



EXTERIOR TO FRONT

The property was built around 1750.  
www.norfolkcourtyard.co.uk; 01362 683333.



# Taking stock of a cottage conversion

You will feel right at home in this charming holiday let which has been given a new lease of life thanks to **Simon and Catherine Davis**.

WORDS AND PICTURES BY TONY HALL

## LIVING ROOM

**Sofas:** Duresta from John Lewis, Norwich, 01603 660021. **Blindless Bronte** available at Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Cushions** from Jan Constantine, 01270 821194, www.janconstantine.com

**Roman blinds** with Osborne and Little fabric, 020 8812 3030, www.osborneandlittle.com

Ingenlook fireplace has **Clear View wood burner**, 01588 650123, www.clearviewstoves.com

**Wall colour** in shaded white, Farrow & Ball, www.farrow-ball.com

**All the beams** were fed with Liberon Black Bison liquid wax (www.liberon.co.uk) which is excellent for very rustic timbers.

*In past centuries*, the tied cottage – which came with the job – was a perk for the fortunate few among those who worked on the land or estates.

This was the case at Westfield Farm, in Foulsham, where this cottage was built around the 1750s, along with some other outbuildings at the time that the main farmhouse was being given a typical Georgian facelift.

It has been said that such cottages and outbuildings would have been constructed partly by the farm labourers themselves and, typically, the lower parts of the walls were a mix of different size bricks left around on the farm, as is the case here.

Today, this charming rural cottage, overlooking north Norfolk farmland on two sides, is enjoying a brand new lease

of life thanks to Simon and Catherine Davis, who have converted it into a holiday let.

Back in 2006, the stress of life on the M25, a busy career as an art director and constant media deadlines persuaded Simon and Catherine that a better life was needed for both themselves and their children, twins Sophie and Flora, who are now 12, and son Benjamin, 10. So they decided to move to Norfolk lock, stock and barrel. More of that move and their farmhouse home will follow next year in the EDP Norfolk magazine, when the balance of the restoration work is finished.

"When we first moved in, initially I used this cottage as a showroom for my other big interest, country antiques," explains Simon. "These antiques are



an amazing social history of former generations on the land.

"This gave us some time to settle in and decide exactly what the future was to be. We soon decided that we would convert the former outbuildings and barn into four luxury bedrooms with en suites, and move the antique business to the end of that courtyard development. In doing so this released this cottage, which we converted into the self-contained two-bedroom holiday home that you see now."

Simon and Catherine discovered plenty of the cottage's history during the conversion. It was obviously much-used in its former years, as the bricks at the back of the inglenook were heavily worn from years of log fires.

The beams are oak with the typical carpenter's marks, and there is evidence of what was once a large bread oven to one side. The original pigeon loft with its holes would have provided extra food to the residents.

"We call it the Stockman's Cottage as that is what a farmer immediately called it when he first saw it, believing that the cowman or shepherd would have lived there as part of the working farm," adds Simon.

"During its conversion, we managed to keep the old, crooked tree branch used for the banister rail and, where possible, many of the original features."

Catherine explains: "The farm was lived in by the same family of auctioneers and dairy farmers for 80 years prior to us, and the cottage was previously inhabited by their resident housekeeper. It had undergone mainly cosmetic updating and a very basic kitchen during that period."

"We wanted a light and airy feel to the interior with ease of maintenance, so we used limestone flooring for the kitchen, bathroom and hall, reclaimed oak for the lounge and study, and painted floorboards for the bedrooms. New central heating,

QUILL ANTIQUES SHOWROOM. In the courtyard at Westfield Farm, Foulsham, 01362 680147.



#### KITCHEN

Table, chairs and signs from Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. Dresser local buy, hand-painted by Simon. Units from Jewsons, www.jewsons.co.uk and shaker doors made by the builders Cornerstone Construction, Great Ryburgh, 01328 829438. Wall colour in shaded white, Farrow & Ball, www.farrow-ball.com

BOTTOM: Simon and Catherine Davis with Freckles.

new bathrooms and complete restoration.

"We stayed in the cottage for our summer holiday last year to test it out," she reveals. "This was really important to help us work out what we had got right, how the cottage functions and what we could improve."

"We found immediately that the cottage has a lovely homely atmosphere when you first enter; it is very relaxing and has a cosy environment."

