MELLOW YELLOW
This elegant farmhouse near the Black Mountains is a haven of calm for Juliette and Neal Fernandes Smith
The landscape around Juliette and Neal Fernandes Smith’s farmhouse seems to invite guests to pause and inhale deeply, such is its still beauty. It was this sense of peace that appealed to Juliette, who has practised yoga for over 20 years and was looking for a property with land where she and Neal might possibly start a retreat centre. After selling her house in London, the couple were renting a Wiltshire cottage when they stumbled upon the house they have since renamed Alchemy Hill. ‘It was only the second place we looked at. But surrounded by thousands of acres of common, the views were outstanding, like a film set,’ says Juliette.

They had been drawn to the area, and nearby Hay-on-Wye, after a visit to a friend. The town’s community of artists and writers appealed to both Juliette and Neal’s creative appetites. ‘Originally, we had been looking for a traditional Georgian farmhouse and, although Alchemy Hill didn’t fit that mould, we were won over by the landscape,’ says Juliette. ‘Internally, the previous owner had done a renovation that had stripped out much of the original character. It was of a high standard, but we wanted to introduce older features to soften it.’ Juliette’s parents bought a hotel when she was four and, when she was a teenager, decided to build their own house. ‘I was given free rein to design my own >
Dining room
Low hanging pendant lights bring a romantic, intimate mood after dark.
Old School Electric Bell blown glass pendants, Holloways of Ludlow

You can walk from our land onto thousands of acres of common where you can roam freely among sheep and ponies.

Herefordshire Farmhouse
A deep butler sink is perfect for catering for large numbers of guests. Paintings propped on the work surface bring a relaxed, informal character. For a similar butler sink, try Tap Warehouse

“WE FOUND LOCKDOWN TO BE THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO PLANT A VEG PATCH AND BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE”
bedroom, so from a young age I was reading all the homes magazines and interior design has become a lifelong passion,’ she says. ‘We worked on the house for eight weeks, initially putting in a couple more bathrooms, restyling the kitchen and redecorating,’ says Juliette. ‘We also opened up a doorway that had been closed. Much of the work was on the exterior, which we repainted, and in the landscaping and planting.’ Juliette reaches far and wide for inspiration, drawing from the Japanese tradition of ‘wabi-sabi’, as well as French farmhouses and the landscape itself. ‘A place is about heart, and the interiors had to feel authentic and uncontrived. I wanted to achieve a sense of inner calm, so I chose objects for their raw beauty. I love things that you can see have been touched by another human being, or have been touched by the elements in nature. I feel comfortable mixing ages and styles of furniture and I have collected individual pieces from every country I have lived in or visited.’ Juliette has created a calming, homely and elegant interior, accessorising with natural wools and linens, as well as locally woven Welsh rugs. ‘The furnishings evoke a sense of timelessness and warmth, far removed from the stresses of daily life. I love incorporating different types of wood, especially ash, oak and walnut,’ she adds. Perfecting walls that were >
pale yet interesting took time, with a lot of fine tuning before settling on each shade. ‘Farrow & Ball’s tones and pigments are incredibly subtle so I have used their paints throughout. I didn’t want the colours inside the house to compete with the beauty that lies beyond.’

It was during the property’s makeover that the couple realised the house would be ideal as a holiday rental. Sharing the same spirit of hospitality as her parents, Juliette was eager to welcome guests to her home, and the pair now move into a cabin on the land when the house is occupied. ‘We don’t need all the space at the moment, but we imagine it as a house we could retire to, and of course we use it when family visits.’

Even with a gorgeous interior, it’s the landscape surrounding the house that rewards guests with extraordinary memories. You can see the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons from the house. Plus, the town of Hay-on-Wye, with its galleries, festival and boutique cinema, offers a bustling counterpoint to the wild expanses of countryside. ‘It’s a house to experience,’ says Juliette. ‘From the landscape, you get a tremendous sense of freedom. When there are so many new restrictions on our lives, here you can walk out into the land and be held in its magnificence.’

Alchemy Hill is available to rent through Unique Homestays, alchemyhill.uniquehomestays.com

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**Bedroom**
Uncovering the original brickwork reclaimed some of the property’s character that had been lost in its previous renovation. **Bed**, Heal’s. **Bedding**, Soak & Sleep

**Bathroom**
A Victorian-style bath and basin capture a bygone era. A milking stool made by a local carpenter makes a convenient side table. Source a similar roll-top bath and free-standing washbasin with ceramic legs at Victorian Plumbing.
THE HOUSE WAS ONCE A SECRET MEETING PLACE FOR QUAKERS. I LOVE THAT IT WAS A SAFE HAVEN FOR THOSE WHO NEEDED IT.

Bedroom
Modern upholstery brings a fresh update to classic, ornate beds. **Beds**, The French Depot. **Table lamp**, Habitat. **Walls** in Bone estate emulsion, Farrow & Ball.
ON OUR DOORSTEP

Visit ... ‘Raglan Castle (cadw.gov.wales/visit/places-to-visit/raglan-castle) is an amazing fortress-palace that cuts a striking silhouette against the landscape.’

Shop at ... ‘The Welsh Girl (thewelshgirl.com). She uses old milling techniques to weave traditional Welsh blankets with more modern colours. The famous Richard Booth’s Bookshop (01497 820322, boothbooks.co.uk) is another real treat with a gorgeous boutique cinema and a café.’

Go for a meal at ... ‘The Felin Fach Griffin (eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk) near Hay. It’s a beautiful restaurant with a great chef that’s been going for years and is very popular with locals.’