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HOME INSPIRATION

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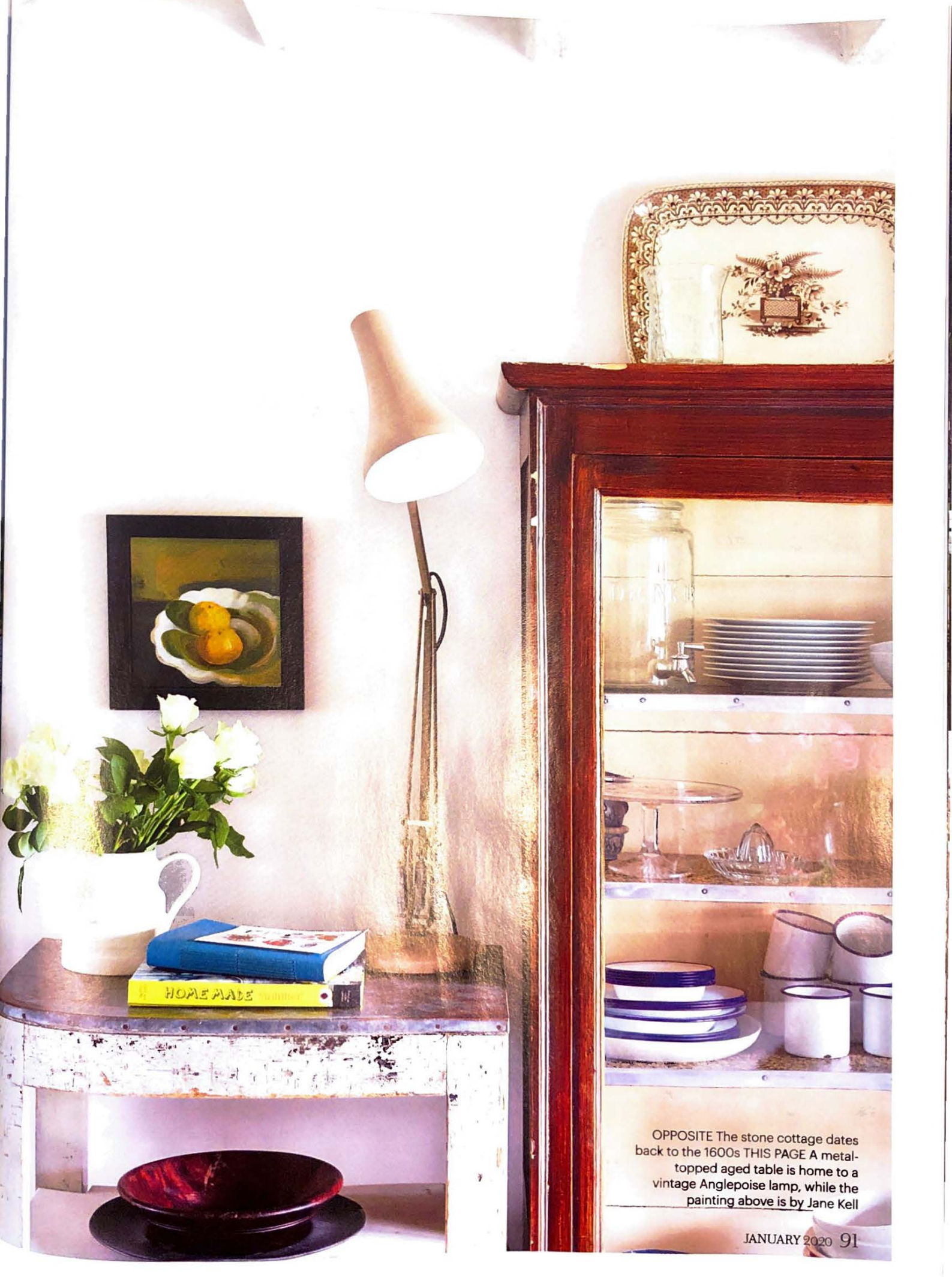
# CORNISH *To the* CORE

