

EXTERIOR Originally a farmhouse, the main building has been extended twice over the years. The house sits in around 11 acres of fields and garden, and there's a lake which attracts lots of wildlife



SENSE OF PURPOSE

The new home that brought fresh focus to
early-retired couple Suzanne and Gary McConnell
has inspired a business venture, too

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or Suzanne and Gary McConnell, the prospect of early retirement was just a little too leisurely. 'We were used to being busy and once we had sold our business we wanted to find a new purpose; something to get us both excited again,' explains Suzanne. The spark of a new business idea came when their son Grant got married in Norfolk. 'We saw a country house wedding venue and we could see how that might work for us,' she adds. It was enough to get the couple searching for a property near Glastonbury, where they had both grown up – eventually finding this home in 2020. It's a former farmhouse set in 11 acres, complete with pool, tennis court and outbuildings.

The house itself was sound but the interiors were tired. A few of the rooms seemed to lack a clear role, and furniture that had passed from owner to owner was looking more shabby than chic. So Suzanne turned to her friends, interior designers Lucy Simpson and Lucy Diamond, to help with the transformation.

'Suz and Gary had been living here for about a year and that was helpful in understanding what they needed from the space,' explains Lucy. The couple have dogs so adding a proper lobby and dog room/boot room was a practical move. Gary had his heart set on a cinema room, and a dark living room with a low ceiling was the natural location. Another room to the rear of the house with a great view became an office and library.

The designers brought in swatches, samples and moodboards. But Suzanne has a great eye herself and it was while they were choosing fabrics and finishes that the true spark for a new business came.

'Suz has always had an interest in interiors and furnishings and we would go to design fairs together,' explains Lucy. 'One night we were having a chat and there was a real lightbulb moment. Before we knew it, what started as an idea for a cushion shop with a few lifestyle bits turned

into a plan for a full design business. And so Parker & Dot was born, operating out of a barn right here.'

With a fledgling business onsite, the early days were challenging. 'Our first desk operated out of what is now the cinema room. It was being used for storage so we were picking our way through towers of boxes and beds to get to work,' says Lucy. When renovations moved on, the office relocated to the space by the pool. It was summer but that didn't stop the wind and rain flying in at times.

Back indoors, the house was taking shape. An orangery was added to the rear of the open plan kitchen/dining/living area, as well as an extra lobby and utility room. 'Most of the work was cosmetic and the challenge was how to make such a large house feel like a cosy home,' explains Lucy. Suzanne cites interiors brand

Neptune as being a great influence for the way it takes classic country and gives it a modern twist, so Lucy took this as a starting point then encouraged her friend to push beyond it.

Where possible they have kept kitchen and bathroom fittings. As a busy home with pets, they chose practical finishes for the flooring and parts of the upholstery. 'There are great materials available, such as flooring from The Unnatural Flooring Company, which looks natural but is

bullet-proof,' says Lucy. 'It's about being realistic and creating a durable home that still has style and elegance.'

So what of the wedding venue idea? 'It turns out it's not so easy,' says Suzanne, 'but this house has delivered so much more than we could have imagined. An inviting family home and a business with friends all rolled into one. It couldn't get much better.' **The house is occasionally let through [uniquehomestays.com](https://www.uniquehomestays.com); see 'Viola'.**



AT HOME WITH

OWNERS Suzanne McConnell and husband Gary live here with their three dogs. They have two grown-up children.

HOUSE Six-bedroom detached home built in 1911. There's also a studio for interiors brand Parker & Dot (parkeranddot.co.uk).

FAMILY AREA The couple love having an open-plan kitchen/dining/living room which is now connected to the orangery. Rich patterns add interest to the neutral shades in the room. Wells sofas, Up Sofas





“The open-plan kitchen, dining and living area is the hub of the home. We added a utility room for practicality but also an orangery which offers beautiful views over the lake and woodland”

KITCHEN The existing kitchen had good quality cabinetry by Chalon, but it was repainted in Alpine by Neptune. Display cupboards, made by local joiner, painted in Mazarine, Little Greene. Table and chairs, all Neptune



SUZANNE'S COUNTRY LIFE

SIMPLE PLEASURES 'Our lake is like a little nature reserve in itself. We get herons and kingfishers and the ducklings are so cute in spring. We see a lot of birds of prey and the starling murmurations are breathtaking.'

FAVOURITE VIEW 'Glastonbury Tor (nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/somerset/glastonbury-tor) is such an important local landmark. I love to walk up it with the dogs and the view from the top is amazing.'

SHOP AT 'The Middlewick (themiddlewick.co.uk) which has lovely treats and Sourdown farm shop (facebook.com/sourdownfarmshop).'

GO FOR A MEAL AT 'The White Hart pub in Somerton (whitehartsomerton.com) is a favourite restaurant of ours.'



POOL AREA The pool is a striking feature and Parker & Dot spent its first summer operating out of the building here, known as the grotto. It houses a hot tub and has lovely views over the garden

ORANGERY Suzanne and Gary added the orangery as an extra room with great views all year round. **Sofas**, Up Sofas. **Rug**, Rugs.co.uk. **Coffee table**, DI Design. **Light**, Visual Comfort. **Cushions**, Oka and custom made





BEDROOM The bath was an existing feature so the design team made it stand out by installing panelling and painting the bath. **Panelling** painted in Oval Room Blue; **Bath** painted in Preference Red, Farrow & Ball







MAIN BEDROOM The design team set a colour palette for the house based around Suzanne's favourite shades of blue. **Carpet**, The Unnatural Flooring Company. **Blue cabinet**, The Dormy House



BATHROOM The team kept the original fittings and flooring in the main bathroom but completely refreshed the décor. **Walls** painted in Cromarty, Farrow & Ball. **Panelling** painted in Kagali, Paint & Paper Library

BEDROOM Inky hues walls help make the patterned wallpaper and headboard pop. Headboard upholstered in Fez fabric, Guy Goodfellow Collection. Bed linen, The White Company. Cushions, Oka and custom made

