

Natural world

Catherine Spain restored her 18th-century lochside cottage using traditional materials and artisan methods

FEATURE ALEXANDRA PRATT | PHOTOGRAPHY RUTH MARIA



LIVING AREA

'I used wood in large pieces, such as these raw larch cross beams, to add to the organic feel,' says Catherine.

Ottoman, Terence Murphy of Goodform. Throw, Kerry Woollen Mills. Sofa; chair, both Loaf. Cushions and rug, all Zara Home. Jug, Muubs

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s a child, Catherine swam in a tranquil loch surrounded by the mountains of County Kerry. Years later, after a career working overseas, Catherine moved back to the area and began to explore her lifelong passion for old cottages. Perhaps it was fate, but not only did she find the 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 Catherine saw past the ugly yellow plaster, uPVC windows and lack of indoor facilities. What did impress her was the cottage's breathtaking setting on five acres of Ireland's wildly romantic west coast.

When builder Henry Thompson began to strip back the plaster and reveal the original stonework, Catherine realised the cottage was at least 200 years old. 'It went back to the times when animals were kept at one end and people lived at the other,' says Catherine. Determined to restore the cottage sympathetically, she used artisan methods and traditional materials so those old stone walls could breathe again. Hemp was chosen to insulate the cottage and traditional lime render was used for the exterior finish.

Catherine gained planning permission to add two contemporary extensions, creating a striking contrast to the older parts of the building. One gable boasts a new sitting room with floor-to-ceiling glass, which gives uninterrupted views across the loch and the mountains. 'I love the glass box,' says Catherine. 'You can relax inside with a glass of wine and still experience the wildness of this place.'

The second extension houses the bathroom and her architect, the award-winning Maxime Laroussi, suggested echoing the curved shape of local barns. 'It has a cosy feel of being enclosed, but there are great views from the bath.'

Catherine's modern rustic style is all about celebrating hand-crafted elements. 'My approach was to use raw materials and let them shine through,' says Catherine, who vaulted the ceilings of the original cottage to bring in more space and light. Her colour palette is all warm yellows and muted greens, which sit beautifully against the off-white lime plaster. Catherine has brought quirky details to the 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.

Yet the inspirational location 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 and overturned it,' she recalls. The cottage is now ready for another 200 years; the perfect place to admire the sunset, swap stories around the fire, or just relax and become absorbed in the landscape. 'It's a fantastic place,' says Catherine. 'There's no light pollution, so the stars are amazing. There's a really peaceful atmosphere.' 🌿

Limehouse Cottage is now also available to rent via [uniquehomestays.com](https://www.uniquehomestays.com)



HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY

Detached 18th-century cottage with two contemporary extensions

ROOMS Sitting room, kitchen-diner/living area, bedroom, bathroom

LOCATION County Kerry, Republic of Ireland



SITTING ROOM

This contemporary addition keeps the weather out with triple glazing in a recycled frame. Rugs, Irish Hide Designs. Coffee table and lamp, both Design Vintage. Sofa, Loaf. Yellow velvet cushions, Avoca

KITCHEN-DINER

The colour of the units reflects the soft greens of the landscape.

Dining table and chairs, found in a brocante in France. For similar, try Hemingway six-seater dining table, and Anyday Clayton dining chairs, John Lewis & Partners. Cabinetry in Citrine, Little Greene





'THE GLASS EXTENSION FEELS LIGHT IN THE LANDSCAPE, YET NATURAL, WITH FLOOR-TO-CEILING GLASS ON TWO SIDES AND RAW LIME PLASTER ON THE REAR WALL'

BEDROOM

The floors are polished concrete, which is simple and robust.

Bespoke bed, The OldBuilders Company. Similar Earth bed frame, Furniture Village. Cushions, Zara Home. Blanket, Kerry Woollen Mills. Muuto wall lights, Inreda Design Shop. Lamp, converted from a vase from Design Vintage by Terence Murphy at Goodform



**'I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE FEEL OF THE PLACE -
I DIDN'T REALISE THERE WAS ALSO A BEAUTIFUL
OLD COTTAGE BENEATH THE MODERN FACADE'**





BATHROOM

The wonderful bath surround is shaped in lime plaster.

Bette bath, Bath House. Riverstone sink, Muubs. Taps, from Bagno range, Delforno. Mirror, Garden Trading. Walls in Beeckosil White, Traditional Lime Company