

## THE OLD DAIRY

A tumbledown cow barn has been rebuilt as a comfortable holiday home by Zoë Henderson and her sister Susan, who drew inspiration for its interiors from the building's rustic origins and the glorious surrounding landscape

WORDS KAREN DARLOW

STYLING PIPPA BLENKINSOP  
PHOTOGRAPHS KASIA FISZER



The massive oak roof trusses, tie-beams and purlins in the 450-year-old barn no longer support the structure but still make a statement. Near the Charnwood stove are a velvet sofa from Arighi Bianchi, and a linen one from Sofas & Stuff. Zoë's grandfather's sea chest from the 1920s serves as a coffee table. The staircase was made by RM Jones Joinery



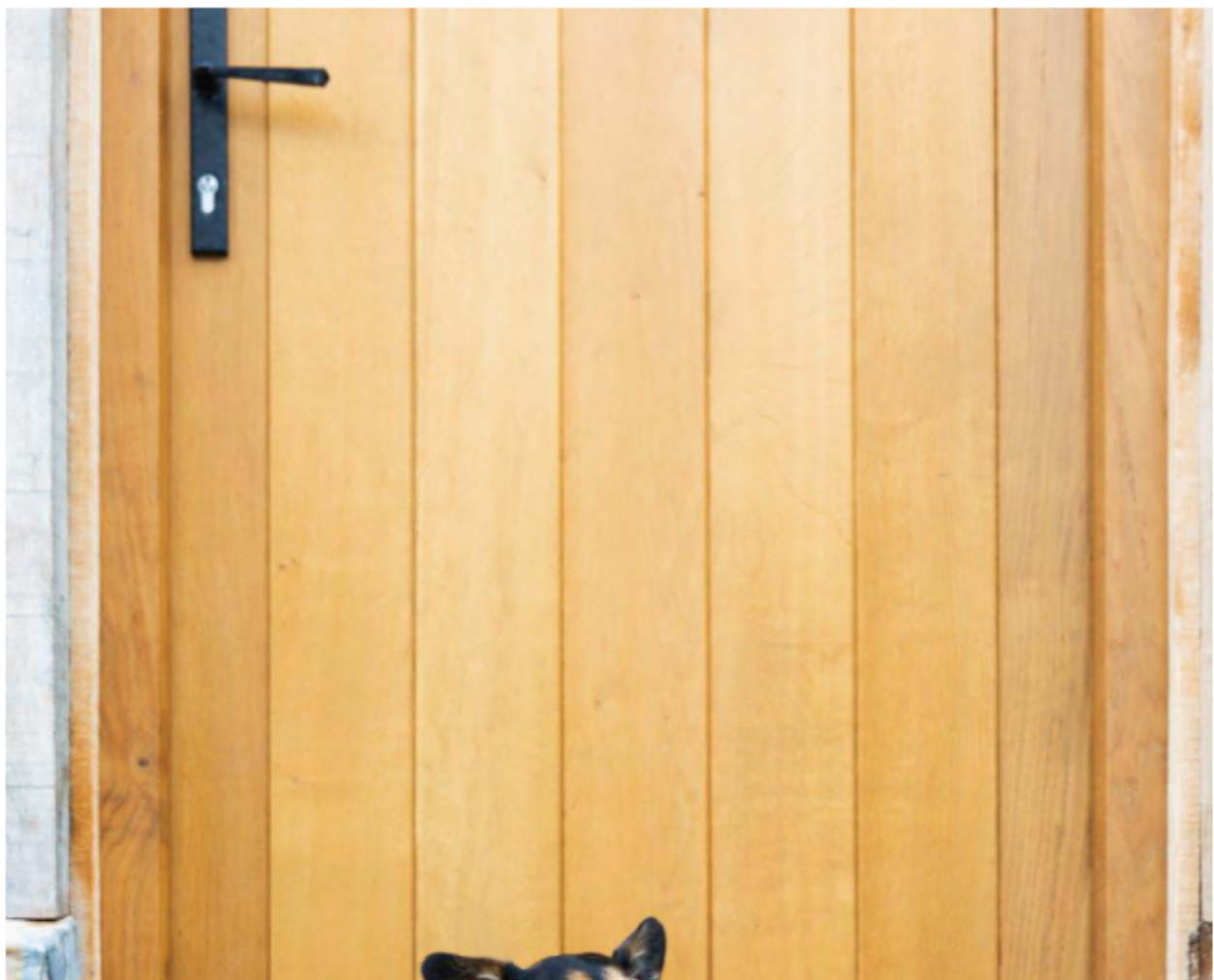
The restored barn in North Wales



Zoë in the dining space. The sliding door behind her was made by Richard Goldston at RIG Joinery, and painted in Bond Street by Mylands. Florist Sioned Edwards from Pont Y Twr supplied the arrangement for the table



the old bench in the loggia came from the village school that dad David attended during the war. The garden table and chairs are from Bramblecrest





Dottie, Zoë's Jack Russell by the front door, also made by RIG Joinery

**R**etired farmer David Henderson is a man of few words, but when he saw his daughters' plans to rebuild and convert the barn on the farm where he'd spent his working life he really was speechless. Zoë soon realised he'd fallen silent because he was so pleased that the old place was to be brought back to life again.

The barn and dairy are part of a cluster of original farm buildings, with a Grade II listing. Zoë, Susan and their brother Harry were given the buildings by their parents when they moved away from the farm nine years ago. They kept the land, however, renting it to arable and sheep farmers.

