

**'I had a very happy childhood here. The house was always full. Hospitality and open house runs in our family'**



Sacha and her three daughters, Siena, Cala and Alegria, in the gardens of their Hampshire home, which becomes a haven and playground for visiting overseas children when she runs her summer English language camp. Behind them is their idyllic country house, built by Sacha's grandparents 70 years ago. The rear façade (left) looks out over a lawn – and two herons made by a Zimbabwean artist



**OPENING THE DOORS OF HER HAMPSHIRE FAMILY HOME**  
**SACHA BANCROFT COOKE**  
**HOW SHE IS SHARING THE JOYS OF ENGLISH**  
**COUNTRY LIVING WITH A NEW GENERATION**



Sacha poses in the main entrance to the house; a series of works by the late Russian-French artist Ossip Zadkine (below right) add a modern touch to her home's antique furnishings.

One of the main sitting rooms in the house, furnished in comfortable English country home style, with a few examples from Sacha's father's collection of antique clocks. "We have more than 20 around the house," says Sacha

**T**reasure hunts, camp songs, bonfires in the woods, picnics and talent shows: the squeals and giggles of children from all over the world fill the fields around this picture-perfect house in the leafy countryside of Hampshire every summer, where Sacha Bancroft Cooke oversees a unique English language camp.

Called the Country House Camp, the lucky kids here get to polish more than their language skills – with English country life, culture and etiquette also part of the curriculum. "We teach the children how to set and decorate a formal table," says Sacha, who returned to the family home – with her Spanish architect husband Alberto in tow – after living in Madrid.

The kids also get to see first-hand how an English country house ought to be decorated: here, capacious sofas with loose covers, soft cushions and rugs, antique furnishings, and tasteful, subtle colours all settle into a cosy, happy marriage.

When the summer camp children

take their leave, things don't get that much quieter around here, says Sacha, who has three young girls of her own and also has two brothers living nearby.

"There's always a fun and lively community of friends and acquaintances around, dinners and parties," says Sacha, who knows better than most the sheer joy of English country living.

**Sacha, you have a beautiful home. How long has it been in your family?**

"Our family has lived here and on the farm next door since the last century, but this house was built by my grandparents 70 years ago. And the countryside has always been a welcome refuge from my father Anthony's shipping work in the City."

**What would you say are the home's most outstanding features?**

"The doors, fireplaces and architraves, which come from some 18th-century houses in Portman Square in London. They were about to be burnt by some workers, but luckily my grandmother

**'The doors, fireplaces and architraves come from some 18th-century houses in Portman Square. My grandmother rescued them'**





saw them and rescued them. My mother designed the stables and the garden. Before that there were just cows and a tennis court there.”

**What about the decoration?**

“Being a country house, the decor is quite traditional, with Colefax and Fowler wallpaper and Farrow & Ball paint. We’re about to change some things and we’re going to be using wallpaper and textiles from the company of a friend of ours, Barneby Gates. It’s all the rage among young people right now.

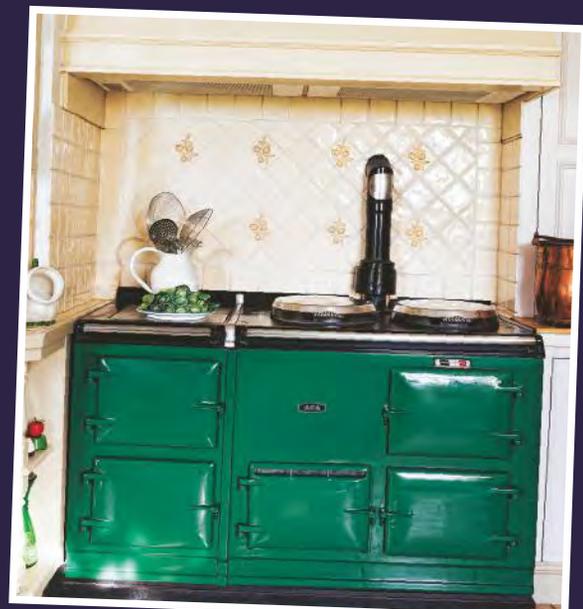
“Pride of place goes to the trunk in the main hall. It’s from 1688 and was made for William Howard, an ancestor of the family. The painting

of the horses is from 1902 and was given to my grandfather. He was not only a major military figure – in the Lancers – but he was also on the British polo team during the war. Horses are very important in our family: my father’s uncle won the Grand National. There’s also my father’s collection of antique clocks – we have more than 20 around the house.”

