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TALES FROM THE MILL

A 400-year-old mill house has been given a new lease of life, while retaining all of the charm that has made it a favourite family escape for two decades

Kitchen This vaulted space links the two mill structures together and is enhanced by white-painted stone walls, a bleached wood-clad ceiling and ceramic floor. **Flooring**, Paris Ceramics. **Similar table and bench**, Lots Road Auctions. **Light**, Maisons du Monde





Kitchen The sturdy range, stylish hanging pendants and patterned tiles add a sense of drama. Similar range, Aga. Lights, Agapanthus Interiors. Similar tiles, Bert & May

A mill house tucked away in a rural valley just three miles west of Dartmouth and a quick walk to the picturesque beach of Blackpool Sands became a bolthole escape from London life for Tanya Bird. It proved to be an idyllic spot for her and her three sons to enjoy holidays away from the city, with all the freedom afforded by the country-meets-seaside location. 'It was a magical place for the boys to grow up,' she says 'Surrounded by the sea, they would spend hours swimming, sailing and making camps. All their childhood summers were enjoyed here, as well as Christmas and Easter breaks. It has always been very much a home from home for us.'

Fast forward 17 years and the boys, now young adults, are at different stages in life and family trips to the mill are saved for a few precious weeks each year. 'The time felt right to renovate the mill and to rent it out as a holiday let between our visits,' says Tanya. 'I approached Unique Home Stays and they suggested a couple of designers to help me manage the process.'

After initial meetings, Tanya commissioned Siobhan Hayles and worked closely with her on all elements of the transformation. 'Siobhan has an incredible eye, both creatively and practically, and really helped to realise my vision. I had strong initial thoughts about >



AT HOME WITH...

Owners Business adviser Tanya Bird bought the mill in 2002 as a holiday home for her family of three boys, who are all now grown up: Rory, 23, Jamie, 19, and Guy, 17.

House A 400-year-old five-bedroom mill house in Dartmouth, Devon.



“ I WANTED OUR HOME TO FEEL REALLY COMFORTABLE AND TO HAVE A SENSE OF PLACE AND AUTHENTICITY ”



Sitting room

A teal velvet sofa injects rich colour. Teal sofa, Loaf, covered in Omega Teal velvet, Linwood. Grey sofa, Nkuku, covered in Espresso Brera Lino fabric, Designers Guild

Dining room Tanya has chosen a traditional feel, with a table bought from the previous owners lending a classic touch. Chairs, The Dining Room Shop. Chandelier, Petersham Nurseries



what I wanted, but she took my ideas to a level that I would never have achieved on my own,' says Tanya. With Siobhan's trusted trades team on board, building work commenced in the spring of 2017 and by the start of August that year, Tanya had her first bookings.

Originally a working mill on the River Em, Ellesmera is one of four mills positioned along the stream and consists of two structures, linked together by a vaulted kitchen space at the rear. Initial work on the house involved damp proofing the property and digging new channels around the exterior to improve drainage, while pipework was updated for the water supply.

On the ground floor, a former boat and wood store has been converted into an open outdoor/indoor snug that has transformed the house. The space features a woodburner, comfy sofas covered in throws, timeworn kilim cushions and old garden paraphernalia displayed eclectically on the original stone walls. 'Whatever the weather, you can cosy up and feel close to nature,' says Tanya. A decked platform replaces a former sloping lawn, while French doors from the adjacent dining room open onto original mill stones that have been inlaid into the deck as a nod to the property's history.

The boys' former bunkroom has been updated with a stylish monochrome bedroom scheme; and the bathroom has been refreshed with a freestanding >

LIVING THE DREAM

Tanya Bird has used a serene backdrop of white and neutral walls throughout her family home.

You haven't used traditional beach house colours - why is that?

'I wanted the space to feel elegant and timeless. A predominantly white backdrop avoids the clichéd look and is very soothing.'