Local knowledge has been key to the masterful renovation of this former toll house

WORDS BY **JO LEEVERS**  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **RACHAEL SMITH**







OPPOSITE The stone cottage dates back to the 1600s THIS PAGE A metal-topped aged table is home to a vintage Anglepoise lamp, while the painting above is by Jane Kell





**F**or Sylvie Morris, vintage furniture was the natural choice for her family's Cornish cottage. "Right from when I was a young girl, my grandmother used to take me around charity and bric-a-brac shops," she says. "It's a style that feels right for me – and it also suits the character of this home."

The core of the house dates back to the 1600s, but the additions are from the Victorian era, when it was a toll house for the quarrying of slate and sand from a nearby beach. Sylvie took time to find pieces that referenced the house's history without feeling 'themed', with Victorian glass-fronted cabinets, which work for crockery storage, and delicate lights threaded with glass beads. The slightly more industrial touches – a zinc-topped table, a machinist's metal chair and a factory-style desk lamp – also chime with the cottage's working past.

In fact, slowing down and taking cues from the building itself formed an essential part of the renovation process. "I'd project-managed several house renovations before in Bristol, but they were more straightforward Victorian or Edwardian townhouses," Sylvie says. "When it came to this home, the building methods I was familiar with were suddenly irrelevant. This cottage set its own rules – Cornish rules – and we had to learn them."

Like many cottages on the north Cornwall coast, the house had been built with similar methods used to construct dry-stone walls: "Its core is made of rocks jammed together with lime mortar," Sylvie says. After a false start with a Bristol-based builder who didn't fully understand the technique, and who tried to skim over the walls as if they were Victorian lath and plaster, she switched to Cornish born-and-bred tradesmen. They understood the method far better – and also knew that the process of renovating sympathetically would take time.

There was a lot of work to do before Sylvie and her family could move in, including re-roofing, replacing the windows, and laying new flooring. For the kitchen, old slate was sourced, which felt appropriate for the house's ▶

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Sylvie and the family's rescue dog, Otis, relax in the comfy living room; the porch area was added, using salvaged timbers, while the exterior was hung with slate tiles; in the kitchen, a wooden crate is mounted on the wall as an

extra shelf, while the bread bin is a market find and the pendant a reconditioned ship light from Trinity Marine  
OPPOSITE In a nod to the cottage's working history, slate from a local quarry was laid on the kitchen floor, contrasting with the plain white units and Aga



*This cottage set its own rules - Cornish rules - and we had to learn them"*









quarry-related past. Fireplaces were stripped back to their original, simple openings, and authentically wonky walls were retained and re-limed. "We love how it's all a little bit wiggly and uneven – even the fireplace has a kink," Sylvie says. "It's a lovely reminder of the rough stones that lie beneath, which can't be controlled or smoothed out."

To decorate the newly shored-up walls, she added items bought at antiques and collectors' fairs, but was careful not to overload each space. "I love finding pieces that feel special, but I don't accumulate for the sake of it," she says.

Sylvie and husband Grant are from Bristol, so they had already discovered favourite dealers and shops in the city. "I love Gloucester Road – you know you'll always find something interesting in the shops there," she says. "It's full of dealers who pick up pieces they love and are intrigued by, rather than things that will make the biggest profit."

