgate house was described in *COUNTRY LIFE*, in April 1933, as 'a modern residence, facing the sea, with inner and outer halls, four reception rooms, a billiard room, a boudoir, about 14 bed and dressing rooms, three bathrooms and offices'.

The house was bought by Sir John Bayley, knighted for his services to education, and, in 1952, became a Church of England children's home and, later, a school for dyslexic children.

Following the school's closure in 2009, East Court found itself back in *COUNTRY LIFE*, with Strutt & Parker in Canterbury seeking 'offers around £2.5 million' for the house, which, the agents maintained, 'despite years of institutional use, remained fundamentally unchanged from its original design, and given the right investment, could easily be reinstated to its former grandeur'. Rescue came

quickly with the arrival on the scene of John Burningham, the multi-award-winning author and illustrator of children's books, and his wife, Helen Oxenbury, another much-loved illustrator.

The busy couple were already in their early seventies and living in north London when they embarked on the painstaking renovation of East Court, trawling specialists and the internet for authentic period pieces and materials. A Polish master carpenter was employed to work his way through the house, reinstating its original Arts-and-Crafts interior with great skill, under the unerring eye of its enthusiastic owners.

With the restoration almost complete, and East Court ready to move into, the owners have reached a crossroads in their lives, as Mr Burningham explains: 'We had planned to live there permanently, but we're both so busy that it would have meant jumping on and off trains all the time and we weren't prepared to live like that.'

Thus landmark East Court, which boasts a magnificent reception hall, four grand reception rooms, a large master suite, four first-floor bedrooms, six second-floor rooms and an annexe, is back on the market with Strutt & Parker (01227 451123) at a guide price of £2.35m.

Hopefully, the sale will prove to be another bestseller for this remarkable creative partnership. 