



Apple of their eye

It may have taken Wendy Needham and Julian Curtis a little time to track down hidden Appletree Cottage, near Stroud, but once they did they instantly fell in love with its historic charm

WORDS BY VICTORIA JENKINS; PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM GODDARD



The newly-created sitting room has made all the difference to their standard of living as now they have a separate dining room. The reclaimed oak beams came from UK Oak Beams, Cirencester and the Chesterfield sofa is from Timeless Chesterfields



Appletree Cottage doubled in size when Julian, his brother Linden, who owns J&L Concrete Pumping, and friend Malcolm built on the right hand extension then painted the woodwork in Normandy Grey by Little Greene

Having spotted little Appletree Cottage in a For Sale advert, Wendy Needham and Julian Curtis set off to view it in a village near Stroud. But they had great trouble finding it as it was up a steep single track, much overhung with trees and with a ‘Not Suitable for Vehicles’ sign at the bottom. “Plus few of the properties had names or numbers,” Wendy recalls.

The couple met when Wendy came from America to work at the same company as Julian and they decided to set up home together. When they at last did find the cottage they were charmed by its age and lost location. Although it was then half its current size - consisting of a tiny 18th century two bedroom property which had been ‘modernised’, plus a 1970s extension

on the west side - they went ahead and bought it. Then Julian, who has wonderful DIY skills, began to restore it as traditionally as possible by removing plastered archways to reveal lovely old beams and replacing the ranch style handrails of the stairs with traditional spindles. Then both of them re-painted the rooms with period colours and Julian gutted the 1970s style kitchen and made lovely Shaker cabinets and drawers.

Later, when the couple were made redundant, it was a golden opportunity for Julian to begin his own business, Appletree Interiors, doing more and more of what he loved most, joinery and carpentry. “We were happy in our little cottage, but it wasn’t quite big enough,” says Wendy. “Julian’s daughter Alana was growing up and out of her bedroom and we also

“I think what we are so proud of, and what every visitor comments on, is Julian’s attention to detail



Wendy and Julian, who began his own business Appletree Interiors and has worked hard to double the size of Appletree Cottage



Julian made the old-looking settle and the second staircase while the reclaimed floorboards originated from a cottage on the Badminton ducal estate. The elm and beech chairs were £40 each from Upstairs Downstairs at the Gloucester Antiques Emporium

needed office space and a dining room so we could entertain more than two people at a time.”

Then Wendy inherited some money from her father and in 2012 the couple were able to design and start building an extension on the east side, using as much reclaimed material as possible. Now Appletree Cottage is twice its original size, having gained an en suite master bedroom, a sitting room, cloakroom and second staircase. “Of course it hasn’t been completely smooth sailing,” says Wendy. “We had objections from the neighbours, constant rain when digging our foundations and a few problems building in a traditional way while keeping to modern regulations.” And because of the narrow steep lane it was also an ‘adventure’ bringing 65 tons of concrete up in a dumper truck and removing 120 tons of soil in a transit van.

In 2012, after Julian had had his plans accepted, he and his brother Linden dug the foundations then with a friend, Malcolm, built the exterior walls and roof. Julian then went on to build or install everything else from the internal walls and

The old plasterwork on the chimney breast in the main bedroom was created only a year ago by a neighbour, Martine Cull, and deliberately made to look ancient. The brass bed is from eBay and the Claudia green quilted bedspread is from Forever England



Julian made the mirrored medicine cabinet, and the black and white flooring is from B&Q

flooring to the wiring and the windows while a neighbor Martine Cull did all the plastering.

Painstakingly, Julian chose the beams and internal pine ledge-and-brace doors from local reclamation yards. All the lintels are of reclaimed oak while he made the bedroom flooring from old scaffolding boards. "He has a knack for making new things look antique," says Wendy. "Our stone is reclaimed and after repointing the old part of the cottage as well as the new, the blend is remarkable.

"I've even got the inglenook I've always wanted," she adds. "It's also made of reclaimed stone and timbers. And in our bedroom closet Julian has transformed the old mullion window from the original part of the house and made a mirror from it. It's a lovely feature, looks framed like it was designed just for that purpose."

The couple always made a point of choosing furnishings that added to the character of bygone years. "We found a lovely chandelier which came from a hotel in London. It's mainly a huge block of oak

with iron candle holders and is the centrepiece for our master bedroom which is open to the roof," says Wendy.

At last the couple were able to move into their extension just before the Christmas of 2013 and the extra space has transformed their lives.

"I love our new bedroom," says Wendy. "It has such a calm atmosphere and such beautiful views that we could almost live in it permanently - that is, if it had a fridge and coffee machine." And Julian says, "My favourite room is the downstairs cloakroom. It has subdued lighting and I've painted the walls in a warm plum colour so it feels really cosy and Victorian."

Wendy finishes, "I think what we are so proud of, and what every visitor comments on, is Julian's attention to detail. Nothing looks worse than an antiquity screwed to the wall, or a period door handle fixed with a huge shiny Pozidriv screw. Julian has been very careful to avoid doing that and that is what makes the whole house special." ■

Address book

Appletree Interiors:
07850368535
www.appletree.me.uk

J&L Concrete Pumping:
07853765028

Little Greene:
0845 880 5855
www.littlegreene.com

Martine Cull:
07703011583

Minton Tiles, Hollins Johnson Tiles:
01782 524000
www.johnson-tiles.com

Natural Stone and Timber:
023 9265 2923
www.naturalstoneandtimber.co.uk

Parlane:
01451 812 700
www.parlaneinternational.co.uk

Timeless Chesterfields:
01204 368413
www.timelesschesterfields.com

Upstairs Downstairs:
01452 421170
www.antiquesingloucester.co.uk

Worktop Express:
01452 881372
www.worktop-express.co.uk