Turning the near-derelict barn into something safe, watertight and habitable was quite a task. 'The oldest part of the timber-frame barn dates back to the 1560s. Most of its walls had been rebuilt over the centuries, but the original trusses and oak beams were still there,' says Zoë. 'It was the most difficult building to tackle, because we knew it would have to be taken down stone by stone and rebuilt, but it was also in the worst condition so we had to start there to prevent further damage.'

Restoring and converting the building required both full planning permission and listed building consent, and Zoë and Susan enlisted the help of chartered building surveyor Arwel Davies for their application. The sisters had a clear idea of what they wanted to do and were delighted when Arwel translated their wishes so closely in his plans, and when those plans were subsequently approved.

'It had to be a practical layout for a house in the country and we wanted it to be a home we would be happy to live in ourselves one day,' says Zoë. 'We also wanted it to stay very much in keeping with how it was as a rustic, working farm building. The main part of the barn used to be the shippon where my father milked the cows.'

There was not one single day of the renovation project when Zoë and her siblings lost sight of the years of hard work and family history tied up with these old farm

buildings. 'It was a really emotional journey it not being a working farm anymore,' says Zoë. 'We all felt it quite strongly and we didn't want to do anything to upset our mum and dad. They were very supportive, but it was a massive change for them to see what we were doing.'

There were moments during the renovation when Zoë wondered whether they'd simply taken on too much. She kept a close eye on the project as she lives right next door in the original farmhouse, which she bought from her parents nine years ago. 'It was great to be living on site,' she says. 'But early in 2014 when only one gable end of the barn was left standing, I worried that we'd never see it finished. But I'd also seen how carefully our builder Martin Roberts and his son Sam worked. They marked every stone and timber as they took the barn down so it all went back just as it was with breathable lime mortar to hold the stones in place.'

Although it was a huge project to a historic building, there were some advantages to the fact that the barn had been altered over the years. Extra window and door openings had been added during the course of its history, which, as Zoë points out, is fortuitous. 'It's hard to get planning consent to add in extra windows and doors, but we were lucky that there were already so many here. There were even windows upstairs in the gable ends – which is unusual in a working barn.'

Once the walls were back up and the roof back on, Susan and Zoë began to plan its interiors. Striking references to the barn's working past are all around, providing not only authenticity and continuity with the space's original purpose, but also reassurance and comfort, like being among old friends. The 5cm-thick slate cow stalls that separated the cows for milking have been used to make the deep sills for the downstairs windows, with a huge piece topping the kitchen island. 'The utility room was originally the dairy's feed store, and we temporarily lifted the original slate floor to put in underfloor heating,' says Zoë. 'The full-height arched door and window are still in their original position in the main room.'

Zoë and Susan chose local suppliers and natural fabrics for the soft furnishings, which were inspired by the colours of the North Wales landscape. It all serves to bring the barn's look up to date, while still celebrating its origins. 'We wanted to leave the property in its next iteration, for many future generations to enjoy,' says Zoë. This successful blend of old and new saw the barn winning 'Best Project' in *Period Living's* 2019 Home of the Year Awards. Far more important than any awards, what does the farm's previous generation make of the finished project? 'Dad's been a big part of it and he's very proud of what's happened here,' says Zoë. From a man of few words that means a great deal.



The kitchen island is topped with a fine slab of slate, a relic from the barn's previous life when it divided the cow stalls for milking. In the slate, probably mined nearby, are fossils adding a layer of prehistory to the 450-year-old barn. Above the Rangemaster oven is a splashback from Colour2Glass. The engineered oak flooring is from RM Jones Joinery in Ruthin



The kitchen cabinets, painted in Mylands' Bond Street, were made and fitted by RIG Joinery, with worktops in Carrara Venatino from Gon Granite & Marble





A dining table from Made makes the most of the beautiful views through the full-height glass doors. Hanging from a rail made by nearby Celtic Dreams Ironwork, are traditional Welsh weave curtains from Trefriw Woollen Mills. Zoë had to persuade them to leave the yarn on the loom to create the longer length needed. The new chapel chairs are from Peppermill Interiors



The downstairs bedroom, with beds from John Ryan by Design, a Roman blind Zoë made from an end of roll fabric from Shufflebotham & Son, and an oak desk by Simon Dean of The Orange Blossom Interiors. The inspiration for the colours came from the landscape – the green echoes that of the moss that's taken hold on the stone walls outside. Cushions and throws from Susie Watson Designs





The natural theme continues in the master bedroom with a vibrant pink Zoë says was inspired by the emerging hawthorn buds. She bought the Georgian chest of drawers and side table from Denbigh Antiques. The striped cushions are from Susie Watson Designs and the vintage Welsh blanket is from Collinge Antiques. The ottoman was made by Davina Fetherstonhaugh and the sheepskin rug, just seen, from Ruthin Butchers, John Jones & Son. The flower posies are by Sioned Edwards





On the landing is a charming reading nook, with the ancient beams providing the perfect space for books. The chair was from Cooper Barrington Auction, the rug was an Ebay buy, and the drop-leaf table is from Denbigh Antiques

## **THE STORY**

Owners Zoë Henderson and her sister Susan Evans converted the barn and run it as a three-bedroom holiday let ([caerfallen.com](http://caerfallen.com))

Property A Grade II-listed timber-frame dairy and barn, near Ruthin, North Wales. The oldest part of the barn dates back to the 1560s

What they did The barn had to be dismantled and rebuilt stone by stone, with the original materials salvaged and reused where possible. The oak beams were put back in their original positions. A ground-source heat pump provides heating and hot water ■