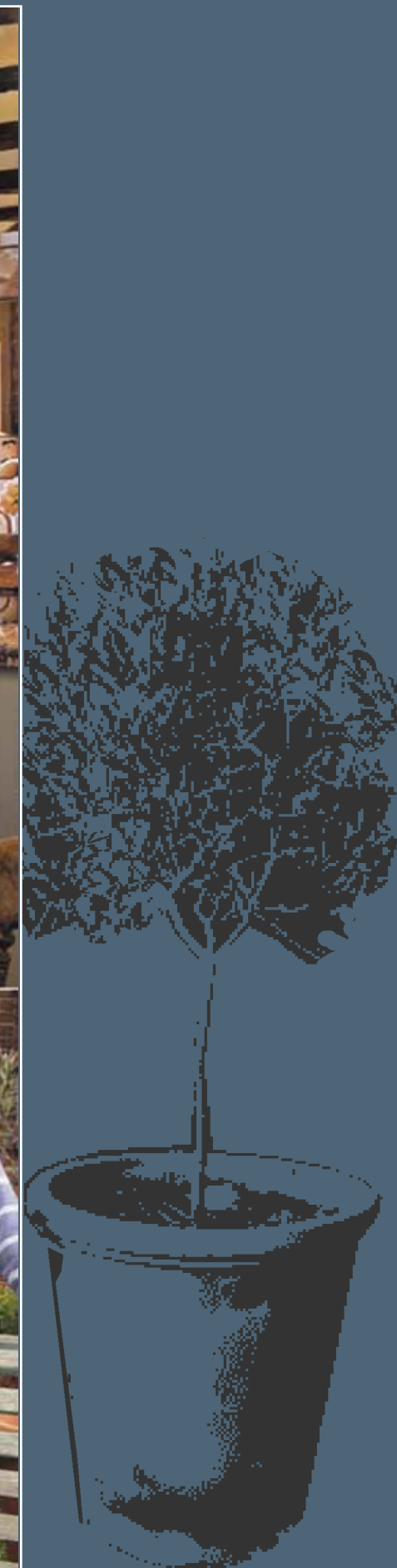
"Just like those TV programmes, we only just managed to get the property renovated prior to the first visitors arriving with literally minutes to spare! All that painting between the timbers took forever."

Simon comments: "We used Cornerstone Construction of Great Ryburgh throughout on the main conversion, and we must say they were brilliant."

"This kitchen is my favourite room – although that said, I like all the rooms – however I do think the kitchen has turned out exactly as we hoped," he says. "I like the combination of the ancient exposed beams with the exposed brick, the granite worktops, the stone floor and the painted units."

The kitchen window with its view of the garden and the ducks playing in the stream are all stereotypically English. This stream is fed by a natural spring which emerges to one side of the cottage and forms a shallow rill that meanders across the lawn to the road. This creates the lovely sound of gentle, running water. It only dries up in very dry summers and would have been the main source of well water for the house.

"We have reinstated an old housemaid's airer and have used a variety of old, enamel advertising signs with





**MASTER BEDROOM**

**Antique French bed**, Newark Antique Fair. Similar try Bed Bazaar, Framlingham, 01728 723756. **Chest of drawers**, Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Bed quilt** from Lily Blue, 01483 860000, [www.lilyblue.co.uk](http://www.lilyblue.co.uk) **Chair**, Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Curtains** made from Ian Mankin fabric, 020 7722 0997, [www.ianmankin.co.uk](http://www.ianmankin.co.uk) **Wall colour** in slipper satin, Farrow & Ball, [www.farrow-ball.com](http://www.farrow-ball.com) **Light** from Moo Moos, Holt, 01263 713178.

**BOTTOM:** The small stream which runs through the garden.

*"Everything has a story to it and that's what I like. It makes a house a home."*

their vibrant colours that I bought about 20 years ago," continues Simon.

"The dresser was bought locally. I didn't like it at first as it was too top heavy in proportions but the lady was so nice and keen for me to buy it and I did think I could give it 'the right look'. So I agreed to buy with a view to cutting it down and doing an old paint effect to give it a whole new look.

"When we removed the dresser from her kitchen the ceiling fell down! It had been holding up the plaster where a bath had leaked above. I had hair full of plaster and left her kitchen as if a bomb had hit it. Then a deer jumped out in front of us on the way home – so we are lucky it arrived in one piece at all.

