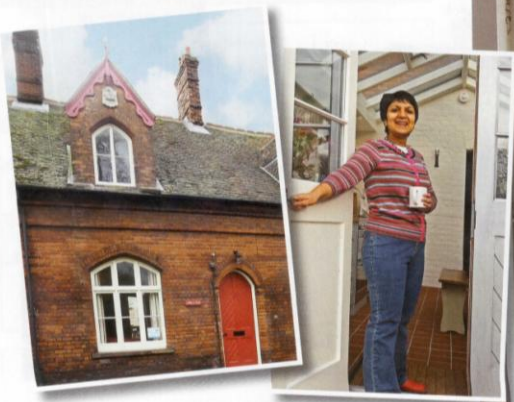


# COTTAGE industry



Simon and Angela James have no regrets about swapping their high-flying jobs to indulge a passion for renovating and converting Suffolk cottages

Words and pictures: **TONY HALL**  
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**C**areer changes, either through unforeseen circumstances or choice are very much the norm these days. Simon James and his wife Angela, who have created a new direction to their lives, are a case in point.

Simon had worked for BT for 30 years before taking voluntary redundancy in 2007. "I felt I needed a change before it was too late. Something totally different," he says. "I had always had a desire to work for myself and this was the time to do it."

Likewise, Angela had worked for Pfizer in Kent but swapped her career as a pharmacist for one in interior design.

Renovating property had always been a hobby of Simon's and he took on the task of converting a 1950s house into a stylish contemporary home. The project went so well that he decided that ▶



SUFFOLK interiors

**DINE IN STYLE**  
Dining table made by David Waddell, Framlingham. Chairs from **Hardys Country Pine**, Hacheston, tel: 01728 746568 and dresser from **Monty's Country Pine**, Hacheston, tel: 01728 746568. Alcove cupboards from **Church and Gooderham**, Earl Soham, tel: 01728 685500. Log basket from **Orford Crafts**, Orford, tel: 01394 450678. The pottery and picture of Orford castle were produced by neighbour **Margo Glaister** a known local artist.



► "transforming property was to be my new chosen path, helped of course by Angela's considerable input styling the place when building work has finished."

Simon's good friend is Alex Tarry, who runs Best of Suffolk, a holiday lettings company, (bestofsuffolk.co.uk) and he has been doing up properties as joint ventures with him.

"It is hard work, often with deadlines for holiday lettings and certainly less money than my previous job, but I am much, much happier," says Simon.

"When it comes to getting things done, the James's are quick workers. "We started to look for a suitable place to do up for ourselves, when one of the estate agents we know mentioned this property," says Angela. "It was built ►



#### EASY LIVING

Top; fireplace made by Philip Chatfield (1984), [www.ourladyoftintern.co.uk/sculptor](http://www.ourladyoftintern.co.uk/sculptor)  
 Alcove cupboards from Church and Gooderham Earl Soham, pine 'coffee table' box from Hardys Country Pine, Hacheston, tel: 01728 746568  
 Log basket from Orford Crafts, Orford, tel: 01394 450678  
 Centre and left; the master bedroom with bed made by Gary Buckingham, tel: 07771 962384.  
 Side tables from Glasswells, Ipswich, tel: 01473 622422. Chest of drawers from Hardys Country Pine



#### A SPLASH OF COLOUR IN THE BATHROOM

The basin and WC is from the Waverley Edwardian range by Shires. Tel: 0870 600 1444.

The copper flush pipe was Made by Simon James Bath by Victoria and Albert, tel: 01952 221100.

Left; light floods the stairs leading from the living area to the main bedrooms above.



"Fortunately most of the old doors and joinery were in good condition"

► in 1878 as a workers cottage by the local country estate. We came to visit in June 2010 and Simon and I had it completed by Christmas Eve last year. Our wish list was it had to be in a coastal village, have period character and preferably with two or three bedrooms. Needless to say, with Simon's new enthusiasm it also had to be in poor condition. However we were always optimistic and here we are now."

