

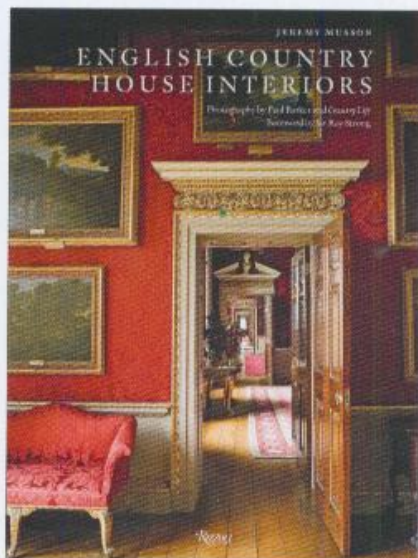


ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE INTERIORS

Jeremy Musson

Photographs by Paul Barker

(Rizzoli, £37.50)



This is a Rolls-Royce of a book: beautiful, grandly conceived and somewhat larger than the average; visually it is richly toned and lavishly appointed (the design is by the doyen of elegant typography, Robert Dalrymple); the text, like a powerful engine, murmurs reassuringly. Roy Strong's foreword opens the door like an immaculately powdered footman and we are off, conducted with elegance and ease by Jeremy Musson on a stately progress around England's greatest houses. At 14 of these we stop for the full tour; many others, no less intriguing, we glimpse from the window in more generally themed scenic excursions. As sometime architectural editor at *Country Life*, Jeremy Musson's preferences are for major houses rather than quirky ones, the cele-

brated exemplars of English style: Jacobean Hatfield, Carolean Wilton, Baroque Chatsworth and Castle Howard, and the great Georgian palaces of Holkham, Houghton, Harewood and Syon. Following the old-fashioned idea that 'good taste stopped in 1830', he gives us little of Victorian opulence, other than neo-Gothic Arundel Castle, but we do see, at Berkeley Castle and Parham, the 'revival of taste' in those clever early-twentieth-century reinventions of the past. A final chapter affirms that there is still life in these houses. All are in safe hands in terms of careful conservation, but in a few at least - here Musson cites approvingly the Duke of Devonshire's Chatsworth and Waddesdon under Lord Rothschild's stewardship - imaginative owners continue to introduce new elements into the decorative mix in a spirit of lively continuity. **Stephen Calloway** ▷