



# LAUREN CHILD RETROSPECTIVE: MOTTISFONT HOUSE

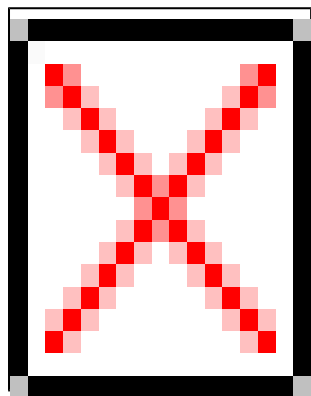
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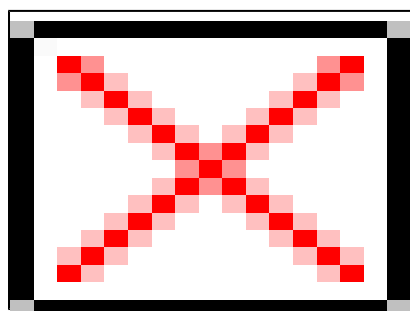
**Clive Barnes** visits the first retrospective exhibition of **Lauren Child's** illustrative work.



This summer, the idyllic surroundings of the **National Trust's Mottisfont House** provide the backdrop to the first retrospective exhibition of [Lauren Child's](#) [3] illustrative work. **Clive Barnes** visited the exhibition for **Books for Keeps**.

Opening the exhibition, Lauren joked that helping put it together had made her realise how old she must be. However, while the exhibition represents seventeen years of her work to date, it is recognition of the impact that her illustration and writing have had on children's books in a relatively short time. **Charlie and Lola** and **Clarice Bean** are as familiar to many children as **Winnie the Pooh** and **Peter Rabbit**, whose creators have figured in past exhibitions at Mottisfont.

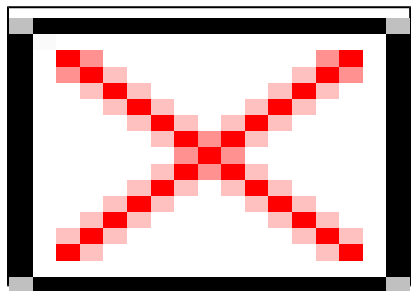
The exhibition, which is drawn from her personal archive, includes not only original work for many of her books, but also a number of objects that have provided her with inspiration or have appeared in the books in various ways. There is the pink milk glass that Lauren bought from a charity shop and photographed to feature as Lola's favourite drink in the *Charlie and Lola* books, the lampshade designs that carried over into the books from Lauren's previous incarnation as a fabric designer, and the genesis of the fabric that Lauren designed for **Liberty** with Clarice Bean in mind. While these are the things that may particularly fascinate younger visitors to the exhibition, older fans can trace the course of Lauren's development as an illustrator.



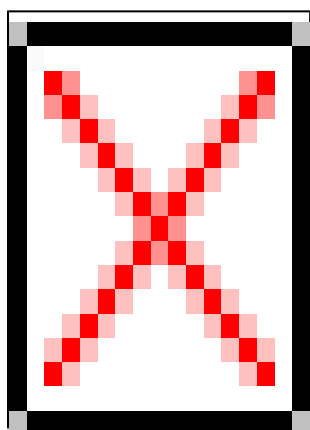
Lauren's work is characterised by humour, deft characterisation and an eye for design and composition, and the work shown here ranges from the earliest collage sketches for [Clarice Bean, That's Me](#) [4] through her experimentation with

photography and three dimensional modelling, including the models for the scenes in **Princess and the Pea**, to her current preoccupation with line, shape and form in the new Charlie and Lola book **One Thing**, due out in October. Of this latest work she says, 'I wanted to show the beauty of numbers, not just the joy of counting which children embrace very early on but how visually beautiful numbers are.'

Mottisfont, a house built around the remains of a former Abbey and on the banks of the River Test, was a scene of



artistic house parties hosted by former owner Maud Russell in the 1930s and, in recent years, the Trust has created an exhibition space within the house which has featured a range of art and illustration, including summer exhibitions of the work of Ernest Shepherd, Beatrix Potter and Quentin Blake. Louise Govier, curator at Mottisfont, said that she was especially pleased that Lauren had accepted the invitation for the exhibition and that they had been able to work so closely on it. She says that one of the exciting things for her about the exhibition is the opportunity it gives to appreciate Lauren's work with textures: 'All sorts of materials are photographed, photocopied, cut up and manipulated to create complex layered textures that are then combined with drawing and paint. One of joys of seeing Lauren's original work 'in the flesh' is the chance to see these layers which often disappear when reproduced in her books.'



For Lauren, Mottisfont has personal significance, since its nationally renowned Rose Garden was a place that her parents loved. And she has also worked with Louise to create a family trail in which Charlie and Lola and their friends act as guides to the house and gardens, with 'creative challenges' along the way. There will also be a series of activity weekends in the summer holidays, from storytelling sessions to craft activities, including making a giant book.

**[The Art of Lauren Child: Adventures with Charlie, Lola and Friends](#)** [5] runs from 18 July to 6 September, 10am-5pm (house and exhibition open at 11am), normal National Trust admission charges, and no separate charge for the exhibition.

**Clive Barnes** has retired from Southampton City where he was Principal Children's Librarian and is now a freelance researcher and writer.

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