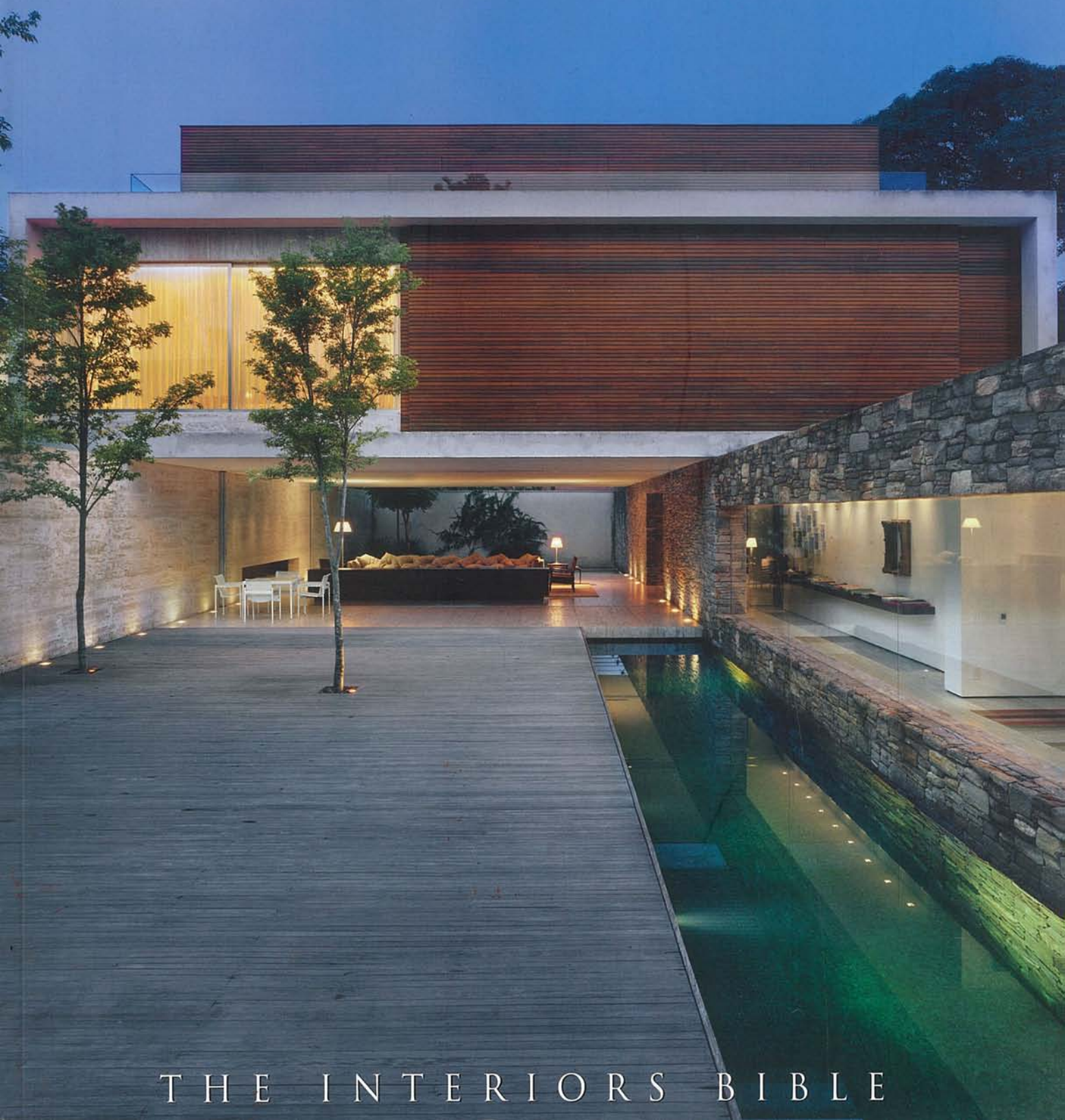


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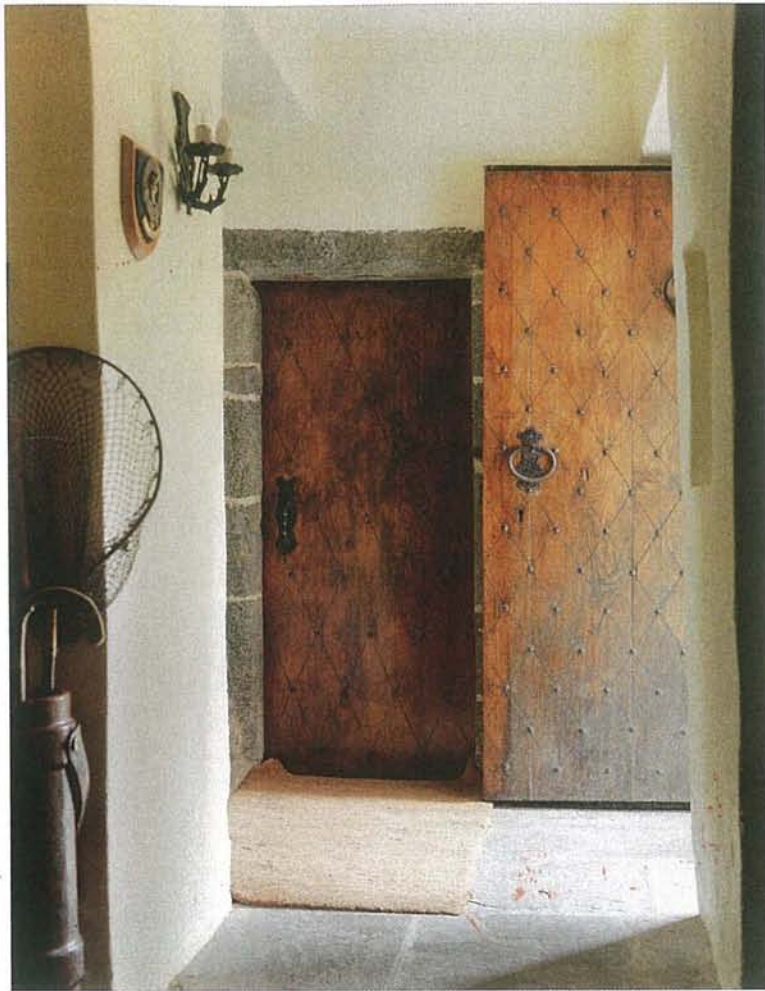
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THE INTERIORS BIBLE





ruins to riches

In 1989, Robert Pooley realised a long-held dream of owning the romantic ruin that for years had caught