

How a Cypriot dynasty created a splendid £6m Surrey mansion

By **Liz Gill**

Not since the closing scenes of the hit 2002 film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* has suburbia seen such an impressive assembly of classical pediments and columns.

In the film, the non-Greek Ian and his bride Toula set up home next to his numerous in-laws' over the top, mini version of the Acropolis.

The Georgious' classical mansion at Oxshott, in Surrey's stockbroker belt between Leatherhead and Esher, is altogether more tasteful, although with six bedrooms, 9,150sq ft and on the market for £6million, it is scarcely less grand.

Fifty years ago, childhood sweethearts Andreas and Carol Georgiou abandoned life in their Cypriot village and settled in South London where they set about making their fortune in the rag trade.

They had their only child, Mary, now 50, when Carol was barely 20 and were soon attracting high-end clients such as the designers Caroline Charles and Ben de Lisi.

By 1985 they were living in affluent Oxshott, paying £300,000 for a house on the coveted Crown Estate in an acre of land – 'a lot of money at that time', says Andreas, 72.

'The first thing we did was put on some Greek columns,' he says. 'I loved the fact that this place had the feel of an English country estate, but I also wanted something from the culture of my ancestors.'

Mary, the boss of her own fashion business, married soon afterwards to Andreas Demetriou, 56, and the couple have two sons, Alex, 18, and yet another Andreas, 15.

The grandparents' house at Oxshott was the setting for big family get-togethers, barbeques and games of football. Around it, however, the mood was changing as neighbours knocked down their Seventies houses and built swanky mansions.

'The value of the land matched the value of the house, so owners started knocking them down and building new ones,' says Kevin Arlidge, a partner in estate agency Trenchard Arlidge, who has worked the patch for 30 years. 'Since then it's been onward and upwards with ever bigger, more elaborate properties.'

The first hint that something bigger should be built came from Mary's husband, who had retired from running his chain of sandwich bars.

'Little old houses were being sold for £1million or £1.5million and then being torn down,' he says. 'We needed to build something to complement the plot and maximise the value of the land.' The decision



GRAND IDEAS: The Georgiou mansion and, below, the original home that it replaced

Our big fat Greek self-build home



gave Mary – who by now had switched to interior design with her company Designer Touches – the chance to widen her expertise still further: the family dream home would be her showcase as well.

Andreas Snr had one rule. 'I said if we're going to do this then from the first brick to the last detail Mary has to be in charge,' he says. 'I knew I'd be writing her a blank cheque but I was confident she'd do a fantastic job.'

An architect was chosen who had built super-rich homes on St George's Hill in Weybridge, where Cliff

FAMILY AFFAIR: Carol and Andreas Georgiou, far right, daughter Mary Demetriou, her husband and her son, Andreas

Richard had a home. 'The look was to be modern classic to appeal to the widest range of buyers,' says Mary. 'I wanted a house full of light with spaces flowing into each other. I didn't want anything quirky.'

The original budget was £1.5million, but as time went by and they

saw the dramatic price rises of neighbouring houses, they decided a further £1million would be spent putting in a leisure complex and buying the best of everything.

The project took three years from the first decision to the champagne party to celebrate its completion at the end of last year. 'Some days there'd be 15 people working here,' says Andreas Snr, who visited the site almost daily. 'You can't afford to take your eye off the ball. I'm no builder but I can see when the roof's

been left uncovered and the rain's coming in, or when the tiles have been hung upside down.'

There were rows with the builder, who had 12 projects on the go, and among family members themselves. 'Everyone in this family expresses their views forcefully,' says Mary. 'But there were no major problems.'

Knight Frank's Charles Davenport believes the size of the plots, quality of build and the general attractions of the village – excellent transport links, green spaces and good schools – will protect Oxshott from any market upsets.

'At this level there is still a lot of demand, particularly from successful professionals with young families who want to move out of London.'

The Georgious remain philosophical about a sale. 'If we sell, we sell,' says Andreas. 'If not we'll just enjoy it.' Carol, 69, adds: 'We love the house. It's everything we hoped it would be. But I'm a bit nervous now about cooking. I don't want to mess up the kitchen.'

● Designer Touches, 01372 270211, www.designertouches.co.uk



MAKING A SPLASH: More than £2million was spent creating a mansion with every modern-day luxury



Key Facts

Price: £6million **Bedrooms:** Six **Bathrooms:** Eight **Receptions:** Seven, including galleried hall and games room. **Outside space:** Landscaped gardens plus triple garage, indoor pool, gym and sauna. **Agent:** Knight Frank, 020 7629 8171.