



## Splendor Falls on Castle Walls

Throughout this Scottish hall house, vintage architecture is emphasized by period furnishings. At the same time, the owner's collections give the house its timely, personable character. In the sitting room (above), paintings, baskets, and a wealth of books establish a setting that is as warm and inviting as the flame that glows in the fireplace. Antique textiles cover chairs and pillows. Scottish majolica punctuates the wall and mantel. The sitting room is in a wing that was added to the house in 1840. Other interesting accessories are found in the hallway (opposite). The owner made the mirror frame from shells she collected on holiday. Scottish majolica, circa 1890, and fish "guggle" jugs animate the narrow passageway. The drapery is handblocked. Through the doorway is a circa 1790 primitive painting of Suki Schellenberg's ancestors, who came from this area in northeast Scotland.

**H**istory resides all around the Banffshire uplands in northeast Scotland. It rolls along the emerald-hued hills that seem to extend into infinity. It wades in the River Deveron, which encircles the hills like a benevolent moat. As it rambles down the sloping fields and skips across the river, history finds a place to rest: at Old Mayen, a 300-year-old hall house estate that is now home to Suki Schellenberg.

Although it has witnessed changes, Old Mayen is ever-mindful of its early life in the late 17th century. In those days, it was not unusual for homes to be raided by marauding clans or hostile neighbors. The house's three-foot-thick stone walls shielded its residents from danger. Spy holes and gun loops were part of the decor. A circular stair tower nestled into the right angle of the L-shaped castlelike structure was also built for defense purposes. Dormer windows and a steep, slate roof warmed the otherwise stoic facade.

The house has long been known as Old Mayen or the Mains of Mayen—"mains" means "the home farm of a manor." Built in 1680 over the remains of an existing structure, it is "typical of [Scottish] vernacular architecture in the sense that it was plainly and economically made by local men using local materials," according to the book *Scottish Country*, by Charles Maclean and Christopher Simon Sykes (Clarkson Potter).

Above a doorway is the coat of arms and the initials of Alexander Abernethy and his wife, Isobel Halkett, for whom the house was built. The Abernethy clan had been associated with this land for centuries. Alexander's ancestor, William, had received it in the 14th century from David II, King of Scotland. The property remained in the Abernethy family until 1612. In 1649, Walter Halkett purchased it. He died seven years later, and his daughter, Isobel, inherited the land. As Alexander's wife, Isobel allowed the Abernethy name to return to Old Mayen.

Photography by Cecilia Innes Produced by Lawrence Kane By Diane DiPiero





The dining room (above)—with its stone walls, wood floor, and heavy wood door—is outfitted in oak furnishings from the 17th and 18th centuries. A vegetable-dyed plaid fabric, circa 1850-1900, covers the table. To the far right stands an 18th-century French maiden figure. Light traipses down the circular staircase. Just as the interior architecture is much the same as it was in 1680, so is the vista surrounding the house (right). The sloping, landscaped hills lead to the River Deveron, and beyond that is the lush Deveron Valley.





Period architecture and furniture  
keep Old Mayen's history  
alive. Yet the personality of its  
current owner is seen throughout  
the house and gardens

