

Hall

A console table provides a festive welcome decorated with baubles and natural foliage.

Baubles, Cox & Cox.
Console table, Graham
and Green. **Lamp**, Pooky



PARTY HOUSE

At Christmas, the singing, dancing and laughter of their five children fills the rooms of this homely barn, converted by Maria and John Southwood



Dining area

A new skylight has transformed the space, filling the room with natural light. Pendant lights, Holloways of Ludlow



Exterior

The converted barn acquired a new porch, larger windows and a Juliet balcony. **Door** and **window frames** in Studio Green, Farrow & Ball



AT HOME WITH

Owners Maria Southwood, a GP, and her husband John, a City financier, and their five children, Felix, nine, Ellie, eight, Sofia, five, Anna, three, and Louisa, 18 months.

House A converted cattle barn in Somerset dating back to the 1800s, with six bedrooms and a separate guest cottage, completed in 2019.

For most parents, Christmas shopping is a highly secretive affair – even more so when you have five children to conceal presents from. ‘I am blessed with a lock-up cupboard under the stairs,’ says Maria Southwood, although hanging stockings from the bannisters above must only increase the anticipation about what’s hidden inside.

Being a GP as well as a mother of five, Maria has to be super efficient with her festive planning, so by the beginning of December the tree is ordered from a local farm and safely installed at one end of the living room, ready to be decorated. For the second year now, it takes pride of place in their newly converted barn – a property bought after Maria and John’s fourth child, Anna, was born. ‘We were fed up with always trying to book country cottages for holidays and weekends and just missing them. We finally decided to buy somewhere of our own,’ says Maria.

The couple first considered Gloucestershire, but decided on Somerset, where properties were less expensive. ‘I come from a family of architects, and my sister Claire and my brother-in-law Max, founders of the award-winning architect and interior design firm De Rosee Sa, were our obvious first port of call when it came to the barn’s conversion.’

A previous owner, a potter, had converted the barn some 20 years before, turning the garage into her >



Kitchen

The Aga takes centre stage and the shelf above it, made from reclaimed timber, adds an additional rustic touch. Similar **Aga**, Aga Living

“I LOVE BEING ABLE TO WATCH JOHN OUT OF THE WINDOW, CROSSING FIELDS ON HIS QUAD BIKE”



Porch

The porch was a much-needed practical addition for the family. **Coir matting**, Ron Thompson Carpets



Living room
Plush blue velvet sofas provide ample seating grouped around the wood-burning stove, perfect for festive gatherings. **Sofas**, Sofa.com. **Coffee table**, Laura Ashley. **Cushions**, Oka. **Lamps**, Pooky



“WHEN SNOW PILES UP ON THE VELUX WINDOWS
AND LOGS IN THE WOOD BURNER BEGIN TO CRACKLE,
THERE IS A FEELING OF FESTIVE COSINESS”



Main bedroom

The sloping, beamed ceiling and views of the Mendip Hills give this room lots of character.
Bed, Swoon. **Bedside table**, Cult Furniture. **Bedspread**, Zara Home. **Cushions**, Maisons du Monde



studio and the living room into a double-height space. 'It was too open-plan for our needs,' says Maria, 'and we needed more space for our family than the existing four bedrooms and one bathroom.'

Working with the family, discussions were 'fruitful and easy,' says Maria. 'It was obvious we needed some intimate spaces and more bedrooms, so as visually exhilarating as the double-height space was, it needed to be divided up. Ceilings were lowered and floors added, but we still enjoy the extra height in the hall and an open apex ceiling in our bedroom, which overlooks the Mendips. We love to sit with the doors open and drink in the glorious view.'

The most logical design decision was to divide the house into two wings, with children and adult areas separated by the double-height hall. 'Remote intercom devices for each child's room means we do not have to be within earshot to hear a child's cry,' says Maria. The new porch is a huge bonus, although achieving perfect order is hard work. 'You cannot imagine how long it takes to line up five pairs of trainers and wellington boots in tidy rows!' says Maria.

Wherever possible, the architects maximised the breathtaking views. As well as installing new doors in the main bedroom, they replaced a tiny barn window with a large bay one and added a cushioned window seat in the living room. 'The window seat is a family >

“RAW WOOD BEAMS AND PAINTED FURNITURE ADD TO THE MODERN RUSTIC FEEL”



Guest bathroom

The free-standing roll-top bath is set at an angle so you can enjoy the view out of the window while you bathe. **Bath**, CP Hart. **Print**, Oka.

Bedroom

This guesthouse was converted out of a large shed at the bottom of the garden. Prints, Oka. Artichoke bedside lamps, Dunelm. Chests of drawers, Swoon

**ON OUR DOORSTEP...**

Visit... 'Stourhead (nationaltrust.org/stourhead), a Palladian mansion with extensive, unusually lush gardens. Our children love it.'

Shop at... 'Kilver Court (kilvercourt.com), an old converted mill that is technically a discount designer outlet, but with a difference because of its rural setting. It's surrounded by ancient trees, making it the most pleasant shopping experience imaginable, and there is also a village-style cafe/restaurant on the site, which is both child- and dog-friendly.'

Go for a meal at...

'The Roth Bar & Grill (rothbarandgrill.co.uk), which is also an art gallery in a barn that inspired us during our building works. The eggs Benedict is amazing.'

favourite. We take turns to sit here and enjoy the peace of the rolling hills and meadows.'

With her busy life looking after five children and running a doctor's surgery, Maria simply had no time to visit showrooms or big stores. 'I bought the entire contents of this home online, from books to fill the shelves to sofas, beds, tables, mirrors, lamps and vintage consoles. It was all made possible because Steve Chivers, our local expert builder, was here to receive the endless run of deliveries,' she says.

Maria's taste is homely, bright, fresh and contemporary. Raw wood beams and painted furniture add to the modern rustic feel. 'I like a bit of mismatch because it feels more homely,' she says. 'With the children in mind, I went for sofas to jump on and stain-proof fabrics to withstand sticky fingers and the rough and tumble of small people.' Her unifying element was the use of a deep blue/green colour that visually connects all the main rooms. 'It made life easier for the painter, and it's a colour I love.'

With a separate guest cottage and even a heated outdoor swimming pool, the house is made for entertaining. But it's never more alive than at Christmas, when the karaoke music is turned up and the children's playroom is turned into a disco.

Kilnwood is available to let through Unique Homestays, uniquehomestays.com