his eye amidst the wild mountain scenery as he headed for the ski slopes at Glen Shee.

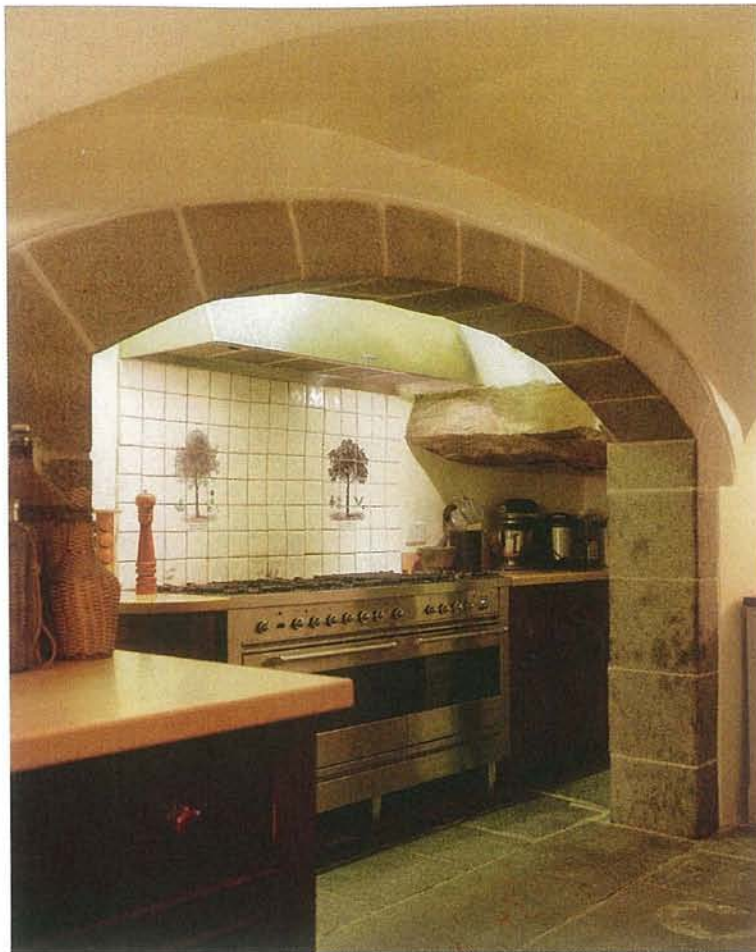
Almost three decades later, the 400 year old Forter Castle played a key role in the launch of a new career for his daughter, Katharine Pooley, now one of London's most sought-after interior designers.

