

CASE STUDY

A PEACEFUL RETREAT

Alex and Naomi Tarry have converted a disused listed farm outbuilding on a tight budget - reclaiming original materials and introducing some contemporary touches.

Story **Debbie Jeffery** Photography: **Darren Chung/ Tony Pick**

In brief

Project Conversion
Location Suffolk
Land/building value £250,000
Spent £60,000
Worth £500,000+

Lime Tree Farm is a 16th Century Grade II listed Suffolk farmhouse, which was purchased together with four acres and several outbuildings by Alex and Naomi Tarry. The couple sympathetically renovated and extended the main farmhouse before turning their attention to the disused outbuildings, which they planned to convert.

“I grew up in a small village near here, but after meeting Naomi at university we lived and worked in London for several years before I convinced her to move back with me to Suffolk, which I’ve always considered home,” says Alex. “Lime Tree Farm is in a quiet rural village just a short drive from the coast, and the location suits us perfectly.”

The couple went on to launch their own holiday letting business, Best of Suffolk, in 2006 and now represent over 300 local holiday properties – converting an old cob barn on the farm into an office for the business.

When it came to converting a brick-built farm outhouse into a residential property for guests and holiday lettings Alex turned to his old schoolfriend Luke Tozer, from Pitman Tozer Architects, to work on the design.

The rectangular single-storey structure was originally built at the turn of the last century, and had previously been used by Alex and Naomi for storing their lawnmower and garden tools.

“Sometimes you can lose enthusiasm when faced with rules, regulations and practicalities, but you need to have the courage of your convictions and fight for your vision – there’s usually a solution to every problem.”



Owner Alex Tarry



“I’ve always loved architecture and design, and wanted to dabble with some contemporary ideas while still retaining the external look of the building as much as possible,” Alex explains. “Luke Tozer and I have been good friends since the age of 11, so it was fun to collaborate on this project. I was keen to introduce some top-end design into an incredibly modest building, which would pay for itself with holiday lettings.”

The footprint of the rectangular 75-sqm outhouse was immovable, but the layout has been orientated to overlook the Tarrys’ one-acre meadow, which is often occupied by sheep belonging to friends and neighbours. Glass bifold doors were inserted on this south-facing façade, opening onto a large oak deck raised up above the meadow.

“We fixed the original stable door entrance permanently shut, and created a new opening for the bifolds, so that from the farmhouse the building still looks as it always has,” says Naomi. “Now the glass doors mean that the space is flooded with light from morning to evening and you can look out onto a lovely Suffolk scene of trees, hedges and wide open skies.”

Planning permission was granted to convert the old outbuilding into accommodation ancillary to the main dwelling, which prevents the property from being sold as a separate residence. “The local authority was quite amenable, and keen to promote tourism in the area because it stimulates the local economy,”

Exterior

Formerly a disused farm building, The Workshop at Lime Tree Farm has been sympathetically converted in collaboration with Pitman Tozer Architects. Bifold doors open onto an oak deck overlooking a wildflower meadow.



In detail

The Workshop is available for holiday rental with Best of Suffolk: bestofsuffolk.co.uk

PROJECT

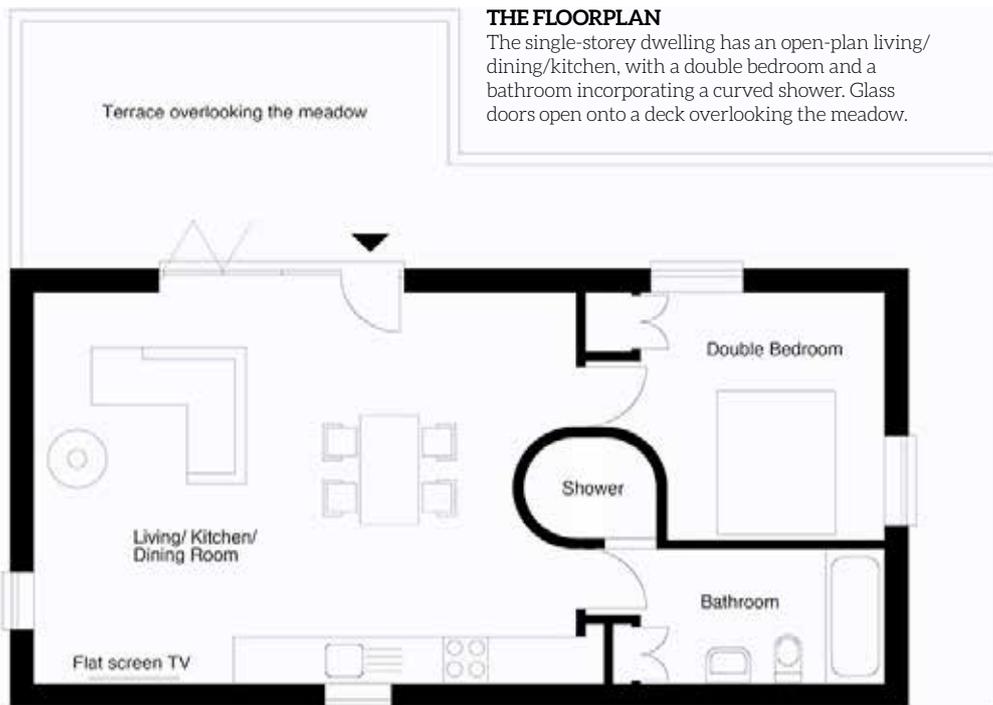
Architect Pitman Tozer
Architects: pitmantozer.com
Structural engineer Adam Power
Associates: adampower.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Windows Mike Honour Windows:
mikehonourwindows.co.uk
Lime products Anglian
anglianlime.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Suspended fire Focus Fireplace
Designs: focus-fireplaces.com
Kitchen, bespoke bed
Church and Gooderham:
churchandgooderham.co.uk
Sanitaryware Duravit: duravit.co.uk
Taps Dornbracht: dornbracht.com
Door furniture Allgood: allgood.co.uk
Worktops Silestone: silestone.co.uk
Wood floor Thorogoods:
thorogoods.co.uk



