



# LIFE & SOUL

*Debbie and Dave Down have lovingly renovated their historic Norfolk cottage, while respecting its heritage spirit*



**Living room**

To complement the restored Norfolk pammments, Debbie chose a palette of earthy tones. **Sofas** in Linwood's Omega velvet in Peridot, Panks Upholstery. Patterned **cushions** in Bullswood in Charcoal/Mustard and Indian Loop in Charcoal/Linen, both Morris & Co. **Flowers**, The Flower Hut





### Exterior

The path, made from traditional-style pavers, echoes the original tiles inside



### Living room

Muted tones add to the room's timeless feel.  
**Walls** painted in Shadow White, Farrow & Ball

Debbie Down initially resisted viewing a neglected cottage in Norfolk, but when curiosity eventually got the better of her, she was captivated by the property's wealth of original features, period charm and rural location. 'When I first saw this flint-and-brick cottage online, I felt that the timing wasn't right,' she explains. 'My husband Dave and I had recently finished renovating our second holiday cottage and didn't want to tackle a third major project so soon.'

Several months later, the dated cottage still languished on the market, so Debbie felt compelled to take a closer look. 'When we set up the viewing in October 2018, it was with a degree of anticipation,' she says. 'I had a feeling that this unloved cottage could well be a hidden gem, crying out to be sensitively restored.'

Debbie's instincts were right and, from the moment she set foot inside, the experienced renovator knew that she couldn't walk away from the building. 'It was desperately in need of some TLC, but Dave and I were taken aback by the height of the ceilings, particularly downstairs, where the rooms felt much more spacious than we'd imagined,' says Debbie. 'We were really struck by the gnarled oak beams everywhere - some of which had been lovingly



### AT HOME WITH...

**Owners'** Debbie Down, an interior designer who also owns and runs interiors store, Rooms with a View, with her husband Dave plus Bert, their Cockapoo. They bought the cottage in 2019.

**House** A three-bedroom Grade II-listed cottage, dating from the late 1700s.





### *Living room*

The inglenook makes a delightful focal point. **Stove** - Charnwood. **Footstool** - Rooms with a View, in Abraham Moon's Burford wool in Mustard. Bespoke **rug** in Seagrass Herringbone, Crucial Trading





carved - the leaded windows, original floor tiles and the unusual red-brick inglenook fireplace.'

The whole cottage, which was once owned by the Gunton Park Estate, had a wonderful, individual feel and was structurally sound. 'Over lunch, we quickly agreed that it had to be a keeper,' says Debbie.

They bought the property in February 2019, then Debbie, Dave and their builder, Stephen Frost, stripped the entire cottage before injecting it with colour, depth and personality. 'Deciding on the kitchen layout was one of the trickiest decisions,' says Debbie. 'I used graph paper to work out the best arrangement for the units, large Bertazzoni range and fridge freezer.'

Next, the cottage was rewired and the plumbing updated, before bathroom fittings were put in place. With her skilful eye for creating stunning interiors, Debbie enhanced the existing period features on the first floor, leaving beams exposed and painting the wooden floorboards. Where required, she added extra character, including panelling some of the bedrooms, and laying striking wall and floor tiles. 'I used moodboards to ensure each room had its own identity, yet still had a cohesive look,' says Debbie.

When it came to painting the kitchen, Debbie felt Farrow & Ball's green Bancha would be an eye-catching

## LIVING THE DREAM

The charm of Debbie and Dave's period cottage is enhanced by the beautiful antique furniture.

### *Why do antiques work so well in your home?*

'With a period property, antique pieces look like they belong and have evolved with it. They add character.'

### *Where do you buy from?*

'I often buy antique items from TW Gaze auction rooms or online.'

### *Is antique furniture making a comeback?*

'Yes, although I believe lovely pieces never really went out of fashion.'

### *What is your top tip for buying at auction?*

'Go with your gut feeling, set a budget - and stick to it.'

### *And your favourite piece?*

'The little chest of drawers in the bedroom. It's mahogany, really heavy and perfect for the space.'



***Kitchen***

Debbie has provided a raft of practical home comforts for guests staying at Woodcutter's Cottage. Range and fridge freezer, both Bertazzoni. Mat, Rooms with a View



“THE COTTAGE HAS SUCH A LOVELY, LAID-BACK VIBE AND NOW FEELS LIKE A REAL HOME, WHERE YOU CAN KICK BACK, RELAX AND ENJOY YOURSELF”



**Bathroom**

A vintage cupboard has been transformed into a vanity unit. **Floor**, herringbone parquet in Morning Oak, Karndean. **Rug**, Rooms with a View



### **Main bedroom**

Artist Angie Lewin's *Knockando Thrift and Feathers* print was the starting point for this pink and ochre scheme. **Headboard** upholstered in Glen Lyon wool, in Yellow; Bronte by Moon **throw**, both Abraham Moon





### Guest bedroom

The blue and ochre scheme was inspired by a painting that Debbie bought at a local auction. Headboard painted in De Nimes, Farrow & Ball. Wall lights, Garden Trading

foil for the quarry tiled floor and wooden beams. 'As I peeled layers of paint off the rickety old back door, I was thrilled to discover the original green paintwork, as used by the estate,' says Debbie. 'This adds to the authenticity of the cottage and is a lovely link to the past.'

Another labour of love was restoring the downstairs floor tiles to their former glory. 'There was nothing else for it, apart from elbow grease and many hours spent removing bucketloads of grime, both from the quarry tiles in the kitchen and the Norfolk pamments in the living room,' says Debbie. 'I then sealed the tiles to enrich their natural colour and make them easier to clean.'

The project came together in just under six months. 'As there used to be a sawmill on the estate, and because of the property's proximity to the nearby woodland, we named our new abode Woodcutter's Cottage,' says Debbie. 'Dave and I absolutely love this place; it's got such a lovely, laid-back vibe and now feels like a real home-from-home, where you can kick back, relax and enjoy everything that this fabulous part of the world has to offer. We are so pleased that we didn't pass on the opportunity to give this historic cottage its soul back.'

**To rent Woodcutter's Cottage, visit [forevernorfolk.com](http://forevernorfolk.com)**

### ON OUR DOORSTEP

**Visit...** 'Blickling Estate ([nationaltrust.org.uk/bllickling-estate](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/bllickling-estate)) is steeped in history and was the birthplace of Anne Boleyn. Built in 1616, the Jacobean hall is absolutely magnificent and there are acres of gardens, woodland and parkland to explore.'

**Shop at...** 'Norfolk Reclaim ([norfolkreclaim.co.uk](http://norfolkreclaim.co.uk)) in Fakenham is super for a good rummage. It's like going on a treasure hunt at this reclamation yard, which specialises in Norfolk bricks, pantiles and pamments. There's everything from fireplaces to basins and lots of antiques; definitely worth a visit.'

**Go for a meal at...** 'The Gunton Arms ([theguntonarms.co.uk](http://theguntonarms.co.uk)) in Thorpe Market. It's quirky and a favourite with us. Fabulous decor and delicious food - venison and beef are often cooked over a large open fire.'