

# COUNTRY HOMES

& INTERIORS

## Renovation answers

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# CELEBRATING AUTUMN

Fall foliage, dried flower crafts  
& gardens that glow





A photograph of a modern interior space, likely a tiny cottage, with a large window overlooking a scenic landscape. The room features a wooden ceiling, a light-colored floor, and a large window that provides a view of a loch and mountains. In the foreground, there is a round, woven ottoman with a glass top, holding a vase of yellow flowers, a book, and a small black object. A yellow and white striped blanket is draped over the ottoman. The text "CALL OF THE WILD" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# CALL OF THE WILD

A tiny cottage by a loch became Catherine Spain's perfect project, and her inspired renovation blends beautifully with its backdrop of mountains and wide skies





## IRISH COTTAGE

**GLASS BOX** This contemporary extension keeps the weather out with triple glazing while giving uninterrupted views of the loch. Easy chair and coffee table, Hyacinth from Design Village. Sofa, Loaf. Yellow velvet cushions, Avoca. Cream cushions, Loaf. Other cushions, Zara Home. Lamp, Design Vintage





# A

s a child in the 1970s, Catherine Spain would go swimming in a tranquil loch surrounded by the Kerry mountains, beginning her love affair with southwest Ireland. So years later, when she moved back to the area from overseas looking for a project, perhaps fate played a part. For not only did she find an ideal cottage to restore, but it was set on the shores of that same loch. 'From the moment

I saw it, I knew this was the one,' says Catherine. It must have been love, as she looked past the cottage's ugly yellow plaster, the uPVC windows and the lack of indoor facilities. What did impress her was the setting in five acres of Ireland's wildly romantic west coast.

As builder Henry Thompson began to strip back the plaster to the original stonework it became apparent that the cottage was at least 200 years old. 'It dates back to the times when animals were kept at one end and people lived at the other,' explains Catherine. Determined to strip away decades of inappropriate changes, she planned to restore the cottage sympathetically using artisan methods so the old stone walls could breathe again. Catherine chose hemp to insulate the building, and traditional lime render for the exterior finish. Inside, the walls are also plastered with lime.

Catherine gained permission to add two extensions, each unique and contemporary, creating a striking contrast to the older parts of the building. One gable contains a new sitting room with wall-to-ceiling glass, which gives uninterrupted views across the loch and the mountains. 'I love the glass box,' says Catherine, who was inspired by images of a house in Belgium with a similar addition. 'You can relax inside with a glass of wine and still experience the wildness of this place.'

The second extension houses the bathroom. Catherine's architect, the award-winning Maxime Laroussi, suggested a concept inspired by the barns on surrounding farms. Those

barns are often made from a section of corrugated iron, and Catherine's curved cocoon echoes that local style. 'It has a cosy feel of being enclosed, but there are great views from the bath,' says Catherine.

Her own 'modern rustic' interior style is all about celebrating natural, hand-crafted elements. 'My approach was to use traditional raw materials and let them shine through,' says Catherine, who opened up the ceilings of the original cottage to bring in more space and light. Her palette is all warm yellows and muted greens, which sit beautifully against the off-white lime plaster, with rugs and soft furnishings in natural colours, adding warmth and texture.

Catherine has brought her own quirky vision to the evolution of this old cottage. The lime render around the bath is curvy and sensuous, and

the basin appears as though hewn from a single piece of rock. While hardy types may wish to start the day with a sprint down to the loch and a plunge into its peaty depths, Catherine prefers a soak in her outdoor bath, nestled in the cottage's grounds.

'I'm interested in re-wilding, so I consulted gardener Mary Reynolds, who suggested planting wildflowers, clover and herbs. It was just lovely last summer.'

Yet while the location may be inspirational, it also

meant a tough working environment for Catherine's team. 'In the autumn the weather was so wet and wild, the wind picked up my builder's site office - a caravan - and threw it over,' recalls Catherine.

Catherine's cottage is ready for another 200 years of admiring the sunset, swapping stories around the fire, or just relaxing and becoming absorbed in the landscape. 'It's a fantastic place,' she says. 'There's no light pollution, so the stars are amazing. And there's a really peaceful atmosphere.'

**Limehouse Cottage is available to rent via [uniquhomestays.com](http://uniquhomestays.com)**



#### AT HOME WITH

**OWNER** Catherine Spain, a former accountant who worked overseas before returning to her roots on the west coast of Ireland.

**HOUSE** An early 19th-century one-bedroom cottage. Catherine bought the cottage in 2019.

**SITTING ROOM** The cross-beams are raw larch and contrast with the painted tongue and groove ceiling. **Ottoman**, Terence Murphy of Goodform. Ottoman fabric, Women Art Store Morocco. **Throw**, Kerry Woollen Mills. **Sofa**; easy chair, both Loaf. **Rug**; cushions, all Zara Home. **Ceiling** painted in Casein Light Green, The Traditional Lime Co





'I love the "glass box" living room; you can relax inside with a glass of wine and still experience the wildness of this place'

**DINING AREA** This homely dining area sits between the kitchen cabinetry and a window overlooking the loch. Dining table and chairs, found in a brocante in France. Pendant light, Zangra. Rug and cushions, Zara Home. Kitchen cabinetry painted in Citrine Eggshell, Little Greene







**BEDROOM** Rustic wooden furniture adds warmth to the neutral scheme. **Lamp**, converted from a vase from Design Vintage by Terence Murphy at Goodform. **Table**, bespoke by Old Builders





## IRISH COTTAGE

### LANDSCAPE

Catherine has a lifelong connection to these mountains and used to go swimming in the loch as a child. The cottage has been lovingly restored to suit the wild surroundings



### CATHERINE'S COUNTRY LIFE

**SIMPLE PLEASURE...** 'Watching the newly planted wildflower meadow come to life last summer, with all the long grasses and seedheads providing the perfect habitat for birds and other wildlife as we head into autumn.'

**MY FAVOURITE VIEW...** 'Apart from looking out of the glass box extension, is from nearby Kells Bay Gardens; they overlook Dingle Bay and there's a cafe where you can sit out and enjoy the stunning view.'

**SHOP AT...** 'Emilie's in Glenbeigh, their famous sourdough bread is fantastic, they also have delicious cakes and all sorts of fine foods and wine. They do a delicious sourdough pizza in a wood-fired oven.'

**GO FOR A MEAL AT...** 'The Driftwood Surf Cafe overlooking the Atlantic at St. Finian's Bay, you get a fantastic view of the famous Skellig Islands.'





**BATHROOM** The wonderful bath surround is shaped in lime plaster. **Bette Bath**, The Bath House. **Riverstone sink**, Muubs. **Taps**, Bagno range, Delforno. **Mirror**, Garden Trading





## IRISH COTTAGE

**BEDROOM** The simple luxury of the bedroom is irresistible. **Bed** by Old Builders. **Cushions**, Zara Home. **Reading lights**, Muuto lamps from Inreda Design Shop. **Blanket**, Kerry Woollen Mills. **Bedding**, Linen Bundle

