



Favourite room: *'The sitting room is a great place to sit and unwind while watching the tides wash in and out'*



Ocean currents

Inspired by the soothing colours of Cornwall's spectacular coastline, Catherine Higgins breathed fresh life into a former fisherman's cottage

Words Anne Armstrong Photography David Parmiter

Meet the owner...

Catherine Higgins, a creative consultant who specialises in interiors

Previous homes 'I've lived mostly in London, in houses of various periods, and for a while I had a large house in Florida,' says Catherine.

Current property...

Victorian cottage in Cornwall, available to rent through Unique Home Stays (01637 881942)

Rooms Sitting room, dining room, kitchen, TV room, conservatory, four bedrooms (one en suite), two bathrooms

Purchased 1994



1 & 2 Sitting room

Two Highly Sprung (01494 439596) sofas are placed around a coffee table; Maisons Du Monde (0808 234 2172) sells similar. Above the fireplace, which was made from local stone by Anchor Pools (01326 574318), hangs a seascape by Chris Hankey; his work is sold through The Rainyday Gallery (01736 366077)

Catherine Higgins describes her Cornish home as 'one of the best places in the world'. Taking in the property's stunning vistas of a stretch of the Atlantic known locally as 'the dolphins' playground', it is easy to see why. 'Living here brings back happy memories of childhood holidays by the sea,' says Catherine. 'The landscape is so rugged – it's like something out of an Enid Blyton novel.'

But coastal homes such as Catherine's can be hard to find. 'They don't come up for sale very often, and when they do, you're more likely to hear about it through word

of mouth, rather than an estate agent,' she explains. True to form, it was on the local grapevine that Catherine heard that this clifftop cottage was on the market. She leapt at the chance to buy it, even though it was letting in water at the time. 'This cottage was built for a fisherman, though I suspect he was wealthier than your average angler,' she smiles, 'and it had belonged to the same family for generations.'

Captivated by its charm and amazing position, Catherine was undaunted by the amount of work needed to bring the facilities up to date. 'That the cottage was in ►





1 Kitchen A vintage French painted dresser from Mark Maynard (01892 617000) adds character to the standard arrangement of cabinets in the remodelled kitchen; for similar built-in units, try Wickes (0800 106068)
2 Conservatory This was once an uninviting space, but refreshed and reorganised, it now serves as an extra dining room. The table, which consists of a glass top on a travertine base, was designed by Catherine (07802 895284)

Favourite shop: 'I'm a huge fan of French antiques markets – my friends always comment on my quirky Gallic finds'



Dining room Sourced in France by Catherine, the chandelier-cum-vase was bought specifically to hang in this space. The table came from Andrew Martin (020 7225 5100), while the chair covers were made from brushed linen supplied by Cotton Mills (01872 278545)

such a poor state wasn't a problem,' she recalls. 'It meant I could start from scratch, extending the building and revitalising the interior by opening up the space to allow in as much natural light as possible.'

Were he alive today, the Victorian fisherman who first lived in the cottage would barely recognise it. Catherine has knocked down walls, reconfigured rooms, and converted the loft into a master bedroom suite. Elsewhere, the old conservatory was relieved of its clutter and turned into an informal dining area, while even the

forest of brambles that formerly masqueraded as a garden has been tamed.

As for the interior decor, the backdrop is predominantly neutral, the odd exposed stone wall infusing the rooms with rustic character. 'It wouldn't have been right to try to make the house look like a fashionable beach hut,' says Catherine. 'But on the other hand, I didn't want it to look quaint. It was a question of keeping a balance.'

The cottage's coastal location also influenced Catherine's choice of textures and colour schemes. 'Both the beach and the

sea inspired me,' she says. 'The muted, sandy tones harmonise with the natural landscape, but I've used the cool, crisp blues of the ocean as an accent.'

At the heart of the house is an L-shaped sitting room, where a vast bay window frames a magnificent view. 'I'll always remember the first time I walked in here and looked out to sea,' says Catherine. 'Even now, I find I can pass a lot of time just gazing through that window.'

Catherine has furnished the property with a gentle assembly of contemporary

and vintage pieces, strengthened with a few French elements, such as the elegant chandelier in the dining room and the pretty painted dresser in the kitchen.

'There aren't any expensive items in the house, but then I don't believe you need to spend a lot of money to achieve a layered, homely style,' Catherine says. 'But I've stolen ideas from exclusive interiors shops in London, recreating them with the French pieces I've accumulated from market stalls over the years. And I've also had help with my soft furnishings from a ►



1 Master bedroom The mood is stylish and relaxed, with splashes of colour provided by the various cherry-red soft furnishings bought from Ikea (0845 355 1141). An artwork by Jordanian artist Suheil Baqian hangs above the bed; The Chambers Gallery (020 7778 1600) deals in abstract works from a wealth of international talent

2 Guest bedroom Mark Maynard (01892 617000) supplied the elegant French bed, while for painted bedside cabinets, try Laura Ashley (0871 230 2301)

3 Bathroom For limestone tiles similar to those used to cover the walls, try Kirkstone (01539 433296)



friend who used to work in the textiles business and is very talented,' she adds.

Upstairs, the bedrooms have been decorated in a country-cottage style, though the master suite at the top of the house has a sophisticated edge. 'I've spiced things up in there with some rich red accessories,' says Catherine. 'It might have been a stark space otherwise, but the crimson throw, cushions and artwork give this room a sense of warmth and vibrancy.'

It is this spirited feel coupled with the stunning views outside that have captured Catherine's heart. 'I'm adamant I'll keep my Cornish cottage forever,' she says. 'It's a little bit of heaven on earth.' **BH**

Inspired buys

Blue-and-white fabrics, like those Catherine has used in her sitting room and conservatory, always look fresh



Bedspread and curtains in Pillemont toile fabric, from £31 per m, Sanderson (01895 830044, sanderson-uk.com).



Sofa upholstered in Oakhurst fabric in Ice Blue, £33.95 per m, Romo (01623 756699, romofabrics.com).



Chair upholstered in Hera 7442, £26 per m, Harlequin (0870 830 0050, harlequin.uk.com).