



# Rustic revival

Simon and Catherine Davis have turned the rundown outbuildings on their beautiful Norfolk farm into the quintessential country escape, complete with its own stylish shepherd's hut

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OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM FAR LEFT  
The exterior of the Victorian shepherd's hut has been repainted in a soft blue woodstain by Jotun; simple enamelware suits the rustic interior. THIS PAGE Exposed brickwork is offset by tongue-and-groove panelling in the renovated farmworker's cottage





THIS PAGE Checked blankets and blue and white textiles add warmth and character to the sitting room. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The study; Simon specialises in country antiques; soft green woodwork brings colour to the kitchen



After ten years of holidaying in north Norfolk, Simon and Catherine Davis found it increasingly hard to return to their everyday London lives at the end of a break. The beautiful sandy beaches, wide open skies and friendly locals threw their hectic city existence into such sharp relief that they began to question what they were doing there. Happy childhood memories of mucking in on the family smallholding in rural Surrey and a desire to give his own three children similar experiences were further incentives to move out. So Simon quit his job as art director at a publishing house to go freelance, and he and Catherine began the search for a new home.

Their first visit to Westfield Farm was unpromising. "It had been lived in by an elderly widower for many years and was badly in need of renovation," Simon recalls. "There was so much work to be done that we drove off after 20 minutes, convinced it wasn't for us." But when Catherine, an occupational therapist, found a job nearby, and the purchase of a different property fell through, it seemed that Westfield Farm was destined to be theirs. "Once I'd got the job we had to find somewhere to live, so we took a deep breath and bought it," Catherine explains.

Gradually, the couple began to see that the property could be much more than just a home and offered some wonderful business opportunities, too. For not only were they in possession of a large 17<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse but also a number of dilapidated barns and an 18<sup>th</sup>-century farmworker's cottage. Simon had been dealing in country antiques as a sideline since he was a teenager and he and Catherine had toyed with the idea of running a B&B. They realised that the farm provided an ideal place for their passions to come together and that the outbuildings and cottage could be transformed to create an antiques showroom as well as stylish, self-catering accommodation.

The cottage was part of a series of improvements ▷







OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Floral bed linen introduces a pretty touch; Simon and Catherine with cocker spaniel, Freckles; an antique shepherd's smock and crook hang in the hut; the secluded courtyard. THIS PAGE The hut has retained its simple, rustic character



to the property in the early 1700s that also included re-facing the main house to suit the Georgian aesthetic. Simon and Catherine renovated the cottage in a rustic yet refined style, combining exposed brickwork and beams with polished oak, carefully chosen pieces of country furniture, limestone floors and a palette of muted greys and greens.

They were then presented with a chance to bring the two sides of their new business together, in the form of a Victorian shepherd's hut that Simon had spotted in a fellow dealer's garden. "All the ones I'd seen before were either too dilapidated or renovated to such an extent that they had no soul," he says. "As soon as we'd bought it Catherine had the idea of using it for B&B." The original platform bed was still in place, so a little insulation was all that was needed to make the hut habitable. "We lined it with sheep's wool so now it's really warm," Simon adds.

They have resisted the temptation to kit it out with the trappings of modern life. "We wanted to offer it as an escape from all that, a chance to live the rural idyll for the weekend," Catherine says. Plump pillows and a comfortable mattress aside, the hut is much as it would have been in the days when it provided mobile shelter to a shepherd tending his flock. The original paintwork has been left where possible, the stove is back in working order and, as a final touch of authenticity, Simon has hung an antique shepherd's smock and crook upon the wall.

The move has given Simon, Catherine and their children – Benjamin, 12, and older sisters Sophie and Flora – a real appreciation of the rural way of life. "We hatch our own ducks and chickens, and you can't beat that as a learning process for the children," Simon says. It's such things that convince the couple they made the right decision. "It's been hard work but we would never go back," Catherine says.

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