



a Natural Approach

Alex and Naomi Tarry have restored and extended a 16th century farmhouse in rural Suffolk, using the same skills and materials that were used to build the property more than 500 years ago



Words: Camilla Sharman
Photography: Darren Chung





Alex and Naomi Tarry are utterly passionate about preserving old buildings, and it is this enthusiasm and dedication that helped them complete the extensive renovation of their Grade II listed farmhouse in Suffolk. Experienced property developer Alex was looking for an untouched farmhouse with traditional outbuildings, surrounded by its own land. “We are fussy about our environment and realised it just wasn’t going to be possible to purchase something that was 100% suitable — so we decided to create it ourselves,” recalls Alex.

Surrounded by four acres of land, with a pond and a wood, the couple, who are members of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, had found their perfect location. “From the kitchen window I can see two and a half miles down to the nearby valley and there’s not another house in sight,” says Alex. ▶

RIGHT: The kitchen, which leads out onto a patio area (ABOVE), was designed around the refectory table, Aga and antique storage cupboard. The tulip wood units are hand-painted and finished with an oak worktop. Handmade clay floor bricks in varying tones add a touch of warmth to the floor and are sealed with Danish oil. All the white goods are hidden away in the adjoining scullery



ABOVE: The oak frame property has been authentically extended with a new green oak section, tiled in handmade clay tiles as opposed to the original slates (OPPOSITE). The new extension is clad with a Scandinavian sustainable board called Heraklith, which is covered with a lime render. The mismatching cladding, roofing and windows only serve to enhance the property's character

FACT FILE

NAMES: Alex and Naomi Tarry	
PROFESSIONS: Property developer and proprietor of holiday letting company	
AREA: East Suffolk	
HOUSE TYPE: Grade II listed farmhouse	
HOUSE SIZE: 255m ²	
BUILD ROUTE: Self-managed, main contractor	
FINANCE: Private	
CONSTRUCTION: Oak frame extension	
BUILD TIME: May '04 – Apr '05	
HOUSE COST: £395,000	50% COST SAVING
BUILD COST: £250,000	
TOTAL COST: £640,000	
CURRENT VALUE: £1,200,000	
COST/m²: £1,100	

From the start Alex had a clear vision for the farmhouse as a conservation project. “For the main construction we didn’t use anything that wasn’t available to the original builders in the 16th century,” he says. Popping down to the local builders’ merchant wasn’t an option. “We had to create a network of contacts, research suppliers and learn traditional building skills.”

Alex learnt many of the skills from an old-school traditional builder, who he worked with for over five years. “It helped me get an understanding of the role that materials make in the aesthetic. A lot of people try and create an ambience with paints, but for me, it’s all about materials and how they weather with age,” he says.

There were two aspects to the project: firstly, the renovation of the original farmhouse, and secondly, a sympathetic two storey extension on the rear of the building. “We wanted to create a spacious kitchen with a separate scullery for appliances, and upstairs we wanted a master bedroom and en suite,” explains Alex.

“We went in expecting to do a lot of work, but not knowing what that work would be”

The couple enlisted the help of architect Sarah Roberts, from TW Gaze & Sons, to draw up the plans. “She offered us a depth of knowledge in building conservation, as well as an approach that helped us realise our vision,” says Alex.

To ensure that the extension was built in the style of the original farmhouse, they researched local buildings of the same era. But purely copying details was not going to get the plans through Building Regulations. “Sarah helped us get as close as we could to what we wanted and ensured that the building complied with the necessary legislation,” explains Alex.

One of the problems they had to solve was gaining the correct insulation value, as the Grade II listing disallows double glazing. “To gain the correct U-value we overcompensated with plenty of floor and roof insulation,” says Alex.

With a wealth of experience in property development – Alex renovates properties for the couple’s holiday rental company Best of Suffolk – he took on the role of main contractor.

