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The Final *Downton Abbey* Movie Marks the End of an Era for These Beloved Period Sets

Production designer Donal Woods reflects on bringing the iconic interiors back to the big screen one last time.

BY KELLY ALLEN | PUBLISHED: SEP 12, 2025

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“So this is how the world ends,” proclaims Robert Crawley in *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale*. Lord Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) is touring a **London** flat, and he’s appalled not only by the small size of the place, but by **apartment-living** as a whole. He describes the concept as “a sort of layer cake of strangers,” and, well, he’s not wrong.

A significant emphasis in the movie—which comes after two others (in 2019 and 2022) and six TV seasons (from 2010 to 2016)—is on home. This tour is a drop in the bucket that nods to how living situations can evolve and the deep **meaning a home can hold in our hearts**.



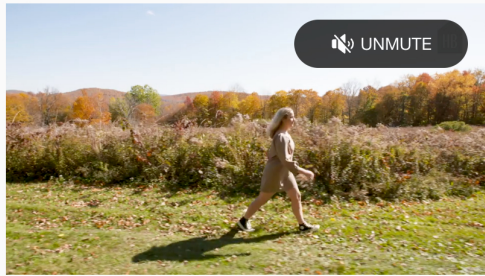


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For the third and final film, the production naturally returned to the grand stand-in for Downton Abbey: **Highclere Castle** in Hampshire, England. “16 years ago... We went to about 30 houses,” production designer Donal Woods, who worked on the entire franchise, tells *House Beautiful*. “It’s a lot we visited and a lot online—and [Highclere] was the first one we went to. But we visited lots more just in case, you know, there’s a better one. In the end, we returned there, and it’s always been good.”

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Highclere Castle’s library, main hall, staircase, drawing room, and dining room are instantly recognizable to fans of the series. “If you go to any country house in England now, they’ve got the furniture from 1740 still sitting in the same place, and it’s all very beautiful,” Woods added in a press brief. “It has been our job to maintain a familiarity which, hopefully, the audience has loved.”



To bring the Crawley charm back to Highclere Castle, the team dressed the interiors with the fictional family's photographs—more than before, as more babies and marriages have come along. They also reintroduced some of their prized possessions, including Robert's desk.



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While many furnishings, like the library's red settees, remain at the historic spot full-time, some priceless pieces in the home were removed for filming, including a valuable desk once owned by Napoleon Bonaparte. To fully recreate spaces like the library on a soundstage, Woods says, "would be, you know, a million dollars—more than that [with] all the books in there. You'd never do it."

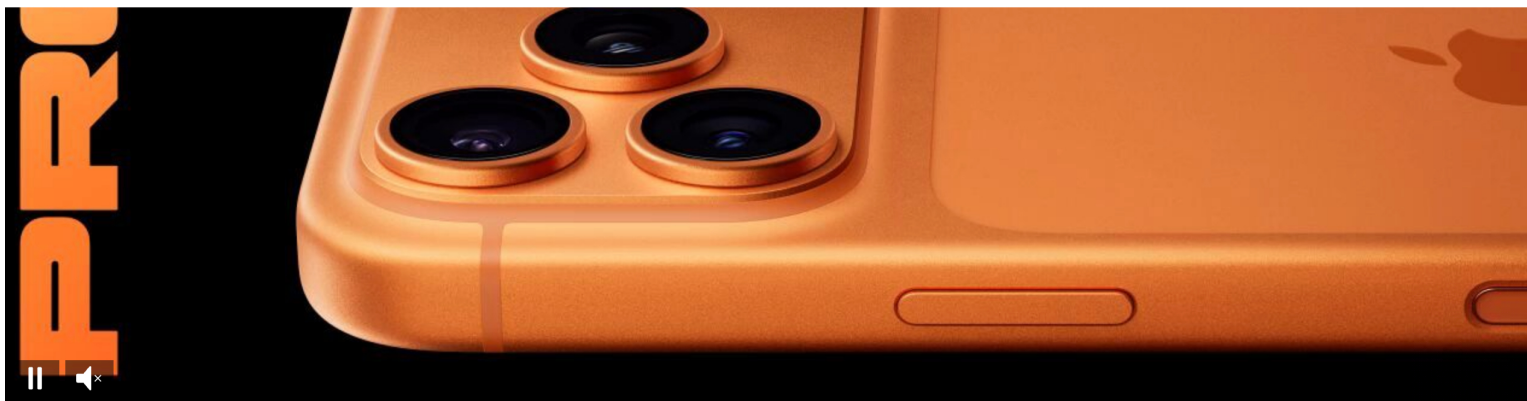


Some spaces were reimagined for *The Grand Finale*. A smoking room, which was built on a soundstage, was transformed into a music room. The formerly dark space is clad in a blue damask wallcovering with brown patterned drapery—a more airy, elegant setting for concentrating on a piano tune.



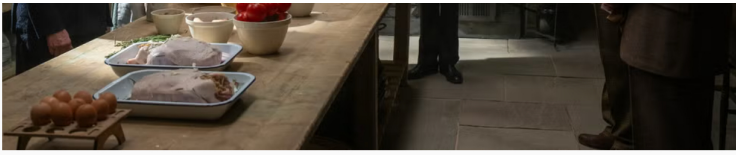
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All of the bedrooms and servants' areas were recreated on soundstages, as they largely had been throughout the series and previous movies. Woods is particularly fond of the downstairs servant halls, which are designed to feel like a black-and-white film in contrast to the Technicolor-coded upstairs world. The hardworking spaces are modeled after some homes the team visited long ago that still had their original kitchens at the bottom of the house, enclosed by three-foot-thick walls.





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“The below stairs may be ordinary and plain, but those rooms have become as iconic to Downton as the library and dining room have above stairs,” Woods said in the brief. “It’s not the prettiest space, but in my view it’s certainly the most memorable.”



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Beyond Downton Abbey, we see a bit more of the Crawley family’s London-based Grantham House in *The Grand Finale*. The 18th-century **house at Basildon Park** in England’s Berkshire lent backdrops for the home’s lavish interiors, including a red drawing room with a glittering chandelier. Once again, the design team did some slight tweaking and added some family photos to “make it more the Crawleys’ than a National Trust House,” Woods says. “Those London houses weren’t dressed too much. It’s a bit like having a holiday cottage—you don’t leave too much there.”



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For the aforementioned London flat tour, filming took place at **Langleybury Mansion**, an 18th-century manor house and film hub in Sarratt, England. Woods and his team decorated the empty space's halls minimally "to make it rather cool and uninviting," he says.



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Back in Yorkshire, the Dower House is no longer occupied by the Dowager Countess of Grantham. So, it's poised to be redecorated. While we see the furnishings draped in sheets ready to be cleared, we'll have to leave that reinvention to the imagination... for now.

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