Church View, as the James's call their Orford cottage, does indeed overlook the 14th century village church with attached 12th century ruins.

"It needed extensive refurbishment," recalls Simon. "This included rewiring, plumbing, new soil pipes, bathrooms, etc. I also installed a downstairs bedroom and showerroom in what had been the scullery. Fortunately most of the old doors and joinery were in good condition, but I did need to re-lay the pavement floor in the dining room.

"The walls were original lime plaster, in good condition and I have adhered to that tradition. Odd casements needed replacing and I also replaced sections of picture rail which I had copied, but overall there were no nasties. I also must thank my team including Steve



**“You could say that for both of us and the property it is a new beginning and we are reborn.”**

Simon has retained all the period details including a working Victorian fireplace. Across the landing is the family bathroom with a free standing bath, overlooking the garden. The twin bedroom next door also enjoys garden views.

“I love the whole of the downstairs,” comments Angela. “The way everything flows together seamlessly, not what you would expect from a period cottage. It is a great success and unexpectedly so. I also love the colour of the living room sofas, and our views, which have not changed for centuries.”

“I am particularly proud of how the bathroom has turned out,” adds Simon. “The panelling, the bath, the period loo, all the period detailing and the view from upstairs to the river and boats. Love it!”

“Rather than holidays abroad,” adds Angela, “we just adore being where we are. The village is very quiet and we are right in the middle, with a nice traditional pub around the corner and a village shop that stocks just about everything. And the village now has a new addition – a bakery selling proper home baked bread and cakes.”

“We have completely fallen into the countryside way of life and coming into this cottage we have history, a sense of the past and of belonging. Details such as the original brick and wood floors just add to that and items such as our

dining room table, you can’t get more earthy and rugged than that. David Waddell of Framlingham, made it for us from old timbers salvaged from Horley Chapel.”

So what advice would Simon offer a first-timer tackling a renovation project?

“Never under-budget,” replies Simon. “Never rush, as most times nothing runs to plan or time. Discover things as you go along, keep very high standards, have lots of vision and keep consistency in the styling, something Angela has really adapted to.”

“Always try and work well with any neighbours and above all enjoy what you are doing, it’s not just a capital investment. However on that subject there still are opportunities if you buy the right place, so do a sensible job and don’t go overboard.”

“Simon and I are delighted with the results,” concludes Angela. “We have preserved the character of this charming cottage and given it a new lease of life for years to come. You could say that for both of us and the property it is a new beginning and we are reborn.”

**Simon and Angela’s cottage Church View, Orford, is available through Best of Suffolk**  
[www.bestofsuffolk.co.uk](http://www.bestofsuffolk.co.uk) or call them direct on 01728 638962.



**KITCHEN CONSERVATORY**

Cabinetry by Church and Gooderham, Earl Soham, tel: 01728 685500. SMEG cooker from John Lewis, tel: 01603-660021. Table from Hardys Country Pine, Hacheston, tel: 01728 746568. Stools and bench made by David Waddell, Framlingham.

**GUEST BEDROOM**

Beds from Monster Beds, tel: 0845 643 2323. Chest of drawers from Hardys Country Pine. Pendant light from French Lights, tel: 0207 831 1111. Cushions and throws from Dunelm Mill, tel: 01473-252277. Bed side table from Glasswells, Ipswich, tel: 01473-622422. The hanging shelf was made on site

plumber. They are all great guys, but I always have to plan ahead as they are always busy.”

Today, when you enter through the solid front door you find yourself in a sizeable sitting room with original floorboards. Gathered around the roaring log fire are two sofas and an armchair upholstered in a warm red. Either side of the fireplace are built in cupboards and shelves displaying favourite pieces.

Next door is the equally large dining room, again with a roaring fire and a large farmhouse table seating eight. This leads directly to the kitchen, which is located in the elegant conservatory, and features modern bespoke units made by Marcus Church and Stuart Gooderham. Light floods in and there are lovely views over the garden

Upstairs is the master bedroom with en-suite shower room. A delightful room overlooking the churchyard,