As soon as the work began it became apparent that a full renovation was going to be necessary. “We went into the project expecting to do a lot of work, but not knowing what that work would be,” says Alex. “Where we should have found a beautiful oak frame network, we found a rotten mess. Only a handful of the timbers extended to the ground and a modern softwood door frame had assumed a structural role of supporting the building,” recalls Alex. ▶





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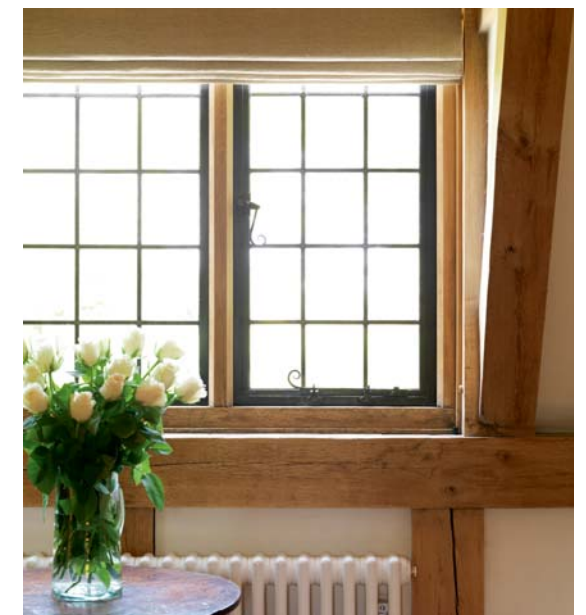
“We saved as much of the original fabric as we could, preserving the wattle and daub and splicing in new oak beams where the original ones couldn’t be rescued. Where we found modern materials we took them out and replaced them with traditional ones,” he continues.

The next stage was the construction of the green oak frame for the extension that had been designed by Alex and the architect. “It arrived like a giant flat pack,” says Naomi. “The whole project took 11 months to complete, but it was incredible that it took only a couple of days for the 20-tonne frame to go up.”

Part of the ethos of the project was to allow the house to breathe and because of this there are no membranes around the walls. Rockwool has been used to insulate the wall structure and a multi-foil system incorporated into the roof structure. The outside frame was clad with a Scandinavian sustainable board called Heraklith: “It gives a good insulation value and ▶

ABOVE: Alex learnt many of his new skills from the craftsman who made the oak bed in the master bedroom. It’s constructed in the same manner as the whole house, using traditional joints and pegs, with not a screw in sight. The ten-inch-wide oak floorboards were fixed with 1,000 handmade nails

RIGHT: The house has a characterful mix of new metal casements, original oak and new softwood casements and sashes





allowed us more flexibility — we were able to lime render directly on top of it,” explains Alex.

While the original oak mullion windows were salvaged and painstakingly restored in the old house, with the later softwood windows being replaced like for like, oak mullion windows using steel casements and leaded inserts were used on the new build.

Although they have removed unsuitable modern building materials from the house, there was no compromise on the heating system: “The house would be miserable to live in unless it was warm. So we renewed the heating and electrics and fitted a large boiler and an Aga,” says Alex.

Both Alex and Naomi are modest in their outlook and this comes across in the property: “It’s not about making any kind of statement. We wanted the farmhouse to sit within its setting and to have integrity — it’s the real deal,” smiles Alex. ■

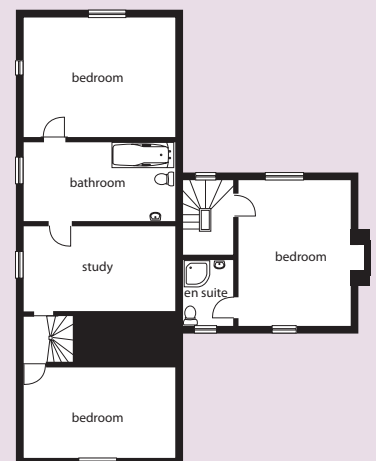
USEFUL CONTACTS: Architect **TW Gaze & Son:** 01379 651931 **Carpentry Church & Gooderham:** 01728 685500 **Bricks Bulmer Brick & Tile:** 01787 269232 **Blacksmith David Butler:** 01379 640182 **Sanitaryware Bathstore:** www.bathstore.com **Lime Anglia Lime:** 01787 313974 **Nails Ashfield Traditional:** 01449 723601 **Lathes Shrubland Sawmill:** 01473 830472 **Frame Border Oak, Herefordshire:** 01568 708752 **Windows Mike Honor Windows:** 01386 701079 **Insulation Tri-iso Super 9:** 01423 339163

A New Addition

The property has been extended at the rear to create a spacious kitchen and separate utility on the ground floor, plus a master bedroom with en suite above. An additional staircase has been included to access the new upstairs section. The ground floor also houses a large central sitting room, off which radiate a drawing room and separate dining room. Upstairs, two additional bedrooms are sited, one accessible through the family bathroom and study, the other self-contained



Ground Floor



First Floor