

Rural retreat

Francesca Reed's sensitive and colourful refurbishment has changed this humble farmhouse into a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of city life

FEATURE RICHARD WEBBER | PHOTOGRAPHY COLIN POOLE



SITTING ROOM

The eclectic mix of soft furnishings contrast beautifully with the pale pink walls, bringing depth and warmth to the room.

Walls in Chemise, Little Greene.

Sofa and chairs, [Sofa.com](#).

Cushions, Anthropologie. Similar

rug, Woven. Bird print, John Derian

HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY

A 17th-century Grade II-listed farmhouse

ROOMS

Sitting room, kitchen, dining room, library, three bedrooms, two bathrooms

LOCATION

Kent



Reflecting on the renovation of their 17th-century farmhouse in the Kent countryside, Francesca Reed and her husband Peter Robinson, 'naively' underestimated the work required to revive its charm. 'It was in a terrible condition but just called out to us – it was clear there was so much potential to be realised,' says Francesca. 'The roof leaked and pipework was in poor condition. In fact, broken pipes had caused damage to floors and walls.'

After removing the ruined floorboards, woodworm was discovered, which meant not only replacing joists but fumigating the entire house. 'We were left with just four external walls because the roof needed replacing, too,' says Francesca. The couple knew a complete reconfiguration of the house was required. 'During the 1970s, the layout was reorganised with the ground floor based around two staircases, each going up to a bedroom. Curiously, though, there was no way of getting from one to the other without descending one staircase and ascending the other.' 'It wasn't practical,' says Francesca, who hired TaylorHare Architects to redesign the layout.

Because the property was Grade II-listed, TaylorHare had to secure listed planning consent before embarking on the project. Once obtained, the team focused on the ground floor and created a layout that offers a more workable experience.

The dining and living spaces are now intertwined to become the heart of the ground floor while the kitchen was relocated and turned into a generous



LIBRARY

Francesca believes every house should have books, not only to read but to create a beautiful feature.

Chair, Oka. Lights, Jim Lawrence. Shades, Pooky

KITCHEN

To maintain a traditional look, many appliances have been tucked away in the utility room behind.

Cabinets, Wren Kitchens. Cat print, Andy Warhol

'BOOKS CAN BE A FEATURE IN THEMSELVES - THE COLOUR COORDINATED BOOKSHELVES ARE ONE OF THE MOST COMMENTED ON FEATURES'



DINING ROOM
Furniture found on Facebook has been brought to life by coats of vibrant paint. Farmhouse Table Company sells tables like this. Similar dining chairs, Incite. Pendant light, Dowsing & Reynolds. For a bird's egg print, try Kuriosis



open-plan space. Keen to retain the characteristics of the property's past, Francesca concentrated on one era from its 400-year history. 'I chose a stripped down, modern Victorian look, which is echoed in the square architraves and boxy skirtings. For the kitchen, I wanted to use traditional fittings and tiles while keeping lines fairly clean and contemporary.'

Upstairs, the main bedroom, with its whitewashed beams, is a peaceful, calming room tucked away in the attic. Nestled into the apex, it affords Francesca and Peter glorious views of the garden and fields beyond. 'I wanted the house to have a traditional feel but didn't want the interiors to be too heavy so chose a light colour palette and kept the soft furnishings whimsical. I like a house to feel curated but not overwhelming,' explains Francesca.

The renovation took a year to complete but the wait was worth it. 'It has been transformed from a sad, decaying house to a light and joyous space,' says Francesca. In summer, we can throw open the windows and enjoy the closeness to nature. In winter, we can turn up the heating and feel cosy on the sofa with a good book from the library wall upstairs!

Having had their first taste of country living, Francesca and Peter wouldn't now swap it for the world. 'It's the greenery and calmness that makes it so wonderful,' enthuses Francesca. 'To be honest, having so much space around us means it would be very hard going back to having neighbours again!' ²⁵ *Maison Blanche can be booked via uniquehomestays.com. For information on TaylorHare Architects, visit taylorhare.com*

STAIRCASE

The rope banister is a nod to the cottage's coastal location.
Stairs in Privet Hedge, Valspar. Rope banister, Rope World

BATHROOM

A deep tub is luxurious and relaxing.
Freestanding bath, Hudson Reed



MAIN BEDROOM

In this lovely space, morning sun streams in, making the crisp white bedding and beams feel even brighter.
Walls in Confetti, Little Greene. Cushion and rug, Oka. Light, Jim Lawrence. Shade, Pooky

BATHROOM

An antique mirror and a basin unit upcycled by Francesca add grandeur.
Similar mirror, Vinterior. Basin, Villeroy & Boch. Floor tiles, Porcelain Superstore

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