

HOME INSPIRATION

Anchored IN A BYGONE AGE



Just a pebble's throw from the sea, this former fisherman's cottage is filled with vintage treasures that evoke a relaxed and timeless coastal style

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THE DETAILS

WHAT'S THE STYLE?
A 200-year-old fisherman's cottage with a balcony overlooking the beach

WHERE IS IT?
St Ives, Cornwall

WHO LIVES HERE?
It belongs to Paula Craigen and her husband Iain



THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT Revealing the house's past life as three separate cottages, an extra staircase leads from the snug up to the green bedroom LEFT The property dates from around 1840 BELOW In the dining space, Paula and Iain pulled up the carpet to reveal floorboards painted in a bluey green. The artwork, *Scribbles*, is by British artist Clare Cammack OPPOSITE Sourced at a Lancashire reclamation yard, an industrial tool bench is a stylish twist on a kitchen island

This is a house that has been loved for a very long time," says Paula Craigen. "I have always been drawn to period properties and this one has a particularly beautiful old soul." She and her husband Iain had been house-hunting in Cornwall for somewhere with a sea view, and this house on the beach exceeded their wildest expectations: "Its balcony is just metres from the waves."

It overlooks Porthmeor Beach in St Ives, where property rarely comes onto the market. Paula and Iain managed to complete the purchase before lockdown, but then couldn't visit for many months. However, the delay gave them the time they needed to dream up the perfect interior.

"The house had been in the same family for 60 years, so we felt a huge responsibility to its previous owners," Paula says. "It still had lots of original features, and any changes we made had to preserve its integrity and respect its history."

Almost 200 years old, it was once three separate houses in a small courtyard of fisherman's cottages, one of which was home to fisherman and painter Alfred Wallis. "Wallis would almost certainly have set foot in here," Paula says. "In fact, we called it Alba House after his painting *Wreck of the Alba*, which is of a ship caught in high seas off Porthmeor Beach."

To help them start the project, Paula and Iain called in Jess Clark, interiors expert at lettings company Unique Homestays, as they planned to rent out the house before moving in.

Jess was similarly smitten. "We didn't need to lay new flooring or replace the doors," she says. "Those old bones had to remain the primary focus, and nothing we added should fight them. There are no statement pieces here. Everything blends to create a warm, welcoming and lived-in atmosphere."

Between them they drew up a wish list of vintage items. "Once lockdown was lifted, Iain and I visited reclamation yards and ▶



The stunning sea view and a *Country Living* woodburning stove from Charnwood are two of the charms of this cosy sitting area

“The window seats are designed for reading or wave-watching, and you can drink in the sunset from the balcony”



OPPOSITE Though colour is used sparingly, shades of pink and terracotta appear in this bedroom in the form of a La Redoute rug and linen by Piglet in Bed. The chandelier is from Cream Cornwall THIS PAGE, LEFT Vintage finds take pride of place around the house BELOW RIGHT Echoing shades elsewhere in the green bedroom, decorator Mark Campbell created a verdigris paint effect on the freestanding bath

antiques fairs, and went with Jess to Shiver Me Timbers, a salvage specialist in Penzance," Paula says. "We constantly traded ideas because we were searching for some pretty specific things. It took many weeks, but everything we found brought us one step closer." Jess adds: "It's always easier to buy off-the-shelf, of course, but we wanted unique pieces."

Iain, a builder by trade, then moved into the house for six months to bring their ideas to life. He started by lifting the old carpets to reveal a patchwork of floorboards, adding a layer of matt varnish to preserve their patina. "It actually took a lot of work to give the impression that we hadn't touched the floors," laughs Paula. "But it was well worth it. They're rather like a time capsule because they chart everything that has happened to the house – including where every rug was laid – over the years."

Iain also has a background in carpentry and turned benches from an old school science lab into the kitchen cupboards and worktops, and crafted integrated doors for the fridge/freezer and washing machine from antique French louvered shutters.

Local decorator Mark Campbell painted all the walls in standard white emulsion – the perfect backdrop for vintage prints and traditional seascapes, plus contemporary pieces by Hertfordshire-based abstract artist Clare Cammack.

The sense of a bygone era invites visitors to enjoy life at a slower pace until the couple can live there permanently. "Three of the four bedrooms look out over the beach, so you wake to the sound of the sea," Paula says. "The window seats are designed for reading or wave-watching, and you can drink in the sunset from the balcony."

Though the house is glorious in the summer, the couple love it equally out of season, when the beaches are empty and the weather is wild. "On a stormy day, you really understand how much the house has withstood over the years," Paula says. "There's something extremely comforting about that."

FOR MORE DETAILS about staying at Alba Beach House, see uniquehomestays.com.

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Paula's tips FOR PRESERVING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

- 1 Work with what you've got** For example, the patched worn floorboards in our house add an air of authenticity that's impossible to recreate.
- 2 Go neutral** Plain white walls are the best way to show off everything from vintage prints to modern artworks. It's what I call the gallery effect.
- 3 Avoid 'statement' pieces** Elaborate items upstage a rustic setting. Aim for a harmonious blend of colours, fabrics and furniture.
- 4 Make a wishlist of items and stick to it** It's worth hanging on for the right piece to complete a look. We wanted some specific things – such as aged wooden panels to make headboards for the beds – and it took weeks.
- 5 Use reclaimed wood** for cupboards and worksurfaces to create a kitchen that's warm, welcoming and practical. DIY skills are a great bonus: Iain has always been great at making something out of nothing.



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