



Our DARLING BUDS OF MAY house

Sharon Chilcott meets a couple of city dwellers who found a home and a new life, in the country

PICTURES BY: ANTONY THOMPSON

Below: Kari Morgan, interior designer and owner of Westbrook Court



Londoners Kari and Chris Morgan couldn't believe their luck when, last September, they crested a hill on the outskirts of Hay-on-Wye and saw a For Sale sign outside their dream home.

But little did new mum Kari know then that their lifestyle-changing decision to buy and renovate picturesque Westbrook Court would result in a new career as an interior designer, using the knowledge she gleaned from masterminding the whole project as well as experience gained in her past career and in doing up other properties.

"My daughter, Heidi, was half the reason we moved here, although we had been looking to move out of London for ages before. When Heidi came along, I went back to working in London as we hadn't found anywhere. Then last September on a quick last-minute holiday we passed the For Sale sign and saw the house and thought it looked amazing. We put an

offer in a few days after that and we were lucky enough to sell our house in London straight away and so we were in here before Christmas.

"It sounds quite impetuous but we had been looking for our rural idyll for ages, from the time we got married five years ago. It was always our dream to move away from London but we just didn't find the right business opportunity or immediate sense of community in the usual suspects like Cornwall, Devon or the Cotswolds. Hay-on-Wye offered this to us at face value and without question.

"This home had so much potential and with its sweeping drive, period charm, wisteria-clad walls, barn for possible conversion and fine views it was the whole package.

"We immediately felt at home in the close community and have felt welcoming support from all our new contacts and friends – we love being part of Hay-on-Wye and Herefordshire and plan to build our little family's future right here."

She adds: "A new local friend, Faith, calls it our Darling Buds of May house and coming from Australia, I haven't seen



Above: The hall
Left: Kari Morgan in her kitchen
Below: Guest bedroom



Favourite room



Kari's favourite place is the vaulted lounge. "I love the lounge. I love the height of the room and the beams. It can be really light and bright in the day, when it is a lovely place for my daughter and her friends to play, and then at night, once you close the curtains and light the woodburning stove it feels really cosy."

that show but hope it's a good image!"

Chris is an account manager for a multi-national business travel company, so it fell to Kari to oversee the renovation project. "When we came to the area I didn't know who to go to and we had no internet connection for two months so I had to rely on the local parish magazines to find contractors, which was a brilliant way to do it.

"The house has really good bones, so we haven't had to do much structural work, but we have literally given it a new lease of life, upgrading the plumbing and central heating, sealing up the draughty windows and doors, replacing some of the doors, taking off layers of wallpaper and completely redecorating each room. We also installed solid oak floors throughout the downstairs and put thick insulated underlay and new carpets upstairs in the bedrooms. We sealed up a leaking cellar, and repaired leaks and holes in the roof and I redesigned and renovated the kitchen and two of the bathrooms.

"The whole project is what led me to undertake my interior design studies and then to go on to set up my new business.

Having sourced and used all these wonderful local contractors on our house, and having years of experience in interior design it gave me the idea to help people who might be nervous of taking on a similar refurbishment, or who even just want simple room by room advice."

Kari, who came to the UK from down

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under at the age of 21, with a one-way ticket, progressed within her former career to associate director in corporate lettings, and a part of her job was advising developers and private investors how best to present their properties. She and Chris also renovated several properties in London. She said: "I have always loved interior design and we did up several Victorian properties in London. Our last

house was an Arts and Crafts style property, which we did up in keeping with its 1920s retro style with a modern slant. Westbrook Court is a 17th century farmhouse and so it required a very different style, which presented its own challenges."

While it is a historic property, the house itself is not listed, although the red brick and timbered barn across the garden is. The former farmhouse stands in five acres of grounds, some of which the couple let out to a local farmer to graze his sheep. The pretty front garden is well stocked with plants and flowers and Kari and Chris are planting an orchard down one side of it and have also recently invested in a ride-on mower to keep on top of the grass.