"It fell on a day, a bonny summer day, When the corn was ripe and yellow, That there fell oot a great dispute, Between Argyle aye and Airlie." So runs the first verse of "The Bonnie House of Airlie", which tells of the fateful day in the summer of 1640 when Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyle raided the home of James Ogilvy, Earl of Airlie, razing it to the ground. While he busied himself with the destruction of Airlie Castle, Argyle sent his most trusted lieutenant on to do the same to Forter, Airlie's other home.

Once Argyle's men had done their worst, the 'Fortalice' was left in ruins; the L-shaped stone tower that had once defiantly protected the entrance of the Balloch Pass to Glenshee and the important Moneca Pass to Braemar and the North, was reduced to a scarred pile of rubble. When Robert Pooley took ownership of the castle, the only inhabitants of Forter in 350 years had been two mature trees which occupied the centre of what was left of the structure. It was to be two years of painstaking construction and restoration, using traditional techniques, before the castle stood as it once had in the 17th century.







Working with Historic Scotland, Robert set about uncovering the original design and layout of Forter. The team relied upon scarring in the stones to reveal details such as the irregular split levels in the upper two floors and the location of windows and fire places. In order to stay as true to the original building as possible, experienced craftsmen were sourced from all over Scotland and local stone was retrieved from neighbouring estates as much of the rubble on the site could only be used for landfill, the best stones having been plundered to build other local buildings over the years. Then finally, on July 7th 1990, the 350th anniversary of the destruction of Forter, the Pooleys held their first celebration at the castle.



Many more family celebrations followed, Christmases with ceilidhs in the Great Hall and summers attending the local Highland Games. In 2003, Robert proudly gave the helm of Forter Castle to his daughter Katharine to treasure and manage. At about that time Katharine was in the throes of a career change. She had been a banker, working for Morgan Stanley in Hong Kong, when she decided to take a year off and think about what she wanted out of life. "Apparently, we're supposed to have four careers in our life-time," she says. "People had kept on telling me how creative I was, how lovely my house was and that I could make a career out of interior design. But once I had left the bank, everything just seemed to snowball and fall into place, as I embarked on my passion for design."



