

# Emotional rescue

A restored house in Rye is a sanctuary for two ex-Londoners and their rehomed dogs. By Emma Love. Photographs by Bruce Hemming



**The sitting-room** The ground-floor sitting-room was painted in Farrow & Ball's Hague Blue (farrow-ball.com). 'We wanted to make this room like a cosy gentlemen's club,' Gareth McCully explains. Animal heads from Colonial Soldier in Kew (colonialsoldier.com) add a further masculine touch. The pink armchair was part of a suite bought at auction in Heathfield (watsonauctioneers.com); the mismatched cushions and rug are from the owners' own shop.



**F**our years ago Gareth McCully and Marcus Crane were living in Hackney in east London when they decided they wanted a calmer life in the country. They searched Cornwall and parts of France for a place that felt right, but were eventually drawn to Rye in East Sussex. ‘You get the best of both worlds here, the countryside and the seaside,’ McCully, who is a visual merchandiser for

an independent fashion store in London, says. ‘Loads of artists live here and the town has a creative vibe. Plus it gives you the chance to start living a bit rather than the treadmill you get in London.’

Although their intention was to slow things down, the pair took on a challenge when they bought a dilapidated end-of-terrace Edwardian house. When they first saw it, the rooms were so

full of junk that the estate agent thought it was unsafe for them to go inside. But the pair overlooked the mess and saw the redeeming features of the house: several original fireplaces, three floors with a basement kitchen and an open-plan dining area, and a secure, walled garden for their ever-growing family of rescue dogs (they currently have seven).

McCully stayed initially in London, while Crane,

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**The living- and dining-room** The open-plan lower-ground floor looks out on to a walled garden at the back of the house. The dresser, bought from a friend, has been filled with a mix of practical crockery and glasses and knick-knacks such as the MEN’S CLUB HOUSE sign, which was bought from Classic Chaps ([classicchaps.co.uk](http://classicchaps.co.uk)), a vintage men’s clothing shop in Rye. The dining-table was bought at Pippa Deeley Auction in Bodiam ([pippadeeley.com](http://pippadeeley.com)).





who had been working as a florist for Wild at Heart, moved to Rye immediately to oversee the building work. It lasted nearly a year. 'There was hardly any wiring and only one tap in the garden that worked. We had to rip everything out and strip it all back,' Crane recalls. One of the biggest tasks was re-jigging the layout of the first floor, converting a bedroom into a large bathroom (pre-

viously there was only a tiny shower room off the kitchen) and opening up the attic to create a second floor. A new staircase leads up to an open-plan guest room and bathroom.

Today the house is a mostly neutral backdrop for the secondhand finds that Crane seeks out for the antiques shop he opened nearby in 2009. McCully Crane was launched after the building

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**The kitchen** The units in the basement kitchen are from Ikea ([ikea.com](http://ikea.com)), but the room has been personalised with the striking DANISH BACON sign on the wall. 'It was a lucky, £20 eBay find,' Crane says. 'It was really undersold on the website, and when it arrived I was so excited because I hadn't realised it would have this lovely patina.' Other pictures include a black-and-white photograph of George Best, found at an auction.

**The living area** McCully and Crane in their lower-ground living area. The L-shaped leather sofa was another auction find. 'In our first two years in this house we got through five sofas,' Crane says. 'This one the dogs can't do anything to, and the best thing is that we can all fit on it.'

works on the house were finished, and started out selling the furniture from their home in London, which had been in storage. Now it specialises in vintage furniture and accessories unearthed in markets and bought at auction. There is taxidermy and needlepoint, bell jars and industrial task lighting. Crane admits to often getting so attached to things in the shop that he brings them





home. 'I have to be really disciplined otherwise the house would be full,' he says. There is also an interior design arm to the business, with recent projects including the George hotel in Rye and the Tregulland holiday cottages in north Cornwall.

There are stories attached to many of the pieces that fill the rooms. A low 1930s chair in the attic is one of a pair from Crane's childhood bedroom; a

slightly dented gold mirror in the living-room was one he helped himself to when he moved out of a rented house years ago (he replaced it with a new one); the velvet curtains that normally hang in the bedroom are currently at the mender's because the dogs ripped them down. 'They'll have a few stitch marks, but I think it adds to their story,' Crane shrugs. Much about the house is designed to

accommodate the dogs, many of them from nearby Hornchurch Animal Rescue. There are few coffee tables to be knocked over or cushions to be chewed. And when accidents do happen, the laidback pair chalk it up to life. As Marcus concludes, 'A lot of what we like is because of what's happened to it. We like a dent in things, a bit of wear and tear.'

*mccullyandcrane.com*

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**The bedroom** A pine bed bought on eBay was painted white and covered with a throw Crane found at the Sunbury Antiques Market at Kempton Park ([sunburyantiques.com](http://sunburyantiques.com)). 'I got a few for the shop and stole this one for the house – something that happens quite a lot,' he says. The antelope head is from Colonial Soldier in Kew ([colonialsoldier.com](http://colonialsoldier.com)). The floors are Farrow & Ball's Great White ([farrow-ball.com](http://farrow-ball.com)).

**The bathroom** The original fireplace has been retained, its nicotine-stained paint scraped back to the iron. An old gun cupboard found in Butlers Emporium in Hastings (01424-430678) makes an unusual bathroom cabinet. The paintings are from eBay and Spitalfields Market. The tiles are from the Ceramic Tile Distributors ([ctdtiles.co.uk](http://ctdtiles.co.uk)); the other walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's 'Cornforth White' (as before).