THE FLOORPLAN

The single-storey dwelling has an open-plan living/dining/kitchen, with a double bedroom and a bathroom incorporating a curved shower. Glass doors open onto a deck overlooking the meadow.



Designer light

The pendant light above the Arne Jacobsen dining table was designed by Jørn Utzon, the Danish architect who designed the Sydney Opera House.

“We’d always worked on traditional projects, but this conversion gave us the chance to try something different.”

says Alex, who funded the conversion privately. “A building without a use is a building at risk.”

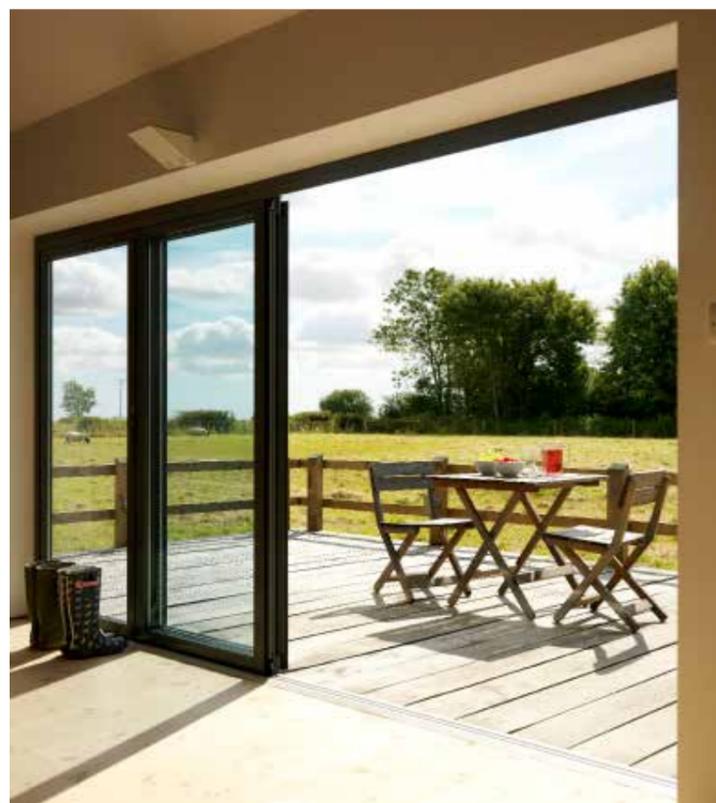
Alex project managed the five-month conversion himself, ordering materials and overseeing the various subcontractors, as well as working alongside them. “I was blessed with having access to very good tradespeople who I’d worked with before, and who are equally keen to conserve and save historic buildings,” he says.

Two local builder brothers tackled the majority of work, and found carvings in the roof dating back to 1923, including the names of the original builders – one of whom was their great uncle.

An existing willow tree standing beside the building was a potential issue, but has been successfully managed by reducing the canopy every three years. Existing foundations and brick walls were in sound condition, and the structure required no underpinning, although brickwork has been re-pointed using traditional lime mortar.

“The site is heavy clay, with no structural movement, and when the foundations were assessed they were found to be perfectly stable,” says Alex. “There was no additional loading, as we were re-using what was already there and not adding extra floors.”