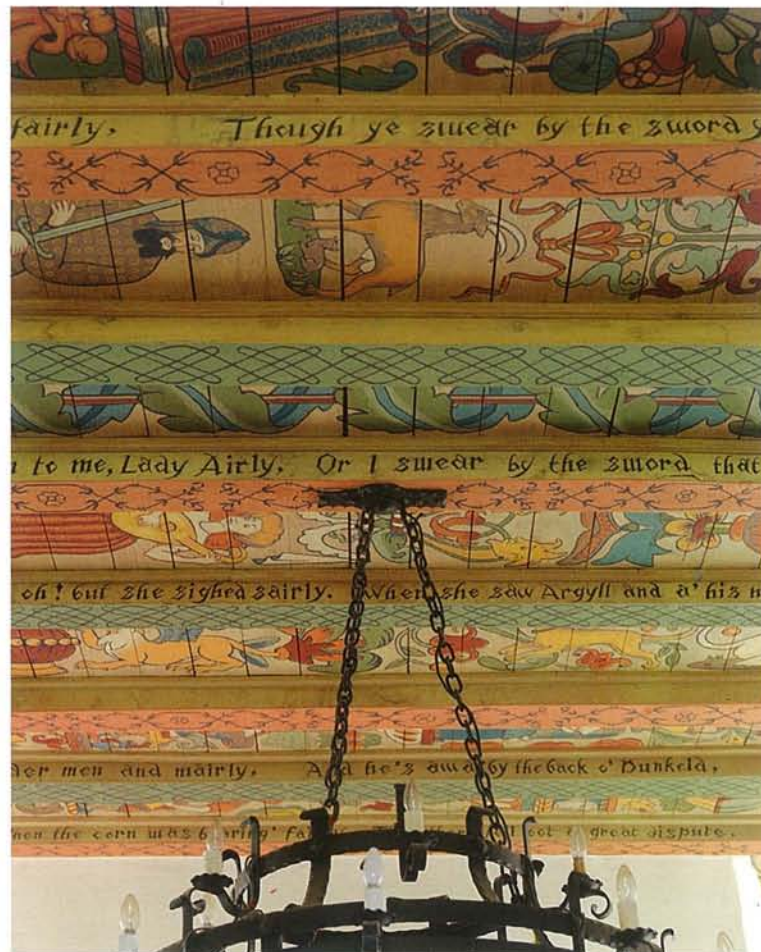




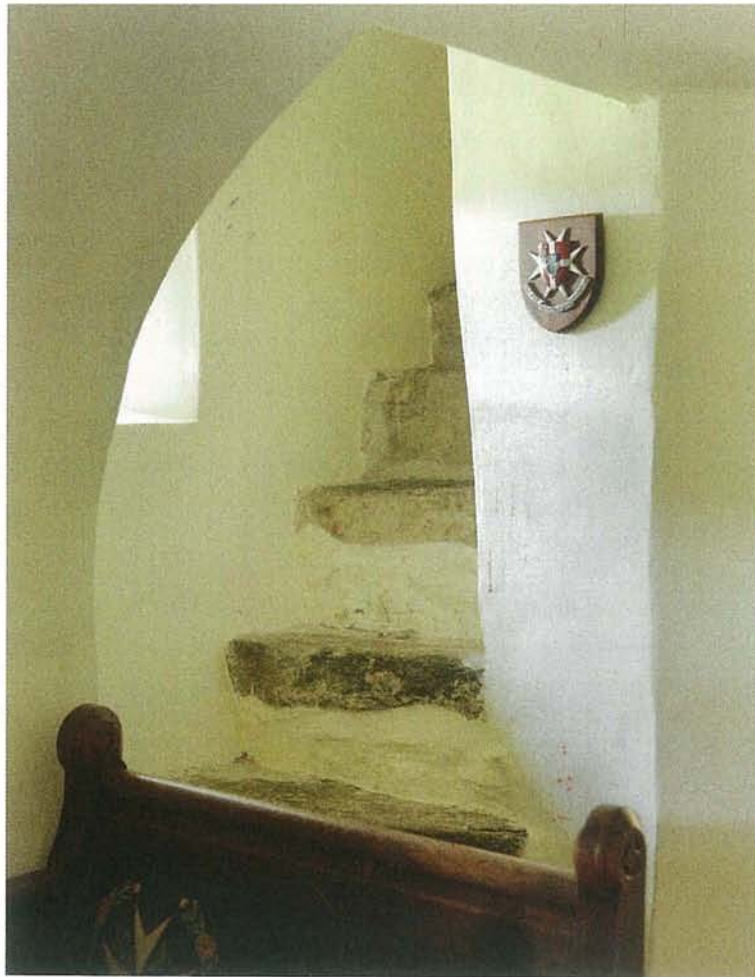
Argyll has ta'en a hundred o' his men,
If fell on a day, a bonnie summer day.

A hundred
When the corn was in
The corn was in





It seemed a natural thing for Katharine to take on the castle. "Forter was my first interiors project. My father had spent most of his time on the exterior of the castle and the interiors had never really been touched. I decided that my guiding principles were to make the place look authentic, avoiding cliché as much as possible, and that when I had finished it had to feel like a home, not a show piece or a museum."



"The first thing I did was to stain the floors and doors to appear more and then I got the ceiling painted in the Great Hall (previous page), just as it would have been when the castle was first built. I found a wonderful artist, Jenny Meredew, who specialises in murals and decorative artwork and is also something of an expert in traditional Scottish painted ceilings. In only 40 days she created a beautiful, vibrant mural, which has aged slowly, coloured by the smoke from the fire."





