

# Homes & Property My home

homesandp



**Local heroes:** Winkworth relied on Algarve builders for the renovation and has not used an architect. The two glorious features of the house are its swimming pool (above), and a long covered terrace, which runs the entire length of the building (above right)

## GOOD FOR MY BODY AND SOLE

Tucked away in an Algarve village, the owner of French Sole designs her latest shoe collections, distracted only by a daily visit to the local shop and its tethered goat, says **Katie Law**



**Relaxed:** Jane Winkworth travels to Portugal twice a year for eight weeks of designing – and enjoying beach walks

**‘The local shop plays my favourite Rod Stewart songs for me every time I visit. You wouldn’t get that in London’**

JANE WINKWORTH, the owner of the phenomenally successful shoe company French Sole, loves the scent of pine, lavender and sage which hits her the minute she gets off the plane at Faro airport, only 20 minutes drive from her home on a hilltop in a village in the Algarve.

The effervescent 64-year-old takes off to Portugal for eight weeks at a time, twice a year, to work on her shoe collections and to get away from the frenetic pace of her life in London, with all its meetings, working lunches and evenings out at the ballet.

Sitting on her terrace, with a box full of paperwork, samples, fashion magazines and sketches that she has FedExed out in advance, she can do her most creative designing, surrounded by sea and mountains and in the most extraordinary tranquillity, listening to nothing except the birdsong. The phone doesn’t ring (unless it’s an emergency), and she

doesn’t answer emails. “It’s a very creative environment. I get up early, garden at seven. I take Tuschia, my Jack Russell terrier, for a walk up the hill and then I get down to work,” she says. At the end of the day, she has a swim in her pool, goes for a sunset walk on the beach and reads another instalment of James Lees-Milne’s diaries.

When we meet, in an office above her Brook Street boutique – one of her four London stores – she shows me sketches of her collaboration with the Royal Academy: a collection of exquisite pumps inspired by the forthcoming Degas exhibition. Twice-married Winkworth, who has three grown-up children and four grandchildren, is wearing a cream loose-linen skirt and knitted silk top, lots of glittering gold and turquoise jewellery and a pair of her signature gold ballet pumps.

In Britain, she lives with her now-retired husband, John, in Chobham,

Surrey. She is driven to London daily, having awarded herself, after many years of hard work, a chauffeur. She also has a house in Los Angeles, where her son, Ben, runs French Sole’s sister-brand shoe company, London Sole.

The family has been travelling to Portugal for holidays for the past 22 years. They originally chose it because when the children were tiny they could not afford the South of France. “We started out with a little beach house that we outgrew and then bought a house on a nature reserve, but it became an overdeveloped building site,” says Winkworth.

Then, 16 years ago, after two particularly successful shoe collections, she splashed out £400,000 in cash and bought her four-storey, three-bedroom Fifties villa in an unspoilt village. The house was decrepit, so she rebuilt it top-to-bottom, which cost a further £400,000.

Outside is all whitewashed walls and terracotta-tiled roofs; inside has terraced balconies and a secluded swimming pool. Most of Winkworth’s time is spent on the terrace, which stretches the full length of the house and is covered in scented jasmine and bougainvillea.

Not bad for a woman who dropped out of art school, became a ceramics restorer and started her own business in the Eighties selling ballet shoes at a charity fair. They went like hotcakes and today, in addition to the London shops, her company supplies 500 outlets around the world, selling more than 100,000 pairs of shoes a year.

When asked if she employed an architect, Winkworth hoots with indignant laughter: “I was the foreman. I still am, it’s a work in progress.”

The triple-glazed windows were made in Germany but everything else

was built by her “wonderful” local Portuguese builders. Hand-painted tiles and ceramics are local, too, but fabrics, furniture and fittings come from further afield. Big cream sofas come from George Smith and Peter Jones in London; cushions and curtains are a mix of Colefax & Fowler and Chelsea Textiles, while the elegant chandeliers are French. Most of the wood furniture is French country-style and has been painted white and waxed by “a marvellous man in Tunbridge Wells”.

The walls and arches along the impressive 60ft terrace have been painted with Italianate trompe l’oeil scenes, including one that Winkworth copied from the singer Cher’s Malibu home. “I loved it so much I took a picture. It’s the same except I’ve done it in cream and white,” she says.

“I love fiddling about, moving and adding things. I’ve just bought a table sculpture in bronze from a gallery in LA which is being shipped to Portugal. And then there’s my shell collection. I’ve added in little accents of colour with the pink-check gingham, but I find it so much more restful without too much colour.”

In Winkworth’s village of Santa Barbara de Nexe there are no other second-home owners and the locals don’t speak a word of English, which suits her just fine – even if her Portuguese is not exactly fluent. She shops at the village supermarket, Jaffa’s, and once she gets past the bad-tempered goat tethered by the shop door, she finds wonderful fresh produce, while the owner plays her favourite Rod Stewart anthems whenever she comes in. As she says: “How many shops in London would you be able to walk round with your trolley while listening to Maggie May played especially for you?”



**London calling:** fabrics and cushions are from Colefax & Fowler and Chelsea Textiles