

left:

Stone Farm Cottage is now the perfect house in the perfect location

below left:

Hours and sometimes days spent pouring over colours have been well worth it

below:

Warmth and cosiness is now very much a feature

COMING IN *from the* COLD

Location, location, location – or so they say. The actual house is important too, as a happy homeowner in the Teign Valley has finally discovered

WORDS: Chrissy Harris PHOTOGRAPHS: SGHaywood Photography

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It was a perfect spring day back in 2014, when Liz and Matthew Carlton first arrived at Stone Farm Cottage in the Teign Valley. They had no chance, really. 'The daffodils were out – hundreds of them – and we sat on the back terrace and had tea,' says Liz. 'I could hear the stream babbling away, the birdsong and I just had this really big cheesy grin on my face. I just thought, oh my god, I love this.'

And the house? 'I didn't love the house, to be honest,' says Liz. 'It was not actually that great – it was a bit higgledy piggledy and didn't have any flow. But I didn't really care. I thought, I'll put up with that because I love the place – the outbuildings, the fields, the trees... I'm mad about trees.'

Liz had fallen for the location and that was that. The house could wait. The couple – who spent years moving and renting during their careers working for the RAF – were determined to put down some roots in a nice place and this was it.

'Then reality set in,' says Liz, describing that first winter in a house that had seemed so joyous in the spring and summer. 'I was like, why is it so cold in here? Why does that door not work? Why is there no heating in the kitchen?'

Stone Farm Cottage is made up of an 18th century longhouse and a Victorian stone-built extension which had been joined to a stone linhay with a first floor added in the early 1990s. It was big, rambling – and impossible to heat.

Liz, by now working as a meteorologist at the Met Office in Exeter, was away a lot with >



above:
The spacious kitchen is a natural hub

opposite top left:
The bathroom sink provided the inspiration for the rest of the room

opposite far left:
Liz is delighted with the new take on her old cottage

opposite left:
Liz has mostly worked with what she already had

"I could hear the stream babbling away, the birdsong and I just had this really big cheesy grin on my face. I just thought, oh my god, *I love this*'

her job and husband Matthew was abroad for most of the year as part of his role with the United Nations.

'I'd come home and the house would be freezing cold,' says Liz. 'The one radiator in the kitchen just couldn't heat the thick stone walls and the upstairs walls were so thin that heat disappeared as fast as the radiators could work.'

'I had to come in and light the stove and wait two hours before the place even vaguely warmed up, by which time I was thinking, I might as well go to bed.'

She's laughing but this routine sounds miserable. Being comfortable in your environment is a key human requirement and this house just wasn't warm enough. Rather astonishingly, however, Liz and Matthew put up with this chilly set-up for about five years before deciding the time had come to address their home's shortcomings.

'It was a struggle to look after the place on my own,' says Liz. 'We knew something had to be done and we had to figure out a way of

insulating and heating the house, otherwise we couldn't carry on living there.'

They drafted in an architect who came up with a way of heating things up, while adding an extension into the courtyard.

'But we didn't want more space, we wanted better used space,' says Liz, explaining that first idea was abandoned, shortly before Covid hit. Matthew was then stuck in Africa with his job for about seven months and Liz went to live with her parents for a while. It was a difficult time.

'But then we revisited things,' says Liz, who then contacted local architect Annie Martin. 'She came up with this amazing plan.'

Annie's idea involved knocking down part of the linhay wall and pushing out underneath the first-floor overhang, leaving the roof intact. The staircase in the kitchen would go, allowing more space for the dining area. The parking area would also be moved to the side of the house, near the new front door. And everything would be warm and toasty.



above:
The cottage feels light and bright throughout

left:
The overall effect is just the right sort of rustic

AT HOME IN THE VALLEY

Liz and Matthew moved to Devon for work 10 years ago and spent a long time searching the county for a new home. They came close to buying a thatched cottage near Totnes but after hearing nothing about the progress of the sale for weeks, Liz discovered it had burnt down. They restarted their search and were told about

Stone Farm Cottage in the Teign Valley, an area they had come to love. Liz had been renting a house there for 18 months and knew she had found the right part of Devon for her.

'It's very me,' she says. 'It's a bit more rugged than other parts of Devon. I think it's all the granite. And we like the pubs!'

'It just all made sense,' says Liz. 'It was so lovely to get somebody onboard and to start realising it all. I knew then that it had momentum.'

The nine-month project to turn this house into a home has been an incredible triumph by all parties concerned. Stone Farm Cottage has been redesigned but still retains much of its eclectic character.

Annie Martin has helped to create a much more user-friendly, workable space that isn't much bigger – just much better, with underfloor heating and an air source heat pump.

John Curd, project manager at Armada Property UK (who's here today to chat about the project) did the heavy lifting, quite literally. There are a lot of huge bits of granite around here on the edge of Dartmoor, which proved quite challenging when it came to starting the groundwork. Once that was done, the project was apparently quite straightforward.

The final victory goes to Liz, who has managed to style this house perfectly. Hours and sometimes days spent pouring over paint colours and lighting have been well worth it.

'It was stressful at times,' says Liz. 'I can see why people end up getting interior designers in because there's just so much choice out there. You go to a bathroom showroom and there are 300 taps and you can have them in every single design, colour and finish. It does paralyse you sometimes.'

'You were pretty good at it, though,' says John, who must have seen his fair share of people who aren't so good at it. 'You knew what you wanted. And the lighting. That was actually brilliant, to be fair.'

Lighting is Liz's new love. She's really gone to town with a clever combination of up, down, backlit and wall mounted in the kitchen. The scale of the wiring task was initially a cause of some alarm to John, but he's now as delighted as Liz with the end result.

Another real win is the furniture. Liz proudly explains that she's hardly bought anything new for her new and improved home, instead styling rooms around key pieces she's collected over the years.

One investment, however, has been the kitchen bar and dining table – reclaimed school science lab benches. They came with swear words already etched on (one assumes).

The overall effect is just the right sort of rustic – and Liz couldn't be happier.

'I love it, we love it,' she says, adding that Matthew is so at home here now that leaving for work is a struggle. Liz adds: 'The result is better than I ever could have dreamed, and I don't think there's anything I would have done differently. It's light, it's clean – and it's warm.'

They've got the location and now they have the house to match. Liz and Matthew can be full of the joys of spring all year round. ●

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