All went well with Katharine's inspired renovations until it came to the final week. The first guests were arriving and Katharine and her team had only seven days to tidy up all the loose ends left over from kitchen and bathroom installations, move all furniture in and dress and clean the castle so that it would be fit for a laird. "I then realised at this stage we had managed to overlook a minor detail! We hadn't taken into consideration the narrow staircases of the castle when choosing our furniture pieces. Initially it looked as if it would be a complete disaster; nothing I had chosen would go up the stairs which had been built back-to-front as all Argyle's soldiers had been left-handed. Needless to say this is a mistake that lives so strongly in my mind that it won't happen again." Help was close at hand, however, and the bedroom furniture was sawn in half, as necessary, and then held together with struts once it was in place.



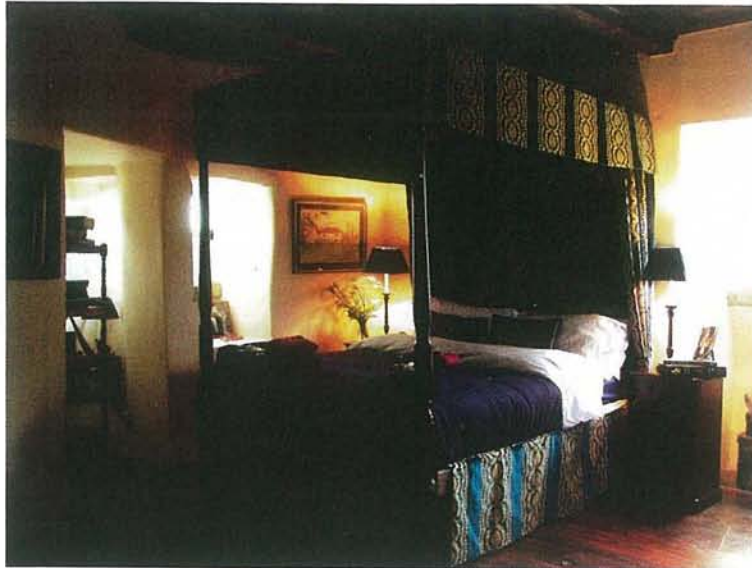




The laird's bedroom (previous page), is the only structural change the Pooleys made to the original layout. Robert had decided the bedroom should mirror the Great Hall and this wonderfully atmospheric room runs the entire width of the castle. Here, as she has throughout, Katharine used a combination of original antiques and luxurious fabrics, sourced from favourite suppliers such as De Le Cuona and Ralph Lauren. As well as a regal four poster bed, the room has the traditional luxury of its own free-standing bath and wash area.







There are six bedrooms in total at Forter, sleeping 12 people comfortably and often 16 or more, for larger family or friendly gatherings or weddings. With its own intimate chapel, which Katharine furnished with pews (sawn in-half to fit) from Pews Corner in Surrey and an assortment of Russian artefacts that she picked upon her travels, the castle is also an extremely popular wedding venue. Katharine's team is on-hand to create a fairytale Scottish wedding by arranging caterers, pipers and ceilidh bands, singers and story tellers.

Forter is essentially a self-catering location and its Chalon kitchen with big Britannia range cooker has been equipped to whip up anything from a quick snack to a full feast for serving under candlelight in the Great Hall in front of a roaring fire.

