



Natural WONDER

This Grade II listed Cotswold farmhouse has undergone a carefully considered restoration, with sustainability and a love of nature at its core

FEATURE SALLY ROWLAND PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES MCDONALD



OPPOSITE PAGE
The reinstatement of the Cotswold stone front porch enhances the symmetry of the house and makes a welcoming entrance for guests.

THIS PAGE Viewed from the dining room, the entrance hall walls, painted in Pigeon by Farrow & Ball, harmonise with the gentle hues in the Adam's Eden wallpaper by Lewis & Wood.



'It brings my passions together, with the house providing the welcome haven for family and guests I had hoped for'

ABOVE The kitchen, which Susie says is the "most used room in the house", was designed by Martin Moore and features stools from the contemporary Anyday collection at John Lewis & Partners to tie in with the black Aga. **RIGHT** A glazed door in the drawing room opens on to the garden terrace and the spectacular views beyond.

Reinvention and taking on a challenge is something graphic designer turned management consultant Susie Walker is not afraid of. Upon viewing a Grade II listed early Victorian Cotswold farmhouse in need of restoration several years ago, she could immediately see the potential to create a family home amid the acres of rolling countryside that could also feed her passion for horse riding. "However, in 2013, with a growing family of three energetic young boys and limited funds, we knew the project was a slow-burn job with hefty renovations to be made before embarking on the fun part of decorating," she explains.

Fast forward 10 years and her hard work, patience and vision have paid off with the creation of a luxurious yet comfortable home, which she shares with her husband and two dogs, along with her adult sons, when they visit. The farmhouse, described by one friend as "the prettiest farmhouse in the Cotswolds", has stunning far-reaching views of the Marlborough Downs and is surrounded by organically farmed land and prolific wildlife. ▶



The striking limestone flagstones in the dining room were reclaimed from a neighbouring barn. The mirror is from a local Cotswold antique shop and the lamps are by Paolo Moschino.



ABOVE The elm dining table in the breakfast room is matched with a set of Gustavian-style Swedish dining chairs from Lorfords. The walls are painted in a muted palette of Paint & Paper Library's Stone IV.

LEFT The hallway is greatly enhanced by opening up the attic landing and inserting conservation skylights to allow light to flood the staircase below. The bespoke Roger Oates stair runner was designed by Susie.

Having not been touched since the 1980s, the house was rundown, with a rabbit warren of dark, low-ceilinged rooms that needed reconfiguring to improve the flow, plus the plumbing and electrics needed to be replaced from scratch. "We lived in the farmhouse for 18 months to get a feel for it through the seasons. As the house is a listed building, we took great care to understand the history of the house before doing anything," explains Susie. "We restored original features, working with Atkey & Co to choose appropriate period skirtings, architrave panels and doors. There were lots of small, dark rooms, but we needed plenty of space downstairs for the family, so we took a major wall down to create a living space to congregate in as a family, as well as opening up the hallway with skylights to let natural flood in."

Taking a truly sustainable approach to the running of the house was paramount. "We installed a wood chip boiler in one of the barns for heating and hot water. Our clever plumber designed a system to reuse water for the loos and washing machines, and we use our own recycled water to keep the trees and shrubs watered in the summer."

The stone flooring in the dining room was found languishing in a barn and repurposed to lay above underfloor heating, while the handsome reclaimed wood parquet flooring in the elegant drawing room is over 40 years old and came from Susie's father-in-

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law. "We took some wood blocks to a local workshop to cut to a consistent size – so it is very satisfying that we could give it a new lease of life," she says.

With a keen eye for colour and design, Susie put together mood boards for each room and collaborated with interior designer Victoria Wormsley of French-Brooks Interiors to pull each of the distinctive rooms together. "I love exploring bold combinations of colour, pattern and texture, and Victoria nudged me to be more adventurous with some specific finishes. For example, the strong paint colour in the hallway and the eye-catching wallpaper for the dining room. "That was a leap of faith, but it definitely paid off," adds Victoria, who knew Susie had a strong visual sense and would not shy away from the bold colour and patterns she suggested.

Victoria has worked on clients' large houses for a number of years, and the farmhouse was no exception. Having advised on the room reconfiguration, bathroom design, lighting schemes and furniture layouts, she took time to find the perfect pieces to fill it with. "I chose the antique Persian rug in the drawing room, for example, to draw the colours in the room

together," she explains. "I also like to incorporate things that the client may have inherited or acquired on their travels so that the house has more meaning for them."

Susie valued Victoria's ability to mix traditional and contemporary styles. "Victoria has a real skill in focusing on the detail in a very considered way, suggesting and recommending how to pull furniture and finishes together, enhancing a room with inexpensive accessories or single lamps or cushions that make a room sing," she says. "She knows where to source new and different things, and we had a lot of fun exploring ideas together."

The kitchen-breakfast room is both functional and elegant, with a striking dining table made from a Dutch elm as the focal point. "What is so special is that this dining table was made from the last elm tree in the village where my husband's family lived, so there is a special resonance to it being the heart of the home," says Susie.

The natural world has been used as inspiration throughout the house, with naturalistic light fittings, fern prints and botanical fabrics all creating a

ABOVE LEFT Curtains in a trailing botanical design from William Yeoward, trimmed with aubergine velvet, are offset by walls in Farrow & Ball's Savage Ground. A Persian rug from Farnham Antique Carpets pulls the contrasting colour and textured elements of the room together. To see more of Victoria Wormsley's interior design work visit french-brooks.com



wonderful, inviting feel. “Susie is a keen gardener, so we consciously chose designs featuring naturalistic and organic motifs which connect with the surrounding landscape,” adds Victoria.

With the house now completed, Susie has more time to focus on her love of riding. She modestly refers to her ‘side hustle’ Cotswold Rides, offering bed and breakfast to keen riders who can bring their horses to stay in the stone stable and enjoy hacks in the surrounding countryside. “It brings my passions together, with the house providing the welcome haven for family and guests I had hoped for. The peace and views here are definitely good for the soul.” ■

ABOVE The mahogany sleigh bed is offset with a set of Henry Bradbury *Ferns of Great Britain and Ireland* antique prints and a cushion and stool in Queen Fruit in Jade by Neisha Crosland for Schumacher.

RIGHT A geometric design called Batik, in Amethyst, by Lewis & Wood covers the large-scale headboard and ottoman, and is offset with a pair of vintage gingham checked cushions from Lorfords.

