



Where old meets new

Making a few contemporary changes to a 17th-century alehouse in Suffolk has allowed its owners to put their own stamp on this inspiring property while still retaining its original charm

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THIS PAGE Garden flowers, Emma Bridgewater pottery and animal-themed accessories lend a nostalgic air. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM NEAR LEFT A glass wall facing the garden brings light into the house; soft greys, creams and blues create a country mood in the kitchen; Winston enjoys a nap in the garden room





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The wooden bench in the hall was made by Dave and painted in Old White by Farrow & Ball; the kitchen window looks over a flourishing herbaceous border; Dave also crafts wooden birds. OPPOSITE Wooden beams were sandblasted to reveal their true colour. Debbie re-covered an old armchair and stool in Wool Spring by Abraham Moon

When Debbie Down first stepped inside her restored 17th-century alehouse in Suffolk, her initial impressions were decidedly mixed. “I felt we had found our dream home but something was wrong,” she says. “The main door led directly into the kitchen, which was at the back of the house, but, with no window looking onto the garden, it felt disjointed.” However, when Debbie and her husband Dave walked into the adjoining derelict storeroom, everything fell into place. “I knew instantly that it had to be the kitchen and the original one could become a spacious entrance hall,” she explains. “Then we saw that there was a little lean-to tacked on the side and realised the potential for a lovely sunny garden room to provide a link between indoors and out.” Suddenly they had a project on their hands, and a determination to make the house their own.

As the property is the best part of 400 years old, the couple’s early plans could easily have turned into a

full-scale restoration job, but luckily it had been well maintained and was structurally sound. Its listed status inevitably gave them a few obstacles to contend with, though, the main one being a sloping cobbled floor in the new kitchen. “The room was where the animals were once kept and there was a gully down the middle of the floor so they could wash out the slops,” Debbie says. “We asked for permission to level it but were refused. So, instead of covering it up, we decided to keep it intact – I’m so glad we did because it has become a real feature. We walk up to the sink and down to the cooker, but we are used to it now, and it gives a wonderful sense of history.” Once the cabinetry was in place – handmade by local kitchen company Beam Ends – and the lean-to demolished and replaced by a beautiful high-ceilinged garden room, Debbie and Dave’s vision of a bright, open-plan area became a reality.

One of the first things the couple did when they bought the house was to sandblast the beams in the ▷

THIS PAGE Debbie has turned her daughter's old bedroom into a sunny guest room
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT An alfresco dining area by the summerhouse; Winston stands guard over the workshop; the field behind the garden became a vegetable plot with raised beds; chickens strut around the garden

sitting-cum-dining room, which were covered in a thick black varnish. Once oppressive, the low-ceilinged room now makes the perfect setting for Debbie's many vintage finds, including dining chairs picked up for a song from a clearout sale at their local pub. Known as the snug, this is where the couple retreat to in winter, firing up the woodburner and enjoying candlelit suppers. In every room, Debbie's passion for pieces from the past is tempered by Dave's more contemporary tastes. Old goes hand-in-hand with new to create a stylish relaxed home, at once clean-lined, comfortable and characterful. As an interior designer running her own business, Rooms with a View in nearby Diss, Debbie had a very clear idea of the fabrics and paint colours she wanted to

introduce. At the top of her list were Kate Forman's beautiful floral linens, which she has used successfully in the upstairs bedrooms, where ancient exposed timbers, sloping ceilings and old wooden floorboards combine to atmospheric effect.

Farrow & Ball paints were also an integral part of her decorating plan, although Debbie found that familiarity with the colour chart was no match for trying out the paints in-situ: "The amount of pigment they put into the colours means they look quite varied at different times of day and in diverse lights. Until you try them on the wall where you plan to use them, you really can't tell if they will look right." Debbie discovered that soft lime and stone colours worked best, complementing the old timbers but also >





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE
 In the spacious bathroom, Debbie chose Skimming Stone by Farrow & Ball for the walls, which picks up the main colour of the blind fabric, Amelie by Colefax and Fowler; vintage china gives the summerhouse an old-fashioned charm; a simple hammock at the bottom of the garden provides the perfect place in which to while away a summer afternoon

providing a sophisticated backdrop to many areas of the house. Off White has proved a particular favourite, and Debbie has used it in both the New England-style garden room, with its large French windows and wooden slatted blinds, and the cosy snug.

