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CREATURE COMFORTS

Nina and James Shaw-Porter's newly renovated home in Dorset is the epitome of fine country living

FEATURE NATALIE FLAUM PHOTOGRAPHY ALISON HAMMOND



**KITCHEN-DINER**

'We reused the old farmhouse stove in the utility room, which is great for extra cooking power at Christmas,' says Nina.

Bespoke cabinetry, Dorset Kitchens & Furniture (0800 833979; dorsetkitchens.co.uk); painted in Farrow & Ball's (01202 876141; farrow-ball.com) **Lulworth Blue** and **Bone**, both £43.50 for 2.5 litres. **Limestone overmantel**, Wharton Antiques (07974 579694; whartonantiques.com); expect to pay around £5,500 for similar

BACK HALL

Metz relaxes beside one of the many fireplaces in the house.

The large **painting** is by Devon artist Katharine Lightfoot (01363 775357; katlightfoot.com); prints of her work are priced from £190

SITTING ROOM

Oak panelling and bookshelves gives this space character.

Hallidays (01865 340028; hallidays.com) makes similar **panelling**. **Ottoman**, £800, VSP Interiors (07787 574192; vspinteriors.com)



Few would have shared the enthusiasm shown by Nina and James Shaw-Porter when they first saw a crumbling farmhouse for sale. 'Sometime in the past, the owners had knocked together two small cottages to make one

decrepit building with no foundations – and the electricians were literally shocking!' says Nina. There were, however, compensations. The farm came with 240 acres of land and was located in a gorgeous, secluded spot in Dorset. And standing alongside the ramshackle farmhouse was a solid 19th-century brick-and-flint barn – ideal for converting into a modern, family home.

'In many ways, the state of the farmhouse was irrelevant to our decision to buy the place,' Nina explains. 'As soon as James and I drove down the narrow, country lane and viewed this amazing location, we knew it was the place for us.' So having made a successful offer for the farm, the Shaw-Porters moved into the conjoined cottages and drew up plans to convert the barn.

'It had been used mainly as a grain store and pigsty, and still had the old grain dryer inside,' recalls Nina. But the nature of the building threw up some unexpected problems, for example, the couple had to wait for the results of a bat conservation survey before the project could begin. 'As James works in countryside management, he knew several ecologists who were able to help,' says Nina. 'If the roosting bats were a rare breed, or had pups, we could have had a problem, but fortunately, it all turned out fine.'

Family concerns more close to home also had an impact. 'I was pregnant with Rosie, and looking after her three-year-old brother, George,' says Nina. 'I remember having meetings with the architect while still feeling queasy with morning sickness.' Nevertheless, the couple pressed ahead with their ideas. 'We knew we wanted a large kitchen and sitting room, with enough space for both the children ▶



■ **THE OWNERS** Nina Shaw-Porter, her husband James, who owns a countryside management company, and their children George and

Rosie. They own miniature wirehaired dachshunds Daisy and Colin, Griffon Pointer crosses Gertie and Foggy, and Metz the Munsterlander

■ **THEIR HOME** Converted barn

■ **LOCATION** Dorset

■ **ROOMS** Hall, sitting room, kitchen-diner, back hall, playroom, four bedrooms (two en suite), bathroom

■ **PURCHASED** 2005

■ **PREVIOUS PROPERTY** 'We lived in the farmhouse next door, which we demolished in favour of a paddock and fruit orchard,' says Nina.

HOME TRUTHS

**MASTER BEDROOM**

'This scheme is calm and serene,' says Nina.

Bespoke headboard and footstool, VSP Interiors (07787 574192, vspinteriors.com).

Crackled Gourd lamp bases, £378 each, Vaughan (020 7349 4600, vaughandesigns.com)

**MASTER EN SUITE**
A bespoke unit makes best use of the space.

Carpentry, John Kirby at Tithe Construction (01305 871578). Design, Henriette von Stockhausen for VSP Interiors. The Samuel Heath Curzon **shaving mirror**, £200, John Lewis (08456 049049, johnlewis.com), is identical to this model

**GEORGE'S BEDROOM**

The couple's young son enjoys the jaunty, nautical-themed decor.

For coastal-inspired **wall stickers**, take a look at Wallglamour.co.uk's (01653 696621) Lighthouse View, £24

ROSIE'S NURSERY

The chest of drawers makes for an ideal changing table.

Chest, French Finds (01538 370052, frenchfinds.co.uk). Ralph Lauren's **Chilod Garden wallpaper**, £90 for a 10-metre roll, is available at Tangletree Interiors (0800 917 8726, tangletree-interiors.co.uk)



and our five dogs,' says Nina. 'In order to stow away all the toys, a playroom was also a priority, as was a large utility room.'

Finally, the work began in earnest in September 2008. 'We had the most fantastic builder, John Kirby, who we've known for years – nothing fazed him!' says Nina. 'As the previous owners had already put windows in the barn, we were granted permission to replace the openings. This helped transform the light upstairs, where the views across the farm are incredible.'

In the kitchen, she opted for a classic, country look, with blue-grey painted units, oak worktops, buttermilk walls and a flagstone floor. The limestone overmantel once formed part of a French fireplace and came from a local antiques dealer. In fact, the piece is so heavy, a structural engineer had to design a wall support to meet building regulations. 'It's a real piece of history, and you can see all the fossil marks in the stone,' Nina enthuses.

To assist with the rest of the decor, she enlisted the help of friend and interior designer Henriette von Stockhausen. 'Having to do a project like this from scratch was daunting,' Nina explains. 'We went shopping together for furniture and she came up with some great tips on lighting and space-saving bathroom ideas. She also took me to Chelsea Harbour in search of fabrics and wallpapers.'

In the end, the conversion took exactly 12 months, with Nina and James living in the tumbledown farmhouse throughout. 'As we have animals, it would have been a real hassle to move elsewhere,' admits Nina. Once the barn was finished, planning regulations dictated that the farmhouse be demolished. 'It was a strange feeling as we watched the digger slash through the place that we'd lived in,' says Nina. 'There's a pony paddock and a fruit orchard there now.'

But she and James have no regrets about their decision and all the family are delighted with their new home. 'Compared to the farmhouse, this place is warm, cosy and dry,' says Nina. 'Moving into the barn has completely transformed our lives.' 