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Cornish idyll

The restoration of an 18th century granite barn has been a long labour of love for the Taylors, who decided a beautiful home deserved the perfect grounds too

WORDS GREG COOK PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD PARSONS



Standing in the gardens surrounding Christine and Charles Taylors' converted barn it's easy to imagine yourself in the balmy climes of the Mediterranean coast. A warm summer breeze drifts the scent of herbs through a courtyard containing a French box-hedge parterre where a central fountain in classical style gurgles peacefully as bees buzz around the lavender elsewhere date palms and fig trees, olive trees and bay stand amongst terracotta urns and stone planters.

In fact, convincing yourself that you were standing on a Tuscan terrace or basking in a garden in Provence would take only moments, if it weren't for the glorious view encompassing the sunlit flanks of Cornwall's St Michael's Mount, on the hills east of Penzance, and overlooking the crescent of Mount's Bay.

However, this idyllic retreat – hidden just a few miles back from the very western tip of England – is no cosy holiday cottage or second summer property. This is Christine and Charles' home of long-standing – they have assiduously crafted their own piece of paradise here over the last two decades.

'Charles' parents and mine both moved to Cornwall while we were teenagers,' says Christine. 'We've both always been involved in equestrian pursuits: Charles' parents used to have a stud farm in Berkshire, and all this ...' – she points to the immaculately landscaped gardens and beautiful converted barn of granite >



THIS PAGE Christine and Charles began work on the garden in 2001 and their careful and close planting has now paid delightful dividends
OPPOSITE Translucent Cornish blue skies above St Michael's Mount; Christine and Charles; teatime in the sunshine; the formal box-hedge garden



LEFT The open-plan area, with its comfy and colourful velvet sofas plumped with tapestry and needlepoint cushions, has a relaxed and cosy feel

RIGHT Flagstones in the hall are a natural partner to the stone walls

BELOW LEFT An interesting grouping of scale and texture against whitewashed stone walls

BELOW Accent lighting is used to emphasise the fine wood of this chest of drawers

BOTTOM The summer room, linking the house and courtyard garden, is furnished in an easy rustic style; the floor was relaid with reclaimed terracotta tiles

‘We really wanted to do this conversion because it seemed to be the perfect way to preserve this lovely old building’



stone – ‘when we met in 1979 was livery stables surrounded by muddy paddocks, owned by my father.’

This was how Ednovean Farm remained until 1989, when Christine and Charles, now married, applied for permission to change the main two-storey section of the barn into their new home. ‘We wanted a proper home that we could spend the rest of our lives in together,’ Christine explains, ‘and at that time we thought that the best way of having somewhere really nice would be to convert the barn’s main area, while leaving the ground floor wing as stabling for our livery business.’

So they asked a local architect to draw up a set of plans to their specifications and proceeded to make an application. ‘We really wanted to do this conversion for two main reasons,’ adds Charles, ‘firstly because it seemed to be the perfect way of guaranteeing the preservation of this lovely old building, because although it’s classed as being in an “area of outstanding natural beauty” it’s not actually listed. And secondly, it seemed to be a cheaper option than buying even a modern property locally in this sought-after part of the country.’

Although their decision seemed to make perfect practical sense, Christine and Charles hit a stumbling block almost as soon as the plans were submitted. ‘The Highways Agency wrote to us saying that the short track which reaches us here from the main >

KEY FACTS

Location Cornwall

Period Ednovean Farm dates back to the 18th century

Size Four double bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms, open-plan kitchen/dining/living room and a summer room

Owners Christine and Charles Taylor, who run a B&B from the property





ABOVE The first floor in the central section of the barn is now the main open-plan living space and has an English country feel. The oak Jacobean style dining table dates from the 1930s; the pale blue cabinet houses a collection of china and porcelain figures, all of which are family heirlooms

LEFT A bespoke tulipwood kitchen with a large corner cupboard was commissioned by Christine and Charles; they painted it in Powder Blue by Farrow & Ball. The bottle-green Rayburn oven completes the kitchen's confidently individual style





'We just had to renovate a bit at a time, as and when we had the funds. But we've got this place in our blood'

road, although fine as farm access, would be inadequate for residential purposes,' Charles recalls. 'Unfortunately, they didn't clearly explain exactly why, or what to do about it. But we worked out a solution and finally gained permission to go ahead almost one year to the day after we first submitted our application.'

When work began, any initial relief at finally getting the project underway was short-lived when they were told that because of the old sagging barn roof displacing its weight unevenly, the exterior walls were bowing and would need extensively rebuilding in many areas.

'That was definitely an extra hindrance,' remembers Christine. 'On top of which, I surveyed the walls and found many of the granite stones had old lettering carved into them; I decided to catalogue them all so they could be put back exactly where they'd been – and I don't think that helped the stone masons do a speedy job.'

So Charles and Christine were both surprised and delighted when, one year later, in the spring of 1991, they found themselves moving into a beautiful, re-roofed, re-floored, newly wired and plumbed home. It now had a wooden staircase leading to an open-plan kitchen, living and dining area laid out over the first floor.

'We felt at home immediately,' says Christine, 'to the extent that soon after we'd settled in we decided what we really wanted to do was convert the lower stable wing into some extra bedrooms and keep our horses in a separate building.'

However, after spending a lot of money on the initial conversion, they realised this idea would have to be a much longer-term plan. 'In fact, to get the whole property the way you see it today took us the next 14 years,' says Charles. 'We just had to renovate a bit at a time, as and when we had the funds. We converted the stable wing a bedroom at a time in two phases, and when that was done we started hard landscaping the garden – digging out the courtyard, laying in the granite, retaining walls and planting the parterre.'

'It's been a true labour of love and it's still a work in progress,' Christine continues, 'as we always seem to be finding new pockets of land to tame and turn over to garden. I remember not so many years ago it felt like every time we had a bit of spare cash it went straight on sand and cement – at least now it's for plants and hedging. But we've got this place in our blood, and we've been tending and improving it so long now I don't know if we'll ever be able to stop – and to be honest I don't think we'll ever want to.' ➔

Christine and Charles run a B&B from their home. Call 01736 711883 or visit ednoveanfarm.co.uk for details



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Palm trees thrive along the private terrace; this ground-floor bedroom at the end of the house has a wonderful antique French bed made of walnut. The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Parma Gray, which makes the most of the natural light; with its wide French doors, visitors can enjoy magnificent views across the bay to St Michael's Mount

HISTORY HOMEWORK

Ednovean Farm takes its name from the old Cornish word for the area. The stone barn appears on early tithe maps and is referred to in the farm records as a 'mowhay' (a Cornish term for a hay barn) and is thought to date from the middle of the 18th century.

The house is located on the eastern side of Mount's Bay and is predominantly built using locally quarried granite slabs. This is the same stone used in the ancient tombs and Neolithic sites of this western Cornish region, which has one of the most concentrated collections of ancient monuments in Europe.