With the structural and decorating work complete, the couple were then able to turn their attention to the outside and create the view from the kitchen they had planned. Debbie envisioned a wide cottage garden border curving around the end of the lawn closest to the house and commissioned a local design company, Floras Fireworks, to put together a planting scheme. "I wanted it to be quite blowsy and relaxed," she says. "We're not worried about seeing a few weeds." Now, a couple of summers on, the border is well established, with lupins, foxgloves, lavender and poppies providing painterly splashes of pink, purple and powdery blue.

Having been given a professional helping hand, Debbie and Dave designed the rest of the garden

themselves, establishing a vegetable plot and chicken run at the end, planting a second herbaceous border and letting a few patches run wild to allow the primroses and cow parsley to emerge among the long grasses. Debbie's chief delight, though, is the summerhouse overlooking the lawn. "When we bought the house, it was a brown-stained hut – not at all inspiring," she says, "so I painted it straightaway. Then Dave built some decking so we could sit outside." Inside, it soon became home to a romantic mix of vintage furniture and accessories, including Debbie's collection of embroideries from the 1940s and 50s. "I've collected them for years. I love things that people have invested time in," she says. A simple hammock strung between two trees at the bottom of the garden provides another peaceful spot. "Lazy summer days outdoors are one of our greatest pleasures," Debbie says. "The hard work is over and we can enjoy being here to the full." *To find out more about Rooms with a View, call 01379 640220 or visit roomswithaview.co.uk* ▷



Ideas to inspire

Debbie's clever combination of modern pieces and vintage accessories adds extra interest to her Suffolk home



A cool, calming palette of muted pastels and natural materials, such as exposed beams, brick fireplaces and the stone and wooden floors, tie the look together, while hints of bright pinks and red in fabrics and soft furnishings introduce vibrant touches to an otherwise muted scheme.

Clockwise from top left: dog rose **corsage**, £10, Gil Fox. **Bunting** made with duck egg/ivory check thick-weave cotton, £22/m; green/red Henley thick-weave cotton, £32/m; duck egg/ivory vintage thick-weave cotton, £32/m; rose ticking thick-weave cotton, £22/m; pale rose/ivory check thick-weave cotton, £22/m; all Susie Watson. Quay **pendant light** in polished aluminium, from £119, Original BTC. Cottage Garden **cushion**, £49, RE. Isobella floral linen-mix **fabric**; Agatha small-print floral linen-mix **fabric**: both £54/m, Kate Forman. Teal **duck**, £44, OKA. Babbington **armchair**, from £619, Lloyd Loom of Spalding. Natural emulsion **paint swatches**, from left to right: Jonquil, Cuisse de Nympe Emouvant, Pomona, Duck Egg, Sky Blue, Aerial Tint and Fair Blue, all £25/2.5 litres, Pots of Paint. **Ribbon frame**, from a selection, VV Rouleaux. For stockists, see our *Where to Buy* page

DECORATOR'S NOTEBOOK Re-create the look with country florals and accessories

FABRICS AND TEXTILES
Rooms with a View (01379 640220; roomswithaview.co.uk) Interior design and soft-furnishings store in Diss, Norfolk, with a wide range of wallpapers, paints and fabrics. Offers a made-to-measure service on curtains, blinds and loose covers as well as a range of home accessories. **Vanessa Arbutnott** (01285 831437; vanessaarbutnott.co.uk) Beautifully printed, British-made linens in designs and colours that are perfect for country interiors.

FURNITURE
Scumble Goosie (01453 731305; scumblegoosie.co.uk) Range of French- and Gustavian-inspired designs, including benches and tables, plus peg rails and lighting. Available painted or unpainted. **Laura Ashley** (0871 230 2301; lauraashley.com) Made-to-order

collection of upholstered furniture, which can be covered in your choice of Laura Ashley fabrics. **Plain English** (01449 774028; plainenglishdesign.co.uk) Joinery company in Suffolk that uses 18th- and 19th-century techniques to handcraft its kitchens.

ACCESSORIES
Dave Down Decoys (0876 233575; davedowndecoys.com) Hand-carved bird sculptures and duck decoys made from locally grown European hardwoods. **Big Blue Sky** (01328 712023; bigbluesky.uk.com) Shopping emporium set in a converted garage in Wells-next-the-Sea. **Emma Bridgewater** (0844 243 9266; emmabridgewater.co.uk) Earthenware pottery handmade in Stoke-on-Trent and decorated with spongeware patterns such as flowers, animals and hearts. **Diss Auction Rooms** (01379 650306; twgaze.co.uk/auction) A large auction site, which sells items for the home and garden. 🐾