I conceived this book in 2003 when my children were infants, but it has taken much longer to reach maturity than them. I have worked on it through sleepless nights in the highs and lows of parenthood, intense periods of house renovation and DIY, and the pressures of academic jobs at the universities of Ulster, Loughborough, Falmouth and Portsmouth. Progress was interrupted further by cancer and its treatment and complications, from which I feel extremely lucky to have survived. I would like to thank particularly my consultant Professor Phil Drew, my oncologist Mr Duncan Wheatley and all the nurses at the Mermaid Centre in Truro and St Michael’s Hospital in Hayle for helping me get to the position where I had the strength to finish the book.

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My children, Mark and Gwendaline, have grown up as they have endured my absorption in the research and writing of this book. As a family, we have moved house four times in this period and on each occasion I have been immersed in complex renovations along with my husband, James R. Ryan. He has patiently put up with my desire to curate my domestic space, my collecting and acquisitions from auctions, junk shops, car boot fairs and eBay and my general mess. James has also read and discussed every single word I have written with enormous patience and insight.
Finally, I spent a great deal of time ‘at home’ over the gestation of this book: on maternity leave, enduring and convalescing from illness, preparing lectures, marking assignments and writing. At the same time, I have been immersed in homemaking, as an expression of love for my family and also simply as a source of deep and real pleasure and creativity. I’m not somebody who enjoys tidying and cleaning but I love to decorate – to choose paint colours and wallpaper, to get furniture, furnishings, pictures and ornaments ‘just so’, to arrange flowers – as well as to sew, bake, cook and entertain. I hope this gives me some real empathy with the interwar homeowners and homemakers who are the subject of this book.