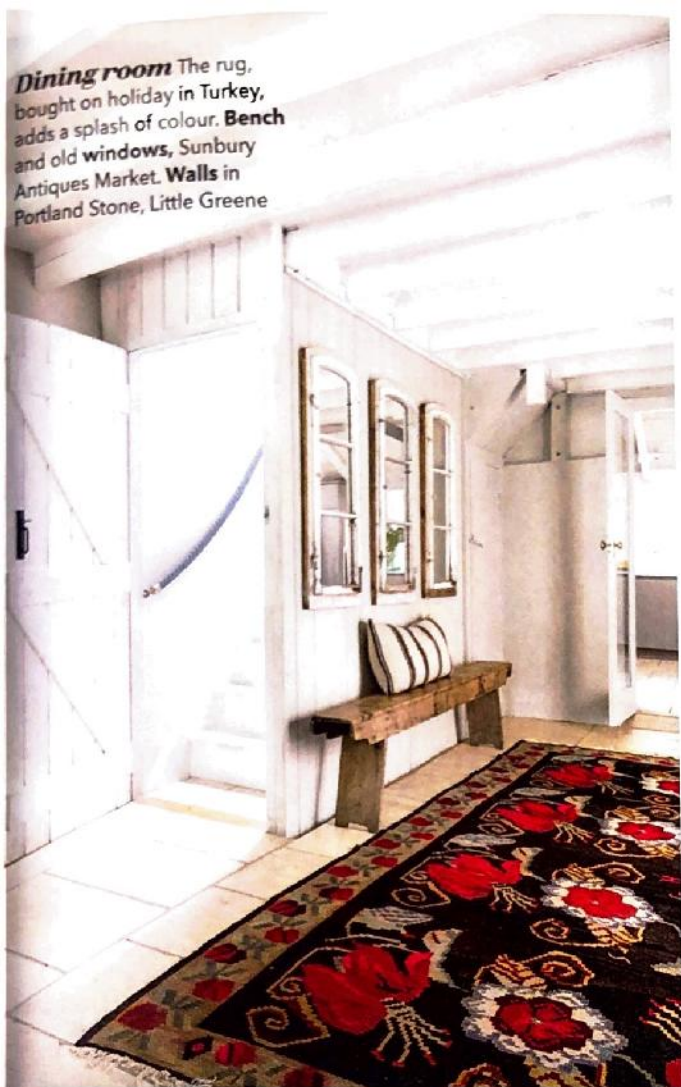
How practical is white in a busy family space?

'White is surprisingly practical and can easily be refreshed. The simplicity creates an airy, almost sanctuary-like feel.'

How hard is it to create interest in a largely white scheme?

'We mixed in natural, earthy tones and occasional pops of brighter colour to punctuate the space. The all-white bedroom features over 20 different shades but still feels cosy.'

Dining room The rug, bought on holiday in Turkey, adds a splash of colour. **Bench** and old windows, Sunbury Antiques Market. **Walls** in Portland Stone, Little Greene



Bedroom A striking orange headboard adds wow factor. Headboard fabric, Kanoko Copper, Zoffany. **Side table**, Maisons du Monde



Bedroom Original boat oars add a nautical touch. **Cushion** on bed, Luma. Similar **mirror**, Lots Road Auctions. Striped cushion, Nkuku. Similar **iron bed**, John Lewis & Partners



Bedroom An antique chair adds a touch of luxury. Similar rug, Rugs UK. Chest of drawers, Sunbury Antiques Fair. Vase, Nkuku. Mirror, Newark Antiques Fair



Bathroom Tanya has updated the space with a Tadelakt finish and a stylish rolltop. Bath, The Albion Bath Company, in Bronze burnished finish. Duravit sink, CP Hart

bath, rain shower, Tadelakt walls and patterned tiles. Throughout, rustic-finish rooms have been redecorated in shades of off-white, stone and soft mole, while pops of ochre, turquoise, warm reds, earthy oranges, dark blues and black punctuate soft furnishings, rugs, fabrics, and headboards. Original French herbarium specimens and fossils reference Tanya's academic background in natural sciences and her passion for plants. Much of the conceptual work was completed remotely, followed by visits with Siobhan to Chelsea Harbour and Ardingly Antiques Fair to source fabrics and one-off finds.

'I originally fell in love with the mill for its sense of calm and relaxed Provençal feel,' says Tanya. 'After 15 years of family life, it desperately needed renovating, but I didn't want to spoil its inherent charm.' A beam in the living room still bears a Latin imprint, painted by the previous owner: *This corner of the earth smiles for me more than any other.* 'These markings are all part of the history of the mill and I wanted to treasure them. Siobhan understood my need to preserve the essence of the space. I wanted our home to feel comfortable and to have a sense of place and authenticity. When I walk through the door now, those sensory benchmarks are as strong as ever - I couldn't be more delighted.'

Ellesmera Mill is available to rent via uniquehomestays.com

ON OUR DOORSTEP

Visit... 'Blackpool Sands Beach (blackpoolsands.co.uk). Whatever the time of year, there is nothing better than walking down the lane to this beautiful cove. The wildflowers and trees bring you close to the changing seasons, as do the dramatic waves in winter and blue calmness in summer. The nearby Venus Café is a hit all year.'

Shop at... 'Wild Food Devon (wildfooddevon.com) for Mark Lobb's local fresh fish. All their fish is caught within a 30-mile radius, working with the seasons and fish availability. Catches are only 24 hours from sea to shop - it's the freshest I've ever tasted.'

Go for a meal at... 'Rust and the Wolf (rustandthewolf.co.uk) in Ashburton is great for coffee, cocktails, brunch or lunch. Soak up the design inspiration too of this lifestyle shop and café.'