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# WE TOOK OUR HOME BARN TO BASICS

Oliver Stallwood talks to a couple who have taken their converted barn back to its rural roots - with stunning results

**EVERYONE** knows what a barn conversion is, right? Take one large agricultural space and turn it into a nice domestic living space - give Kevin MacLeod a tinkle and get the seal of approval: simple.

But what about the other way around - converting one of these properties back to its barn roots? This is what Pippa and Scott Patten did when they bought Mill Barn in Oxshott in 2011. This home consisted of two barns, with the larger converted in the early Nineties into a house for a disabled elderly lady. It had two-and-a-half bedrooms, while the other had a large garage and was a

**It started life as a barn, so we only wanted to add elements that would be truthful to its history**

care's flat. The problem is, it didn't really resemble a barn anymore - a warm room, it was painted orange and green with pink highlights. Pine was added to give a rustic feel, but looked fake and ill-fitting. The main barn had so many walls, it was easy to get disorientated.

The walls would have to go, opening the space up to how it was when it was a home for grain and cows. 'The style was old fashioned, in a Nineties way, and it felt small and not truthful to the building,' explains Pippa. 'It was like it was trying to hide the fact it was a barn.'

Scott puts it simply: 'It's a barn, it started life as a barn, it's an agricultural building. We only wanted elements that would be truthful to its history as possible.'

The couple run Pippa Patten Design (pippapattendesign.co.uk), a studio that provides interior design,

**Keeping watch:** Agnes the cow presiders over the living room



architecture and project management. Pippa is the design director leading a team of designers, while Scott leads the architecture and project management team.

This was both their dream home and ultimate project, with a nine month timeframe from start to finish, while also living on site. Having

gained consent to convert the property into a single dwelling, and to convert the garage into a sunken drawing room, work could begin.

The two homes were stripped back to the stunning original barn, and then rebuilt internally, retaining the valuable aesthetic, and period details of the original building, such as the



barns. 'We tried to expose the bits of the original barn that were worth highlighting and cover up any bits we didn't need to have on show,' continues Pippa. It was important to create both a flow to the abode, as well as giving a sense of orientation.

Turn left when you walk in the single entrance, built into a new extension that connects the two barns, and you see all the way through to the back of the kitchen in the main barn. Turn right and you step into the smaller barn, which is now a family room, with a children's room upstairs. Straight ahead and you look out over the lush garden and paddock.

'The whole vision for it was that we wanted people to be able to walk into the house and know where they are. With long thin buildings you could walk around for ever and never really

get anywhere. Usually it now works well; it is divided by farmyards rather than walls. Big spaces can feel quite daunting but even though it is open plan, you still know where the separate spaces are.'

To create the central drawing room and conform to existing roof pitches, the floor was sunk and used to create the separation from the walkway and entrance to the drawing room. Then extra steel was introduced to replace existing structural walls. The living spaces downstairs now includes a media room, sitting room, dining room, kitchen and drawing room. The property also now has five bedrooms, a study and a bathroom. The barn enjoys the benefits of air-source heating and fibre-optic data - it is an wired and technological inside as it is barn-like outside.

Aesthetically, the details do the talking. The walls are lime washed - essentially white - and wood has been left exposed. Even the floor is resin, allowing a crisp, unfussy shell in which to work. The original staircase, an odd Victorian-style grandiose affair, has been replaced with a minimalist one that has been tucked away.

There are delicious details everywhere: behind the kitchen sink, almost working as a splashback, is a gloriously rusted panel - this was an old workshop table, bolted to the wall; a stone trough, salvaged from a field, acts as the basin in the cloakroom; original French café signs are dotted around. A sculpture of the head of a Highland cow nicknamed Agnes,



Original: The couple retained and exposed the barn's features, such as beams, left, and the brickwork



Visions: Scott and Pippa Patten



Redesign: The barns have been stripped back, and many walls have been removed



Five details: The pair of hanging lights in the living area are vintage Murano glass