The local Building Control officer thought that the existing roof ties were inadequate and wanted additional support in the form of eaves ties. “It would have spoilt



the open effect inside, so I worked with the structural engineer to design four pairs of steel rafters to be hidden in the roof structure,” Alex explains. These were made by a local steel fabricator, and the original clay pantiles were stripped and then replaced once the new roof had been built and insulated. Now all that can be seen internally are the restored original timbers.

The building has been carefully stripped back and renovated, using the existing brickwork and 1920s single-glazed metal windows, which were meticulously refurbished by a specialist company. “We had the old windows removed, shot-blasted, powder-coated and reinstated,” says Alex. “Where a new fire escape window was needed to meet Building Regulations this was made exactly to match. As The Workshop stands within the curtilage of a listed building it’s also listed, and we needed to comply with the conservation officer’s wishes, but I’ve built up a good rapport with the local conservation team over the years.”

A dividing wall has been added to one end of the open-plan living/dining/kitchen to form a bedroom and separate bathroom, and architect Luke Tozer devised a high-level panel of clear glass, supported by timbers, which allows light to pass through into these rooms and enables the roofline to remain visually undisturbed.

A bold statement was also created in the form of a curved wall containing a round, walk-in shower, with

Kitchen

Bespoke cabinets were made from painted MDF for the open-plan kitchen and fitted with Silestone worktops.

the sculptural wall protruding out into the open-plan living area. This was built using a softwood frame which has been clad externally in gypsum plasterboard, with flexible ply for the inner curve. “It had to be pushed into shape quite gently,” says Alex. “The small mosaics work well with the curve, and were a challenging job for the tiler.”





Living area

The curved shower wall projects into the kitchen, creating a sculptural form. A suspended spherical steel wood-burner, designed and made in France by Dominique Imbert, has been installed in the open-plan living area. Solid pine flooring from Scandinavia was finished with lye oil.

Instead of skirting boards the builders were asked to create shadow gaps to produce clean lines between the plaster and other finishes – a skilled job, which they executed well despite the curving wall. “It’s a detail that nobody should notice when it’s done correctly, but if you get it wrong everybody sees it,” laughs Alex.

Alex and Naomi were determined that despite working to a tight budget they would not scrimp on these finishes, and one of the key features in the open-plan living area is the suspended wood-burning stove which was hand made in Montpellier. They also chose heavy-duty fire doors, which have a solid, high quality feel.

“Previously we’d always worked on traditional projects, but this conversion gave us the chance to try something different,” explains Naomi. “We wanted to keep the open roof space, and needed to work within the existing shape and size of the outbuilding, but inside we chose more contemporary finishes.”

A local joiner was employed to make the sprayed MDF kitchen, and also copied an expensive Italian bed the Tarrys had admired. “I drew up an interpretation of it myself and asked our joiners in Suffolk if they could make it for us,” says Alex. “We found a pendant light for the dining area while we were on holiday in Copenhagen – we’re constantly looking for ideas wherever we go.”





Bathroom

The large bathroom opens directly into the curved shower area, and is lit from above by a conservation roof light. A utility area is also contained within this room. The curve for the shower was achieved by building a softwood stud wall clad in gypsum plasterboard and ply and tiled with small mosaics.



Positioning the solid pine floor of the living space at the same level as the oak decking outside connects the two spaces, and the Tarrys have created a wildlife haven on the farm, with meadows, hedges and ponds. "It's completely private, so there's no need for curtains on the glass doors," says Alex, "and there's just one window above the sink, which faces towards the farmhouse, where we've used acid-etched glazing for privacy."

The entire structure has been heavily insulated, including under the floor and in the roof and walls. "We've used natural, environmentally-friendly products wherever possible, such as wool insulation," Alex explains.

"It's a simple building, which doesn't shout at you, and the whole project has been a joy - working with the builders on features like the curved shower room, and coming up with various solutions. It's really satisfying preserving an old building and giving it a new purpose."



Bedroom

The bedroom is located to one end of the building, and walls remain below the vaulted ceiling to avoid breaking up views of the roof timbers.

The final word

What was the high point?

We really enjoyed choosing the suspended fireplace, and travelled to Cornwall one weekend to see the only model in the UK at the time. It was installed in a day and is a real focal point in the living space.

...and the low point?

Realising that we had to introduce structural steel into the roof, which was an alien element. Ideally, we would have preferred to just restore the existing materials, but we needed to work with Building Control.

The best buy?

The bifold doors, which bring in light and overlook the



meadow - without them the design wouldn't have worked.

...and the biggest extravagance?

Choosing designer finishes and a bespoke bed were extravagances, but we wanted to spend money on the things you see and touch every day.