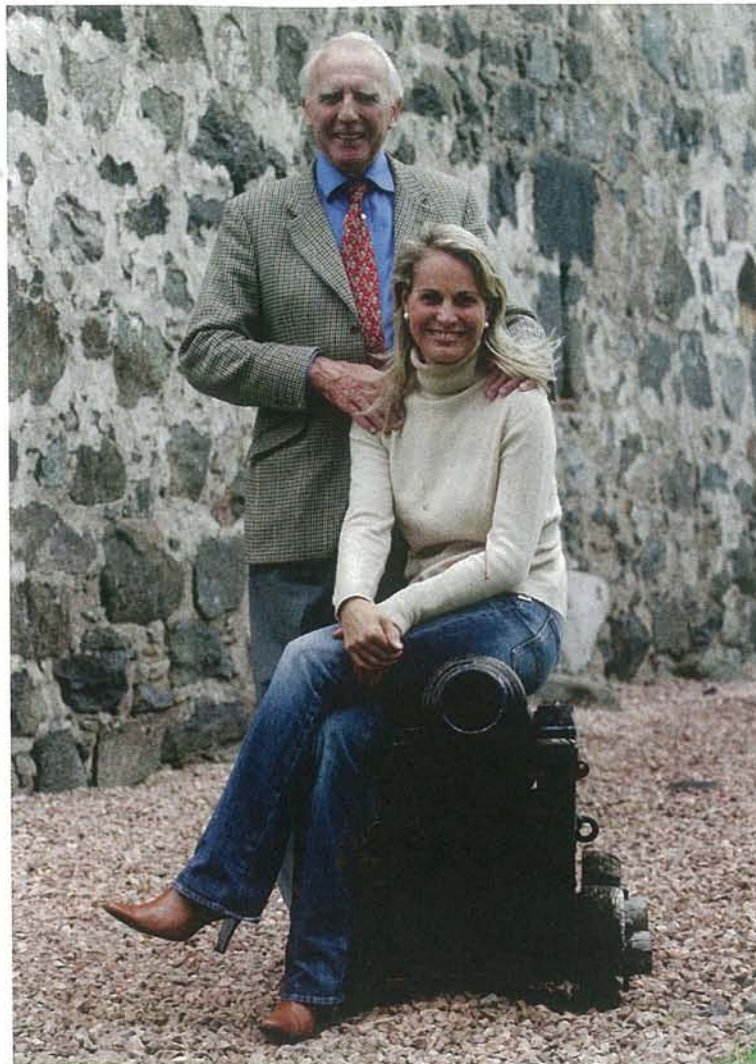
The castle feels every inch a family home, which is exactly what Katharine set out to achieve, and as well as all manner of valuable antiques, ornaments and trinkets, a collection of family photographs is dotted around, just as one would expect to find. "I never feel the need to put anything away when I leave Forter," says Katharine. "People do seem to respect the fact that this is someone's home and the only things I have to replace are rugs and linen, which is normal as they get so much use."

Katharine has filled Forter with objects she has gathered from all over the world. The chest shown here, for instance, is from Tasmania, the tapestry from a market in France and the Jacobean armoire and chair are from Georgian Antiques in Edinburgh. "I just kept adding things that looked right. What I didn't want was a terribly contrived, faux "Scottish laird's castle" – this is why I've used tartan very sparingly and mixed in lots of traditional furniture styles, not being afraid, for instance, of putting an antique Spanish chair with a tartan rug – somehow they just complement each other."

