



# A GOTHIC ROMANCE

Singer-songwriter Lynsey de Paul only planned to live in her Victorian villa for a year, but a decade on, she is still entirely devoted to it

FEATURE TRICIA WELCH PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT SANDERSON



MEET THE OWNER

Lynsey de Paul, who is a singer/songwriter  
**PREVIOUS HOMES** 'My first place was a rented flat in north London,' says Lynsey. 'Next I bought a house where I had Michael Palin as a neighbour. I moved to two other houses near here, before buying this place.'  
**CURRENT PROPERTY** Victorian semi-detached villa in north London, built in 1894  
**ROOMS** Hall, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, music studio, cloakroom, five bedrooms, three bathrooms  
**PURCHASED** 1999



When Lynsey de Paul initially moved into her Victorian house, she only planned to stay for a year or so. 'I saw it as a stop-gap property,' she explains. 'I'd sold my previous home for a handsome profit and planned to take my time finding the place of my dreams, but I didn't want to waste money on renting, so it made sense to buy in the meantime.'

'The house had been neglected decoratively for years. I knew, before I moved in, that I would have to rethink every room – and fast. The wallpaper throughout was so garish it made me giddy, the kitchen and bathrooms needed updating, and the whole house felt unloved. The night I moved in, I lay there in bed, surrounded by boxes, thinking, "Why have I left a perfectly decorated home to live somewhere in need of a complete makeover?"'

Fortunately, Lynsey is a good organiser. 'I knew I couldn't put up with the house as it was, and before I moved, I had started organising teams of decorators,' she says. 'I set a target of three weeks to do up the rooms, with 23 December as the deadline.'

Although Lynsey had misgivings on her very first night in the property, she knew that, ultimately, she had been right to buy it. 'I saw through the hideous wallpaper and tired old fittings, and realised the house had enormous potential,' she recalls. 'It had lovely proportions with high ceilings and lots of period features, including beautiful wood panelling, some fabulous leaded windows, intricate cornicing ▶

**1 KITCHEN** The existing dark-wood Chalon units were repainted, then Lynsey teamed them with a carved oak sideboard inherited from her grandmother. **Cabinetry**, from £30,000, Chalon [01458 254600, chalon.com], finished in **Old White oil eggshell**, £38 for £2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball [01202 876141, farrow-ball.com]. For a similar **dining suite**, try Alfie chairs, £122 each; Little table, £970, all John Lewis [08456 049049, johnlewis.com]



**SITTING ROOM** The colour palette used throughout the house was inspired by the 19th-century shell mirror, which Lynsey found at a London gallery. For a similar mirror, try the Seashell design, £175, Papilio (01825 723434, papilio.co.uk). Walls in Lime White estate emulsion, £25.50 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball (01202 876141, farrow-ball.com)



and most of the original fireplaces, except for the one in the drawing room, which I replaced with a large French marble repro.'

The former owners had also made some structural improvements, including removing a wall between the sitting and dining rooms to provide an impressive living-cum-entertaining space. 'This area was large enough to accommodate my biggest items of furniture, including a Gothic-style dining table and chairs, two sofas and a huge Chinese armoire,' says Lynsey. Pride of place, though, is the grand piano, on which singer/songwriter Lynsey writes many of her songs. 'My latest song is an anthem called *Til You Come Back Home*, written for Help for Heroes, a charity formed to help those wounded in Britain's current conflicts,' she says. 'It is hoped to be in the shops by November.'

During those busy first three weeks, garish wallpapers, paintwork and tiling were replaced with a palette of mushroom, beige and cream, based on the colours of a Victorian shell mirror that hangs over the sitting room fireplace. 'The decor now provides the ideal backdrop for my furnishings, especially the antique dark-brown carved-oak pieces,' she says.

As well as redecorating the house from top to bottom, updating the wiring and laying beige, velvety carpet throughout the reception rooms, Lynsey also replaced the tired-looking bathrooms. Her en suite was the first to be completed and now features a white slipper bath and modern sink and WC, with a glass table and a wall-mounted shelving unit to display her perfume bottles and silver trinkets. 'This was the only room that proved to be a decorating nightmare,' says Lynsey. 'Most of the team were brilliant, except the plumbers I employed to refit this ►

**DINING ROOM** When Lynsey first saw her dining suite in Liberty, it was too expensive for her. But 18 months later, when she discovered that it still hadn't sold, she offered just half the price and the store manager accepted. Liberty (020 7573 9645, liberty.co.uk) sells similar chairs, from £1,200 each. The lectern came from an antiques shop. For similar, try Robert Mills (0117 955 6542, rmills.co.uk), which sells a brass eagle lectern for £2,800

FAVOURITE FEATURE

*Gothic-style carved oak is my passion – I have special pieces in almost every room*



## Glamorous London home

**MASTER BEDROOM** *The bed in this room is a huge 7ft. 'I had it made years ago when I was engaged to someone who was 6ft 4in,' reveals Lynsey.*

For a similar bed, try the Thyme bedstead, £1,675 for a 4ft 6in frame. And So To Bed [0808 144 4343, andsoebed.co.uk]. Classical White design, £464, Sweetpea & Willow [0845 257 2627, sweetpeaandwillow.co.uk] is a good match for the chaise longue



**LAST WORD** *'You've heard of a minimalist – well, I'm actually a maximalist'*



bathroom. The first time I ran the bath, the water gushed all over the floor as they'd installed the taps in the wrong place. I had to rip up all the stone tiles, which had only just been put down, and start all over again.'

Lynsey is particularly happy with her redecorated master bedroom, which has a feminine, boudoir feel. The theme here includes pretty accessories – many of which are gifts from friends – faux-suede curtains, sumptuous cushions, a classic chaise longue and more plush flooring. 'The carpets were the last thing to go down,' she says. 'I was told they were stuck in a depot and couldn't be delivered in time to meet my December deadline, but the carpet fitter kindly went to collect them for me and worked overtime so that I could have them by Christmas Day.'

'Looking back, it's funny to think I ever imagined this as being a stop-gap home, because as soon as I had finished making it my own, it seemed perfect in every way,' says Lynsey. 'I've viewed other properties over the years, but I've never seen anything that would suit me better than this house. Somebody once said to me, "There's nothing as permanent as temporary", and they're absolutely right.'

**1 BATHROOM** *Before its revamp, Lynsey described her bathroom as, 'the grimmest place on the planet', but now it has a sumptuous, spa-like quality.* French-style slipper bath, £1,000, Tiles & Baths Direct [020 8202 2223, tilesandbathsdirect.co.uk]. Similar bath and shower mixer, Balmoral in nickel, £198, Victorian Bathrooms [0845 130 6911, victorianbathrooms.com]