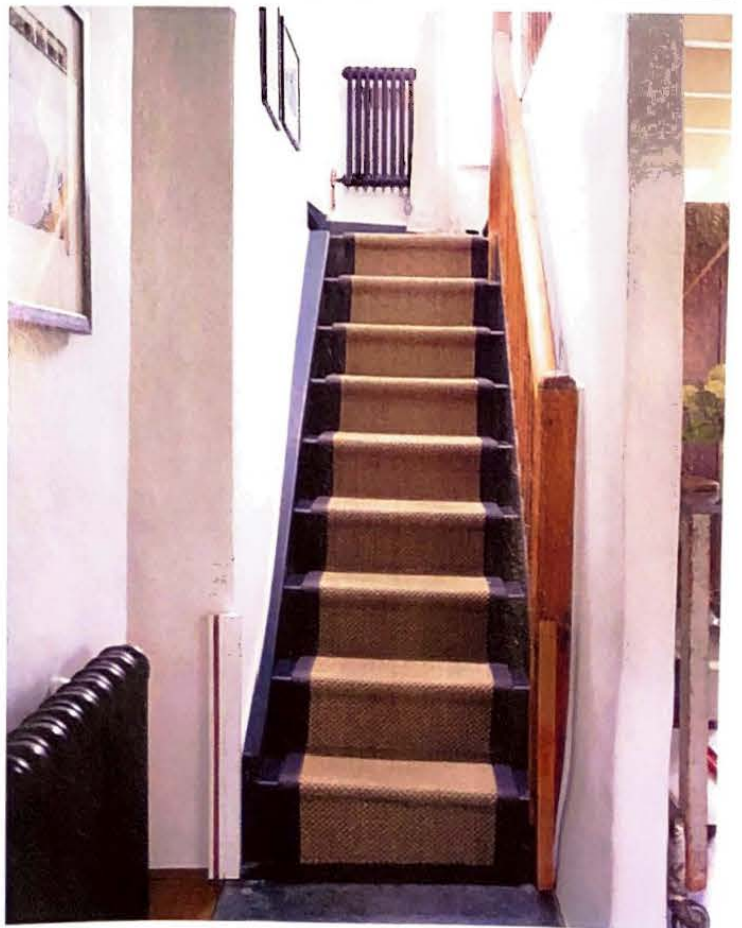
Bar the mattresses and sofas, most things in this cottage are vintage or antique. The kitchen table is a French find, with extra inches added to the bottom of its legs so Sylvie's husband could fit his legs underneath. "He's a fair bit taller than your average 19th-century farmer," she says, with a smile. An old trunk doubles as a coffee table, while a pig bench works as a side table: "It's been patched up with pieces of lead over the years – it's definitely got character."

Build in joinery was done by Cornish carpenters, with detailing and joints that are in keeping with the older furniture. In the bathroom, old slate from one of the few remaining working quarries is set into the rendered wall as a splashback. "It has a lovely texture," Sylvie adds. The art in the cottage feels personal, with several paintings and etchings by her father, David Morris, and her sister, Jane Kell, both established artists.

Sylvie likes lighting with a utilitarian character and has added metal shades, plus vintage Jieldé and Anglepoise lamps. "Industrial lights have become more popular lately, but I've loved this style ever since seeing dealers bring ▶

OPPOSITE Baileys sofas are upholstered in a Belgian linen that works with the house's slate tones, while a vintage trunk serves as a coffee table. A vintage Jieldé lamp, mirror and wall cabinet, from Shepton Mallet Antiques, Vintage & Collectors Fair, create a

small study in the corner THIS PAGE, FROM TOP The cottage's original curves and quirks have been retained; a vintage French country table and old pig bench create a rustic, rural feel in the dining room; the sisal stair runner suits the cottage's unfussy style





back Czech factory pendants and ships' hull lights ten years ago," she says.

While she's always on the lookout for items for the cottage, Sylvie trusts her instinct for what will suit the spaces. "It's not my style to slavishly follow what's deemed on trend right now - be it industrial furniture or floral prints. For me, buying antiques and vintage pieces is more about what catches my eye and will look right in our home."

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*Sylvie trusts her instinct for what will suit the spaces*





OPPOSITE Almost-matching crystal lights hang by the bed, which was made from salvaged floorboards THIS PAGE The false ceiling was removed to reveal beautiful beams



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