"We bought the granite from a farm sale for £45 and heard another bidder say that it was 'the colour of puke!' Well, how wrong he was. Everything has a story to it

and that's what I like. It makes a house a home."

Catherine's favourite room is definitely the master bedroom. She says: "I love the French bed that we painted in Farrow and Ball pigeon paint. The white bed linen and Greengate/Lily Blue quilt finish the look.

"I chose to have the painted floorboards after seeing it in a magazine and realising how fresh it looked. We really enjoyed decorating the cottage as we have been able to do paint finishes on the furniture. It has enabled us to transform old pine into a more contemporary, timeless look. We use traditional antique wood paints that give that period colour and feel.

"The chest of drawers was a pine dressing table that had hung around in the shop. Simon took the top section and swivel mirror off it and left it as a chest



The cottage is surprisingly spacious inside.



#### STUDY

**Desk** from local auction. **Settle** from Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Curtains** made from Ian Mankin fabric, 020 7722 0997, [www.ianmankin.co.uk](http://www.ianmankin.co.uk). **Rocking chair**, Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Blue side table**, Quill Antiques, Foulsham, 01362 680147. **Wall colour** in shaded white, Farrow & Ball, [www.farrow-ball.com](http://www.farrow-ball.com). In the study area there are some old wrought iron ceiling hooks where it must have been used as a larder years ago. It is easy to imagine a brace of pheasants hanging there.

**Bottom:** Sheep in the field which is part of Simon and Catherine's land.

of drawers as it had a pleasing shape with its beading and curved corners. It looks so much nicer when painted in the pale blue grey.

"I get several interior magazines on subscription each month and often tear out articles of things I like that I think would suit the setting. Simon's theory is to buy furniture that you like when you see it and then find somewhere to put it.

"Gone are the days of shopping for a specific piece when good bits are so hard to find. We are lucky that we have our own antiques shop to call on for furnishings. It is surprising how much stuff you need to furnish even a simple cottage.

"After all this was done we went back through and added extra, more individual items that then inject the personality into the rooms. This takes the cottage beyond that bland functionality that you often

get with holiday lets, but at the same time being careful not to clutter."

The cottage is surprisingly spacious inside. Besides the kitchen and living room on the ground floor, there is a large study, then off the living area there is the garden room/lobby with a family bathroom beyond.

Up the stairs, with the original crooked banister, to one side of the landing is the delightful master which has an en suite, and to the other side the twin guest bedroom with countryside views. Both bedrooms have ceilings to the apex, with exposed beams.

"The look that we have tried to create," concludes Catherine, "is a classic English, simple and honest country look, using colourful ticking and gingham curtain fabric. We have used large, stunning photographs of local coastal scenes to create the essence of the

*"Simon's theory is to buy furniture that you like when you see it and then find somewhere to put it."*



Everything  
and that  
a home

to  
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#### GUEST TWIN BEDROOM

**Chest of drawers and bedside table.** Quill Antiques, 01362 680147.

**Quilts** from Lily Blue, 01483 860000, [www.lilyblue.co.uk](http://www.lilyblue.co.uk)

**Wall colour** in slipper satin, Farrow & Ball, [www.farrow-ball.com](http://www.farrow-ball.com)

#### FAMILY BATHROOM

**Suite** from Bathroom Warehouse at Rackheath, Norwich, 01603 722339.

**Wall colour** in light grey, Farrow & Ball, [www.farrow-ball.com](http://www.farrow-ball.com)

*"It's a good centre to explore a lot of the county's delightful countryside and attractions."*

north Norfolk coast and have used the quintessential Farrow and Ball paints, painting the skirting a darker tone than the walls.

"We already have many favourable comments in our visitor books, both for this cottage and the courtyard bed and breakfasts.

"It's a good centre to explore a lot of the county's delightful countryside and attractions. We are meeting many interesting people and the whole family is more than delighted with our new life here in the stunning Norfolk countryside."

For more information on The Stockman's Cottage or Courtyard Luxury B&B, visit [www.norfolkcourtyard.co.uk](http://www.norfolkcourtyard.co.uk)  
01362 683333 or 07969 611510.  
Quill Farm and Country Antiques:  
01362 680147.



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