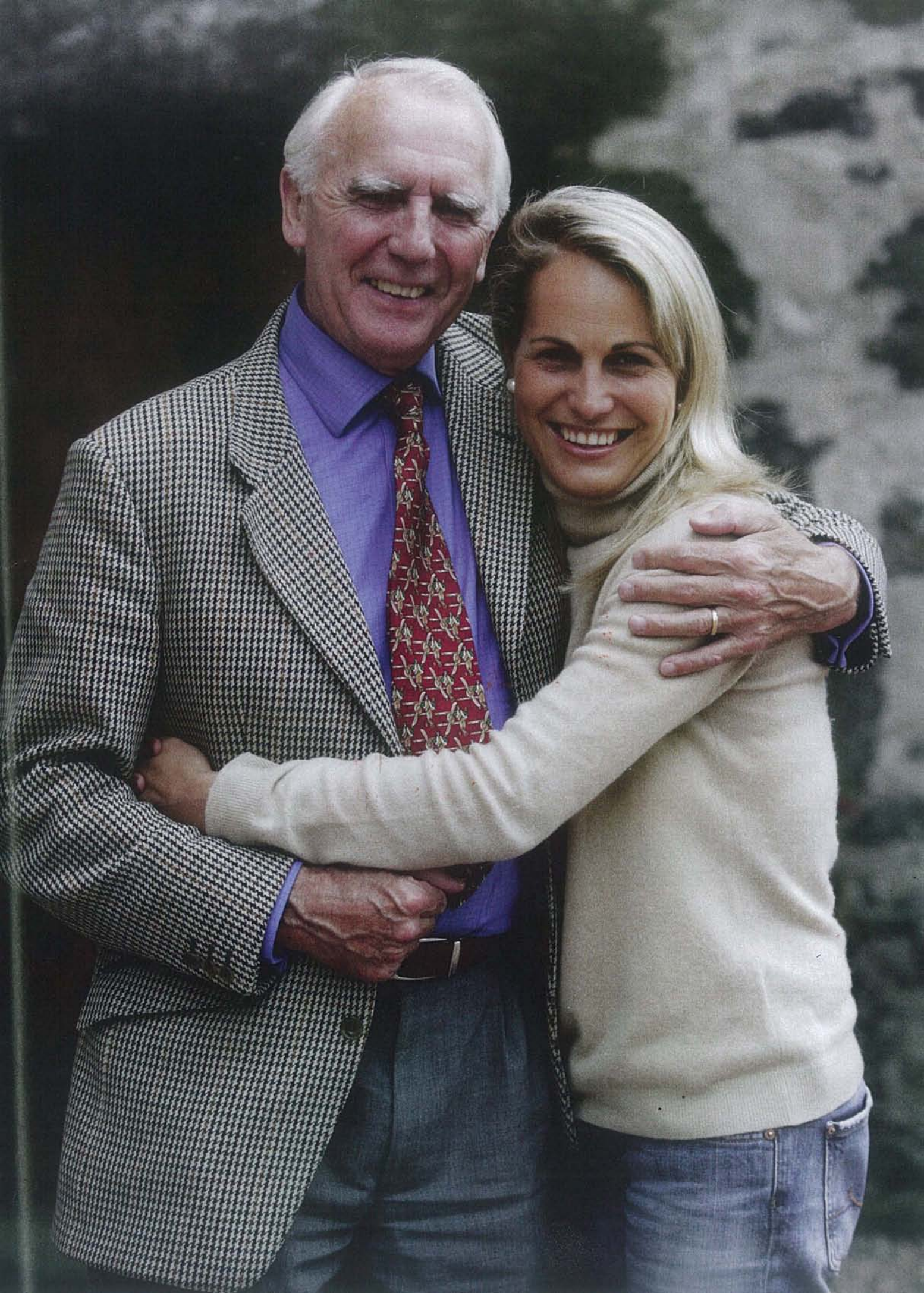


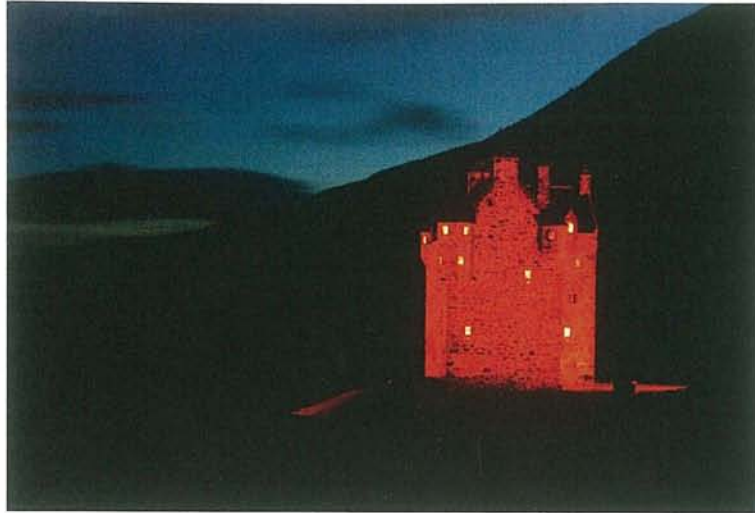


One tartan fabric is draped as an elegant shower curtain over the free-standing antique bath in the family bathroom, "I felt that I needed to incorporate at least one shower at the castle and thought that tartan would make an appropriate shower curtain overlaying a waterproof fabric. I got the tartan rugs, carpets and curtains from Anta in Edinburgh. I also sourced our family tartan, the Dunn tartan, which covers the chairs in the Great Hall, from New Zealand!



The Pooley family no longer tend to gather at Forter to celebrate Christmas, but they come every year in the summer for two weeks to coincide with the nearby Highland Games. "There are 24 of us now in the family," says Katharine. "We have a seriously great time here in the summer and those two weeks are a permanent fixture on everyone's calendar."





For the remainder of the year, however, the castle is available to rent. Whatever time of year you choose, you can be guaranteed of finding plenty to do. The list of available activities is endless: from walking and riding, to fishing and shooting; mountain-biking and climbing, to paragliding and bungee jumping; swimming and sailing to golf and archery; and, of course, back to the sport that originally brought Robert Pooley to Forter – ski-ing. Or you could just relax and enjoy the views – there are enough of those to last a lifetime. A truly memorable place.

www.fortercastle.com ; www.katharinepooley.com

www.highlandadventure.co.uk