HOME FROM HOME

A warm, welcoming interior with a carefully curated mix of vintage and custom-made furniture gives Ett Hem in Stockholm the feel of a well-loved house, rather than a hotel, finds Guy Dittrich.

TEXT GUY DITTRICH | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY
It's hard to put your finger on what is so special about En Hen, a 12-room hotel in the embassy quarter of Stockholm. En Hen translates as 'a home', and it feels as though it has been lived in for ages, even though it only opened in 2012—everything is in just the right place and gives the impression of being brand new, though 'new' here means in great condition rather than fresh out of the box. It is as if, simultaneously, the house has been repaired, the curtains laundered, the original furniture recently returned from the upholsterers, the bookshelves reordered, the plants recently pruned—they way most of us would like our homes, if only we could find the time.

Owner Jeanette Mix bought the sturdy, brick corner building in 2006. Built in 1905, it was originally furnished in the Arts and Crafts style epitomized by the work of its first owner, Carl Larsson, a decorative yet practical approach that celebrated the design of the everyday things found in a home.

And a home is exactly what Jeanette wanted. Even before she bought the house she had begun to assemble her dream team. Local architectural practice Lantbruk Arkitektur was engaged to ensure that the building could be returned to its original configuration following its use as an office from the Filtris onwards, and project architect Magnus Steenmark had the task of gaining planning permission in a deeply conservative area—something which took three years to attain—in order to add fire escapes and a lift. He also replaced the original roof structure from the inside, creating five additional attic rooms, in one of which—a duplex—the sloping ceiling has been ingeniously paneled in dark wood. This job alone took two craftsmen 12 weeks to complete. 'There was no cheating,' says Jeanette. 'The quality of craftsmanship was extremely important to me.'

She deliberated long and hard over her choice of interior designer. It was during a dinner with her husband at Matthias Dahlgren's restaurant in Stockholm's Grand Hotel, on the waterfront, that she saw the balance of international and Scandinavian design she wanted.

So began a relationship with the designer's British partner, Ise Crawford of Studioe, and an immediate friendship was struck. When asked what was the best value for money in the whole project, Jeanette responds without hesitation, 'Ise Crawford.' For her part, Ise describes her client as 'terrific and courageous. Prepared to go beyond her comfort zone.'

And true comfort is the end result. 'We don't just do the interior, we design the experience,' explains Ise. 'It goes way beyond interior design to make a strong emotional impact, as well as make a place feel instantly comfortable.'

This comfort comes from the considered curation of new and old, the timeless and the living. Several tables, sofas and the vast wall cabinet in the kitchen were designed by Studioe, as were boxes and candle holders in copper and brass from her new collection for Georg Jensen, and a desk lamp from Wästberg. The company also sourced many antiques, including chandeliers fitted with real candles and the large ceramic stoves in several of the bedrooms.

In the library, a feeling of timelessness is achieved by the Vintex '600' shelving system designed by Dietrich lann, filled with artfully displayed but genuinely readable books, and the vintage Kaare Klint leather chairs clustered around the dining table. The living room of the design is the preponderance of plants—not the ubiquitous flashiness of orchids but the realistic homeliness of ferns and trailing plants. Equally, the small garden, designed by Ulf Nordfjell, winner of Best in Show at the 2009 Chelsea Flower Show, adds to the sense of calm realism. 'It is a shady garden so the colours are whites and soft blues,' he says, 'with lots of pots of seasonal flowers to give an atmosphere of being at home.'

The whole house works on a human scale, with the layout and interconnectivity of the spaces encouraging real use. Walking through the kitchen, with one of the chefs preparing dinner, to the glasshouse and garden beyond, seems totally natural. As it would, no doubt, in Jeanette Mix's own home...