The living space in the original property has been added to over the years by incorporating former farm buildings. For example, the pretty dining room, with doors opening to the garden, was once a barn. The lounge, with its high vaulted ceiling, was formerly a dairy. The house has evolved into a spacious, four-bedroom property, with an imposing entrance hallway with a grand staircase



Left: The dining room
Below: Westbrook Court's listed barn



leading off. Kari has made a style statement in this room with her reproduction Barcelona chairs, an iconic 1920 to 1950s design. In the study, her ideas include a framed map of Antarctica (sold as wrapping paper). It's a place where her father explored in the 1950s and where there is a Trajer Ridge named after him by the Australian Government. In the bedrooms Kari has feature wallpaper, including What a Hoot, an eye-catching owl-inspired design in the nursery and, in the master bedroom, an elegant gold motif by Graham and Brown. Painting and decorating such a large property was quite a task in which she was helped by Clare Morris from Kingston.

The kitchen was the last but most important room on Kari's list. Having the time to live in and use the space beforehand meant the new design was exactly right for the family's needs. "I had to wait for my new kitchen and I am really pleased with it. It just felt really dark before, with dark mahogany cupboards and furniture."

A large unit that cut the room in two has been removed and at one end old cupboards have been given a clever makeover, a coat of cream paint and matching pewter cup-style handles so they team up with the new, bespoke kitchen cabinets and island at the other end. The whole room now has a much brighter feel. "Now,

even though there are three slightly different designs of door fronts, you hardly notice because they are integrated with the new," said Kari. "I also kept the flagstone floors, the oak work surfaces and the Everhot cooking range already here."

The butler sink has also stayed in situ, in front of the kitchen window with its rural outlook. It was only when Kari and Chris moved in that they realised the house and garden benefited from far-reaching views over the Wye Valley. "When we saw the house in September I didn't know there were such stunning views because there were leaves on the trees, but by the time we moved in they had died back," she said. ■

Get the look



Kari Morgan runs her business Westbrook Interiors from home, where she can be contacted on **01497 831752** or email design@westbrook-interiors.co.uk. An example of penchant for quirky ideas is the ironic twist on the country-house hunting trophy in the study – a wall decal bought online from art and

vintage retailer Frank and Fearless.
<http://shop.frankandfearless.co.uk>



Many of the curtains and blinds in the property were made or altered by Coach House Interiors, whose soft furnishing and home interiors showroom and workroom is set in the grounds of Brobury House Gardens in

Bredwardine. Coach House Interiors, The Coach House, Brobury House, Bredwardine **01981 500777** www.coachhouse-interiors.com

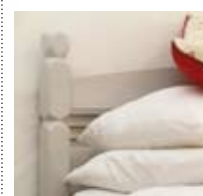


Kari has this attractive floor runner made up from an off-cut of the natural flooring she used to carpet the downstairs hallway passage. It co-ordinates with the dark wicker garden screening which she has placed along the landing banisters – a creative safety measure whilst Heidi is still little. She bought all the wool and natural carpets from Sullivan Flooring, Sullivan Flooring, 2 Glanwyne Business Park, Hay-on-Wye **01497 820077** www.sullivanflooring.co.uk

The bespoke kitchen units were made by local joiner Michael Smallwood. Kari is particularly pleased with the design of the breakfast bar, which has shelves one side to neatly store all Chris's cookery books and a bar on the opposite side for perching. "It's designed for our needs and is a practical piece of furniture," she said. Michael Smallwood, Bredwardine **01981 500718** email: smallwood.michael@googlemail.com



Kari found her stylish kitchen bins at a local family-run hardware store where she became a regular customer during the renovation of the property. "They were our local one-stop shop when we first moved here," she said. Jones Home Hardware (Hay) Limited, 11-12 Castle Street, Hay-on-Wye. **01497 820760** www.joneshomehardware.co.uk



The bed head in the guest bedroom is painted in Pavilion Grey from the Farrow & Ball paint range, which Kari bought from traditional timber and builders'

merchant. F.J. Williams of Hay, Hereford Road, Hay-on-Wye **01497 820644**

www.fjwilliams.co.uk/

The dark kitchen, before renovation, showing the unit which cut the room in two.

