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Tincture's remote location in the Cambrian mountains gave the project its own unique challenges – and opportunities

# Living the WILD LIFE

How a sailor and a yogi transformed a remote run-down cottage in Wales into an eco-idyll. By *Carole Annett*

This project challenged us in so many ways,' admits Raffaella de Tommasi of Tincture cottage, which sits hugged by the Cambrian mountains on a carpet of undulating Welsh greenery. The closest neighbours are wild ponies, colourful blooms and tangled shrubs, while a natural pond doubles as a plunge pool after long hikes in the nearby Brecon Beacons.

Raffaella and partner James Fooks-Bale had a tick list of essentials when house hunting: no pylons or other man-made obstructions; a property they could make sustainable; and, most importantly, a place of calm, peace and comfort. Looking at Tincture, its cosy kitchen with Rayburn cooker and scrubbed table (found in the stable and restored), garden room with low, wide windows where one can literally count sheep in advance of an afternoon snooze, and the bath with bucolic vista, it's clear the couple have achieved their objective, and some.

The end result has been a rocky road – in all senses – the location being both main draw and the main challenge. Sitting at the end of a long, narrow tarmac road followed by 800-metres or so of uphill farm track, with a stream thrown in for good measure, meant all rubbish had to be taken out via truck and trailer. Bringing in a two-ton generator, 'was spicy in several places,' smiles Raffaella. And in the early days, there was no water or electricity. 'We were literally hand-sanding every floorboard', she says. 'Resilience, determination to prove ourselves and others wrong, and a splash of naivety and creativity went a long way.'

Upcycling formed a major part of the project. As Raffaella explains, 'Getting rid of stuff when you live in such a remote location can be extremely challenging and counter-intuitive. So, in a way, it forced us to make the most of what we already had on-site. We really enjoyed getting creative with what we could find and repurposing what we already had. It can be a very fun and rewarding process, and kinder to the environment.'

Inspired by his enthusiasm for sailing, James brought in a marine electrician to help design the power supply and central heating. Central heating and hot water comes courtesy of the Rayburn with a thermal store via solar energy. An oil boiler kicks in when needed. Water is sourced via a natural spring, with a filtration system topped up by the stream in drier months. 'We insulated both floor and roof in the house increasing the house's EPC rating from a G to a B which, for an old property, we were told was exceptional by the surveyor,' says Raffaella.

Tincture gives James and Raffaella a lifestyle they have been longing for, an escape from work and a simpler way of life more in tune with nature. And space, both indoors and outdoors. 'I think we can proudly say the result exceeded our original expectations,' she smiles. 'We hope the off-grid function inspires others to make similar steps.' With somewhere as beautiful as this, how could it not.

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