**What’s the social scene like here?**

“Because lots of people, once they have children, move from London to the countryside, there’s always a fun and lively community of friends and acquaintances around. There are dinners and parties ▶

Sacha with her daughters and her mother, the florist Daryll Cooke (left), who lends her talents to creating displays of blooms in the light-filled country-style kitchen. “My mother has been in the florist business for many years, both here in the country and in London,” says Sacha. The room boasts an Aga (right), as well as hand-painted tiles and distressed, lime-washed pine cupboards (top)



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**'All three girls are well-behaved, curious and artistic. They get the latter from their father'**

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“They’re three fantastic girls,” says Sacha of Siena, Cala and Alegra. She met their Spanish father Alberto in the exclusive residential enclave of Sotogrande in Andalusia when she was 18; they got together when she later moved to Madrid



Over the summer holidays, Sacha's company offers children from around the world the chance to experience a quintessentially British country lifestyle. It is a theme reflected in the decor of the house – such as in the winding wooden staircase (above) and a sizeable bathroom, with its bath framed by floor-to-ceiling floral curtains (left)

in private homes and there are increasingly good restaurants in nearby villages – in addition to traditional pubs, of course.”

**What childhood memories do you have of this house?**

“My siblings and I had a very happy childhood here. We enjoyed the garden, dogs, bike rides... The house was always full. Hospitality and open house runs in our family.”

**In summer the house is filled with children who come to learn English. What's that like?**

“Yes, we run our Country House Camp here every summer. It's an exclusive camp for just 35 children aged eight to 12 from all over the world. They get to enjoy a unique and authentic experience of the English countryside, a quintessential British country experience. Our programme is full of culture, language and activities, all within a safe, welcoming and very British environment. For example, we teach the children how to set and decorate a formal table. But always in a fun way.”

**What else do you do with them?**

“The children do a range of workshops on theatre, poetry, reading and writing in English, according to their level, as well as various activities ranging from arts and crafts to dance, music and cookery, to name but a few, plus all kinds of sports: rounders, tennis, football, netball, military fitness, cops and robbers in the woods, mini Olympics and so on.”

**What other services does your company offer?**

“As well as Country House Camp, I have an educational consultancy called ninetynineworld. I set it up with my business partner María Ascanio. We have offices in Madrid and Beijing and we offer a unique search service for boarding ▶



The cosy and traditionally inspired country house decor continues in the bedrooms (main picture and below)





## 'Somehow we have the best of British and Spanish cultures'

schools, relocation services for the UK, exchange programmes and search services for other camps and summer programmes, plus a fantastic au pair and English tutors service. Above all, we seek the best language learning solutions for each client, offering them a personalised, discreet and comprehensive service."

**Your mother is a well-known florist. Can you tell us more about her?**

My mother, Daryll Cooke, is one of the best-known florists, both here in the country and in London. She does all kinds of events, from weddings and large private events to communions, formal dinners and private workshops. She's always been a wonderful creative force in our house and our lives. Everything I know, I learnt from her."

**And what about you? How did you end up marrying a Spanish man?**

"We first met a long time ago in Sotogrande, on holiday, when I was 18 years old. Then, at 21, I spent a year living in Madrid as part of my modern languages degree at Cambridge University. I got hooked on the Spanish lifestyle; I moved back to Madrid when I was 25 and stayed. And that was when we met again... and the rest is history. I think somehow we have the best of both worlds: the best of British culture and its traditions, along with the freedom and spontaneity of Spanish culture."

**You have three daughters. Tell us a little more about them.**

"They're three fantastic girls. Siena loves everything to do with singing and dancing, while Cala is the gymnast and athlete, as well as being sensitive and loving. And Alegria, true to her name, is pure joy personified, always smiling and joking. All three are very good, well behaved, curious and very artistic. They got the latter from their father, who's a great architect, poet and designer. They're going to be great women."



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Visit [countryhousecamp.co.uk](http://countryhousecamp.co.uk) and [ninetomineworld.com](http://ninetomineworld.com).

Sacha welcomes us into her home. The main hall (right) is dominated by a 1902 painting of horses – which play a large part in the family's history – and a 17th-century trunk belonging to an ancestor

