

Client: The Rt. Hon. Edward R G Heath MP MBE



HOME AFFAIRS

Edward Heath is still a force to be reckoned with in the house — as the man he employed to design the interior of his historic home in Salisbury's Cathedral Close can testify

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Home alone in the Close

The Rt. Hon. Edward Heath MP's elegantly proportioned country house is in the magnificent Cathedral Close in Salisbury, Wiltshire. Within its part-medieval, part-Queen Anne structure Mr Heath has created a home that reflects his lifetime's interests.

The former prime minister bought the house six years ago when Robert Key, the MP for Salisbury and then his parliamentary private secretary, told him the lease was available. Mr Key had grown up in the Close as the son of one of the diocese's assistant bishops. "Mr Heath decided he wanted the house even before he saw it," he says.

Originally built in 1280 for one of the canons, with rooms added in the 16th century for six priests, and more additions in 1690, the house was in need of complete refurbishment. Mr Heath hired the designer Derek Frost.

"We did not set out to restore this house," Mr Heath says, "but to recreate something new within it."

Mr Frost has designed furniture for Richard Branson, John Schlesinger and Elton John, but here the brief was more comprehensive. The house had to be completely rewired and doors and windows made safe before Mr Heath's insurers and security minders would let him

When he bought his house in Cathedral Close, Salisbury, Edward Heath had very definite ideas. Kay Marles reports

move in. He still has a 24-hour police guard.

"After that I told Derek that what I wanted here was light, colour and life," Mr Heath says. "I told him to come back with his ideas, but if I didn't like them it would be pointless to argue and only waste my time."

"There were plenty of arguments," Mr Frost says. "Mr Heath and I talked about everything from the skeletal structure to festoon blinds."

Together they agreed to close up some fireplaces and create others. In the process they discovered a fireplace with original lining and burnt bricks.

Instead of stone, the hall floor is terracotta from Madrid, which shows off Mr Heath's fine collection of oriental rugs.

Mr Heath also commissioned a one-off fabric for a sofa in the drawing-room, which the Indian weavers agreed to do in an upholstery weight. It took the weavers three attempts to satisfy their demanding clients.

Although traditional shelving has been used for the library, Mr Heath chose contemporary shelving for



the hall so as to best display the five models of Morning Cloud, the yacht in which Mr Heath won the Admiral's Cup in 1971.

"I found it very exciting to use contemporary design ideas inside the house," Mr Heath says. "But sometimes the difficulty for me was to visualise what Derek proposed."

The only room where Mr Frost has used a chandelier, which is carved, gilded and English, is in the medieval dining-room, a room which presented a whole set of problems.

The room could be reached only through the kitchen, but in order to knock a hole through from the hall, Mr Heath had to get permission from the dean and chapter, place advertisements in the local and national press and consult the local and district councils. No

one objected and later on, when historical records were passed to him, he discovered a door had once been in the exact spot they had chosen.

The dining-room is high, long and thin. "I was worried that people would be craning their necks up at the ceiling all the time," Mr Heath says. "But Mr Frost dealt with the problem through the skilful use of colour. Now all the pressure is to look down."

Mr Frost's colour scheme for the dining-room is a rich, dark pink picked up by scarlet piping on the chairs and a scarlet inlay on the table, all of which were commissioned by Mr Heath.

Mr Frost came up with chairs that are full of glamour and interest. They stand, in the tall-backed, Queen Anne upholstered style, on race horse legs with another scarlet line inlaid down the back, like a military stripe. "There is a tradition through English furniture of using stylised animals' feet or legs," Mr Frost says. "I added the stripe to make it a bit fun and flirtatious."

For the table he used a rare amboyna veneer and satinwood edge. The silver commemorative

bowl on the table was presented to Mr Heath last year by friends and colleagues to mark his 40 years in Parliament. Mr Frost put up glass shelving to show off Mr Heath's collection of fine English china. The walls which are lined with paintings by John Piper and include two of the house.

What Mr Heath most enjoyed, he says, was creating something he really wanted. He adds, rather surprisingly, that the ghastly part was having to keep taking decisions, which he found exhausting.

Mr Heath, who is 75, plans to spend many years in the Cathedral Close, and is heartened to learn that two of the previous occupants, a canon and his sister, lived there to the ages of 98 and 94. "I do find that very encouraging," he says.



Cabinet room: Derek Frost with Edward Heath in the dining-room he created in the former PM's home in Salisbury. The silver bowl marks 40 years in Parliament

