

Warm woods and an open, natural colour palette create an informal and relaxing sitting room. The hare cushion is from Cream Cornwall. Ian's parents re-rigged the Victorian pond yacht.



Winds OF CHANGE

Timeless views across a seascape of winding creeks, saltmarshes and endless skies make this former cowshed on the North Norfolk coast a much-loved family holiday home

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ABOVE Bespoke units in the kitchen are painted in Dulux Chalky Downs 1. Farrow & Ball's warm Eating Room Red creates a suitably earthy backdrop to a pleasing display of slipware.

RIGHT A flight of carved birds animate this convivial dining area. The table and chairs are from Neptune. Pam commissioned the painting by Norfolk artist Brian Lewis for Ian's birthday.

Pam Cowie bought this Norfolk cottage with her husband, Ian, 30 years ago, "It's a place where, with every exhalation, shoulders relax, cares slip away and the North Sea air makes everyone sleep well," says Pam.

There might, perhaps, have been a little too much fresh air in the equation when Pam and Ian first viewed a forlorn outbuilding where the Norfolk breeze blew through a large hole in the walls. The former cowshed formed part of a complex on a historic site, where the largest malt house in Britain once stood and which was itself partly constructed from the walls and foundation stones of a Roman fort. With its idyllic coastal setting, located in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Pam and Ian could immediately see the potential for creating the perfect holiday haven for themselves and their young twin daughters, Abi and Ashley. Pam has a strong sense that rather than finding the house, the property found them. "Ian comes from the Suffolk/Norfolk border and it was whilst holidaying in Wells-next-the-Sea as a child that he fell in love with the area," she explains.

They worked with a small local developer to personalise the renovation, salvaging the beams and other original features, and transforming the single-storey building into a three-bedroom home that served the family as a sanctuary for many years. Four years ago, however, with Abi and Ashley grown up and with children of their own, the family gatherings everyone so enjoyed were becoming a little squeezed. An extension was added creating a flowing open-plan space with a sitting room, dining area and kitchen in one wing of the L-shaped property and a sleeping area with four bedrooms and three bathrooms in the other. A small courtyard garden provided a quiet central focal point, reserving the main drama for the expansive views across the tidal saltmarsh.

Then, in the winter of 2013, disaster struck. A huge North Sea surge, turned onshore by violent winds, caused catastrophic flooding along the North Norfolk coast and submerged the ground floor of the Cowies' home under ten inches of water. "It was heartbreaking," Pam says with feeling. "We were faced with the prospect of having to pull everything out and start again." Deeply saddened by the devastation, ►





A pair of comfy Hudson chairs from Hudson Homes and Interiors, in an Ian Sanderson fabric, create a cosy corner in the sitting room. The tapestry cushions are Pam's handiwork.



“This is a place where, with every exhalation, shoulders relax and cares slip away”

Pam struggled to know where to begin. Her heartache was eased when Abi and Ashley, now running their own Surrey-based interior design business, Hudson Homes and Interiors, stepped in to help bring the cottage back to life. Abi and Ashley’s passion for design began at an early age: Pam’s father was also an interior designer and the girls enjoyed regular visits to their grandfather’s shop in Hudson, Ohio. “It was easy working with them,” Pam reflects. “We share the same design ethos and like the same things. It’s definitely in the genes.”

A palette of earthy neutral tones was chosen as a backdrop to Pam’s beautifully displayed collections of bird carvings and slipware, which add rich layers of the past to the home. “What mattered was to maintain the vestiges of our family history and also, on a practical note, to make the house accessible to the grandchildren. To make it a place where everyone would feel comfortable,” Pam adds.

The warm tones carry through to the kitchen, which was refitted after the flood. The couple wanted a plain English look; something that would stand alone but complement the relaxed flow of the open-plan living space. Ian, a retired project manager, designed the layout and the units were made by a local joiner.

Most of the soft furnishings were damaged in the flood and had to be replaced, but in the main bedroom, the jewel colours of a vintage Caernarfon-pattern Welsh blanket, which Pam found many years ago, unite the red-white-and-blue theme, and also marries the family’s Anglo-American heritage. Pam remarks that her family left Essex for Windsor, Connecticut in 1632 and that she has completed the circle by returning to East Anglia.

Pam inherited her love of bird carvings from her parents and collects them wherever she goes, so there is much for bird lovers to enjoy both within and beyond the cottage. The unspoilt, long coastline of ►

ABOVE LEFT Under Lord Nelson’s watchful gaze, a campaign desk purchased by Pam’s father from James Croft of Whitstable provides an inspirational writing nook popular with all the family.

ABOVE RIGHT In the master bedroom, a red-white-and-blue palette is both nautical and patriotic. The bespoke headboard is painted in Farrow & Ball’s Hague Blue; the walls are Pavilion Gray.



ABOVE The earthy colours and pleasing textures of chalky clunch, cobbled flint and soft-red bricks add simple rustic elements to this restful guestroom.

RIGHT Classic tongue-and-groove panelling in the guest en suite, painted Chalky Downs 3 by Dulux, lends itself to the coastal location.

North Norfolk is renowned for the diversity of bird species found there. Views from the house afford ample opportunities to sit in comfort and watch the saltmarshes come alive with the chatter of seabirds in the summer and the soft flap of pink-footed geese in the winter. The Cowies have a small boat, and the nearby Scolt Head Island nature reserve offers further glimpses of migratory birds.

With the trauma of enforced renovations firmly in the past, this lovely, and very personal, holiday home is once again a place of tranquillity and relaxation. Little wonder, then, that everyone wants to come and stay. Although the large family gatherings still take place, Pam and Ian are happy to let Abi and Ashley and their children take first pick of the house during school holidays. "Summer or winter, I don't mind when we go," enthuses Pam. "It's beautiful at any time of year." ■

