



Bright colours zing against the dark walls of the living room, which are painted in Mole's Breath by Farrow & Ball. The yellow armchair is from Hunter Jones. The floral paintings, collected over the years, are from auctions and car boot sales.



Brimming with charm

Filled with colour and character, this diminutive house in the heart of Rye proves that small really is beautiful

FEATURE AMY MAYNARD PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD GADSBY

The Owners

Michael Jones and Michael Beatt (known as Mikey) who together run interiors company Hunter Jones, plus their dog, Daisy. Michael also works at Merchant & Mills in Rye.

The Property

A Victorian terraced cottage that sits on a pretty street in the medieval town of Rye, East Sussex. It has two bedrooms, a sitting room, a galley kitchen, bathroom and patio.



T

he whitewashed exterior of Michael Jones and Michael (Mikey) Beatt's Victorian home gives little clue as to the delights that lie beyond its front door. Stepping over the threshold, visitors are greeted by colour and character in spades, with intriguing collections at every turn. Dark grey walls on the ground floor provide a neutral backdrop for their collection of gilt-framed floral still lifes – picked up at flea markets over the years – and cushions and kilims in rich shades of red, ochre and teal.

'We don't follow any style rules but just fill our home with the things we love,' says Michael, who is responsible for choosing most of the furniture. 'I'm into the details,' says Mikey, adding that he is the one who tends towards obsession from time to time. 'For a few weeks I'll be fixated on finding the perfect candlesticks,' he says. 'And then I'll move on to something ▶'

'The couple were won over by Rye's half-timbered houses and the picture-perfect cobbled streets.'

else. It can be quite specific, like 1970s Wedgwood glass or Victorian mantel dogs.' All are in evidence, thoughtfully arranged on shelves and above the fireplaces throughout the house.

The couple moved to Rye nine years ago, prompted by their desire to devote more time to their newly launched homewares business, Hunter Jones. 'We wanted to expand and start adding textiles, candles and ceramics,' says Mikey, who was working in sales at the time, while Michael was working in product development. 'We were living in Camberwell in south-east London and we knew we could halve our



ABOVE The blue sofa in the long, narrow sitting room is from SofaSofa and the cushions are from Hunter Jones. The pretty desk is from Brewhouse Salvage in New Romney and the mirror is French. **LEFT** The couple love to rootle around car boot sales where they have picked up all manner of things, including pieces of coral and religious statuary.

overheads by moving out to the countryside. It would also give us the freedom to put our energies into the business.'

Situated on the edge of Romney Marsh, a few miles inland from the sea, Rye has the air of both a seaside town and a country village. The couple discovered the area while attending a friend's birthday party one weekend. Won over by its half-timbered houses and the picture-perfect cobbled streets that meander up to an ancient church whose spire can be seen for miles around, they started house hunting. 'We had a beautiful weekend,' Michael recalls. 'It felt like the town was evolving - new shops were opening and things were happening.'

The couple soon found a small fisherman's cottage in the old town. 'I loved the house straightaway. It was the attic bedroom that sold it to me because it's just gorgeous, tucked away in the eaves,' says Michael. ▶



The galley kitchen is painted in Farrow & Ball's Ammonite. Michael and Mikey constructed the wall rail from a piece of plumbing pipe and an old light fitting, which they copper-leafed. The bowls on the draining board are Pacific Porcelain by Royal Doulton.



LEFT The stairway serves as a mini gallery and includes a montage of passport photos from a birthday celebration. **ABOVE** Some of the couple's collection of old corals is on display on the upstairs landing. 'Coral is so beautiful and dramatic looking. It's hard to come by and we always make sure what we buy is antique,' says Mikey. The blue and white tile and beaker are both by Evie May Adams.

Though tiny at just 2.7 metres wide, the two-bedroom property is the perfect showcase for their many and varied collections of art and antiques. Beyond redecorating, they have largely left the space untouched, though dated units in the kitchen were replaced, and open shelves installed along the walls, making good use of the limited space.

While the ground floor is a cosy mix of colourful rugs and cushions, and the furniture is upholstered in jewel-toned velvets and linens, upstairs the mood is lighter and brighter – the bedrooms and bathroom, painted in pale chalky shades of pink and blue, feel restful and calm. Everywhere one looks there are thoughtfully arranged antiques and objects – the walls hung with a mix of

paintings and prints and, in the bathroom, there is a charming group of antique hand mirrors. 'We trawled the many car boot sales in the area and spent hours at Rye Auction Galleries and Watsons Auctioneers in Heathfield,' says Mikey, adding that they also source things when on holiday, taking time to seek out artists and makers in search of unique pieces to bring home.

'We have a full house now,' admits Mikey, 'so we are trying to buy less.' They sell collections they've had enough of, 'or we move them to a less prominent position'. Achieving this mix has been a slow and organic process: Michael and Mikey try to steer clear of what's in fashion, ►

'It was the attic bedroom that sold the house to me because it's just gorgeous, tucked away in the eaves.'



Layers of heathery colours make for a restful master bedroom. The walls are in Setting Plaster by Farrow & Ball. The bed linen is from Merchant & Mills and the cushions from Beata Heuman. The painting is by local artist Karl Terry.

'It's easy for anyone to have a nice home, but unless you trust your instincts, you won't make it yours.'



The couple painted the bathroom woodwork in Farrow & Ball's Inchyra Blue. They bought the antique mirror frame above the bath in Hastings and added the mirror glass. The rug is vintage Persian.



preferring to be led by their hearts. 'We are drawn to exotic pieces, like Persian and Moroccan accessories. But generally, when we like something, we go for it and make it work. We don't think about it too much,' says Michael.

Life in Rye has certainly lived up to their expectations. 'After living in London, the Sussex countryside feels a more natural fit,' says Michael. 'We both grew up surrounded by greenery, so this feels like coming home.' What's more, the business has gone from strength to strength. They now have their own shop off the high street, which has allowed them to expand their own range and to add local handmade ceramics. 'We try to support up-and-coming potters,' says Mikey.

It's very much a joint venture – Mikey is the face of Hunter Jones while Michael works as general manager at draper Merchant & Mills just around the corner. Their homewares have gone down a storm in the area and it's not unusual to walk into a house in Rye and its environs and see a Hunter Jones rug in the hallway. The couple's laid-back aesthetic has attracted a real following. 'It's easy for anyone to have a nice home,' says Michael, 'but unless you trust your instincts, you won't make it yours.' In filling the house with treasures collected over the years, that's exactly what Michael and Mikey have done, and their home brims with charm as well as personality. 📍



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

A collection of antique and vintage hand mirrors is mounted on the bathroom wall; the spare bedroom is painted in Oval Room Blue by Farrow & Ball. The chair is one of a pair from McCully & Crane, Rye (the other one is in the living room). The print of Henry VIII came from a friend; Michael and Mikey bought the portrait of an unknown woman at Strand Quay Antiques in Rye.

