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25 BEAUTIFUL HOMES

Find out how...

25 families created their dream home

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COVER STORY 'We cleared a forest to build our new home' See p44

Particulars



LOCATION
Cotswolds

AGE
16th century

BUILDING
Cotswold stone
former courthouse
with thatched roof

ROOMS
Kitchen, laundry,
drawing room,
dining room,
4 bedrooms,
3 bathrooms; stable
conversion incl.
bedroom, office,
bathroom

MOVED IN
1995



1 The canopy above the fireplace in the drawing room was installed by Judith. Pale sofas and fresh flowers add light to a dark room

2 & 3 The dining room is separated from the kitchen by an archway, and gives on to a terrace and herb garden. The walls were

painted in Razzle Dazzle from Dulux (01753 550555). The pine grandfather clock came from an antiques shop in Wales



Courtly love

Judith Hitching's painstaking refurbishment has really paid off in her lovely 16th century former courthouse

Chance had a big part to play when Judith Hitching first started house-hunting five years ago. Just as she was driving past a Cotswold stone, thatched house in a pretty Oxfordshire village, a For Sale sign was being hammered into the ground. 'I literally screeched to a halt,' recalls Judith, 'and asked if I could look around there and then.'

When Judith viewed the property, she found that the house had been neglected and was in an appalling condition. As she walked down the two steps from the front door into the stone-floored hall, she paddled through a little brown stream. It was also clear that the thatched roof needed replacing.

Nevertheless, Judith was enchanted. 'It was

the main bedroom here that really made up my mind for me,' she says. 'It has double height, marvellous beams, and windows on three sides with a beautiful view across the Cotswolds. I moved in just before Christmas and camped in the bedroom with my dog, a kettle and a microwave.'

The house is part of an old, 16th century ▷



1 The oak chest in the drawing room was inherited from Judith's family. The armchair has been covered in a William Morris print

2 The arched jail cell window in the corridor is a legacy from the house's

days as a courthouse. Theatrical prints from the 1750s hang on the walls, and the dresser holds a set of ironstone china

3 The large urn in the hall was brought back from a holiday in Tuscany

4 The curtains that soften the archway were given to Judith by a friend. The Aga is reconditioned

5 The Victorian sofa is kept in the bedroom, as it is too delicate for heavy use. The *prie-dieu* is carved from oak



courthouse and Judith's bedroom was probably the old court room itself. The corridor leading from the front door to the kitchen still has tiny arched openings, which were once the jail cell windows.

Later the building was made into two cottages, with adjoining barns and stables, but when Judith moved in, there was no heating, no kitchen and the roof was leaking. Luckily, the local council provided a small grant for new thatching, which took care of the roof repairs. The next major task was a damp course treatment and once this had been done, Judith set about enlarging the kitchen to encompass a dining area. This is now heated by a small woodburning stove from a local forge.

'It's a little ship's woodburner and it's a real joy,' Judith says. 'When there's a big power cut, the room is always cosy – and I can boil a kettle on it.' The kitchen has now become the hub of the house and is the place where everyone gathers when Judith's three daughters and five grandchildren come to stay.

In the drawing room, an old bread oven is still intact behind the fireplace, although Judith had to double-line the chimney with ▷



'I camped in the bedroom with my dog, a kettle and a microwave'



1 A collection of antique glass inkwells lives on top of the walnut bureau. Beside the four poster bed are paintings by a friend

2 Judith put up the bathroom pansy tiles herself. Her Bristol blue glass collection complements the rest of the bathroom

stainless steel. 'Smoke was leaking into the bedrooms upstairs, so we put in a new canopy and it works like a dream now,' she says. 'As this room is rather dark, we mostly use it in the winter when the fire is lit.'

Another major expense was incurred when the drawing room windows had to be replaced. 'The carpenter started putting in new wooden windows instead of the existing, rusting 1920s metal ones, and suddenly the bedroom window frame, above, fell out due to all the hammering. So he had to put an expensive new window up there too.'

As a member of Wolsey Lodges (01473 822058), Judith's home caters for bed and breakfast guests. So each bedroom needs an en suite bathroom or access to a bathroom nearby. 'One bathroom was made out of a passage. When the plumber had finished I tried to put the tiles up, but because I had



'It was the main bedroom here that really made up my mind'



started at the top, and the walls are old and crooked, the tiles kept sliding down,' explains Judith. 'I finally realised that I should start at the bottom and work my way up!'

There are now three spare bedrooms and three bathrooms, as well as an extra attic bedroom which is useful for Judith's grandchildren when they come to visit.

As well as having run her own country house hotel, Judith is also an award-winning cook and garden writer, and the three quarters of an acre of land that were brambles when she arrived have proved to be quite a challenge. But the garden has slowly been reclaimed, and a spacious greenhouse now thrives with cuttings, scented geraniums and jasmine. It's a favourite 'room' of Judith's. 'There is always something to discover there,' she says.

Looking around the rest of Judith's comfortable, inviting home, it is easy to see why some guests might never want to leave. **55**

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25 Good ideas



Magic Lanterns have a wide range of original, antique lamps, including ones similar to the one pictured above from Judith's dining room, priced from around £195. Call 01727 865680 for further details.