

A woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved dress and black tights, stands in a kitchen. She is smiling and looking down at a small, fluffy, light-colored dog sitting on a dark wooden floor. The kitchen features dark blue cabinets, a black countertop, and a wooden island with a thick top. On the island, there are various items including asparagus, bread, and a green cloth. A sink with a chrome faucet is visible on the counter. A wooden cabinet with a lattice top is mounted on the wall. A black pendant light hangs from the ceiling. The overall atmosphere is warm and rustic.

# 'This is my little bubble'

Jo Flavell left her life in rural France to make a forever home in Leicestershire

FEATURE LIZ POTTER PHOTOGRAPHER COGIN POOLE



**SERENE SCENE**

In the dining area, patio doors open to glorious views across the garden and countryside beyond

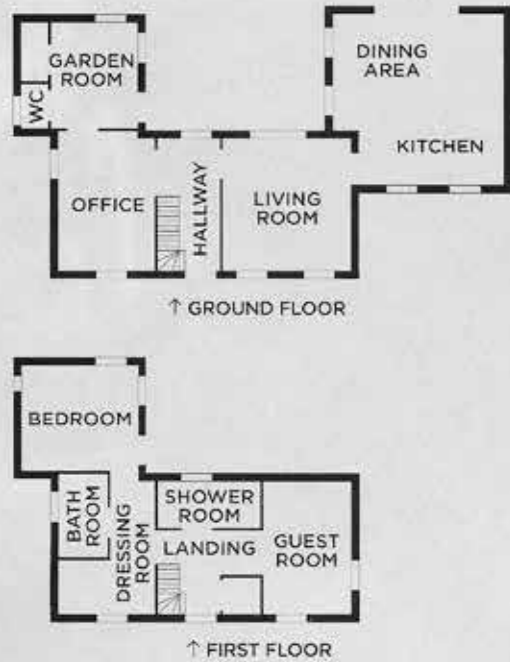
**HOUSE DETAILS**

**Homeowners** Jo Flavell, interior designer, and her husband Peter, a furniture maker. The couple run their own furniture and design business, Flavell Trading (flavelltrading.com)  
**Family** Peter's 30-year-old son, Frank, and Ralphie the Lakeland terrier  
**Location** Near Market Harborough, Leicestershire  
**Property** Two-bedroom, Grade II-listed cottage

**HOUSE VALUATION**

**Purchase price** £280,000  
**Valued now at** £550,000

**THE FLOORPLAN**



**SHOP THIS ROOM**

Peter dining chairs, EPOA, Flavell Trading. For a similar pendant light, try Ian Snow metal bowl pendant shade, £19.78, Wayfair. For a similar tablecloth, try faded linen tablecloth in lemon yellow, £79.99, Zara Home



← **WINDOW DRESSING**

A trio of green glass carboys from France catches the light in the hall beautifully

↳ **HANDMADE TOUCHES**

Filled with Peter's furniture, the living room is the house's stylish and homely centrepiece

**W**hen you make your living from finding properties to refurbish and sell on, renovators' restlessness can sometimes make it difficult to put down roots yourself. But for creative homemakers Jo and Peter Flavell, finding a special place to call their own was simply a matter of locating the right house in a picturesque spot with glorious countryside views and then adding their own unique style to it. They just had to move countries to make it happen: 'We had spent seven years abroad restoring houses,' professional interior designer Jo explains. 'But this gorgeous place we found in Leicestershire wasn't for resale; it was for us to live in. It really works for us, too – we love it here.'

Adventurous Jo and husband Peter, a woodworker and furniture maker, had moved to the south of France in 2005 to convert rural barns and relish the challenge of a different lifestyle. 'We transformed

two complete shells and a third part-wreck in Uzès,' she recalls. 'Each time we lived on site during the build, and that sort of workload really takes it out of you. We came back to the UK in 2011. After seven years, we were ready to settle down.' On returning, the couple rented a place in Somerset for six months before spotting Stone Cottage in the tranquil village of Bringhurst, Leicestershire, handily halfway between Jo's parents in Yorkshire and Peter's son Frank in London. 'The fact it was a large, two-bedroom property suited us perfectly,' Jo adds. 'It faces the oldest church in Leicestershire and is part of a conservation area in a quiet no-through-road. Hardly anyone knows we're here.'

The Jurassic Way long-distance footpath may pass by the side of the garden over the drystone wall, but it's still an extremely private space. 'We have wonderful views across rolling countryside. Peter and I can sit out and watch the sunset on summer evenings. It's magical,' Jo beams. 'The ▶

**ONE SIMPLE CHANGE**

If you're the proud owner of deep windowsills, try this simple styling idea for spring. Instead of cluttering up the area with trinkets and photo frames, go for a beauty-chic look with just three oversized textured vases (or carboys, as they are known) which will still let the light stream through. You can find a great range at Cox & Cox from around £22; there's lots of different tones of glass in its collection, from smoky grey and blush pink to emerald green. Just one allium is all you need for the floral display, and if you can't find any in a local florist, you can buy a faux one from Oka for £7 to last all year round.



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In France, our scheme was cream and greys, but we wanted it cosier here



← **SIMPLE STUDY**

Peter built this elegant trestle workbench. The reclaimed floor is from a distillery

↗ **BESPOKE TOUCH**

Jo has dyed the cosy French bed linen in olive green and chartreuse hues

→ **PRACTICAL STORAGE**

Neat tongue and groove cupboards are fitted under the original cruck beam

house looks like a tiny cottage from the front, but inside it's surprisingly spacious,' Peter adds. 'The layout is essentially a U-shape, with what we jokingly call our east and west wings.' The interiors had last been modernised in the Seventies, so it was in need of a major overhaul to make the living space workable. 'We created a new double-height kitchen-diner from the old garage and rebuilt the east wing to make a master bedroom with a new garden room underneath,' he adds. 'We also altered the floorplan upstairs so we could extend the bathroom and create a new dressing room.' Not only is the property

more spacious now, it's also better looking. 'We changed the windows to be more in keeping with its age,' Jo says. 'Originally the exterior was painted bricks and we've replaced them in part with a skin of Cotswold stone. The cladding on the extension is made from scorched cedar planks – it's an ancient Japanese technique known as *shou sugi ban*, which involves charring the timber to preserve it.' Inside, the feel is beautifully relaxed, warm and cosy, dominated by Jo's favourite hues of sludgy, earthy greys. 'Our style has changed and evolved,' she explains. 'When we lived in France, our colour scheme was

all cream, neutral linens and soft greys. Here we wanted it to feel cosier so we had to use warm, bolder shades.' Throughout, the Flavells' home is filled with rustic, handcrafted touches that give it a unique personality. For example, Peter has built all the fitted cupboards, laid the reclaimed floorboards and created the tongue and groove panelling from scratch, impressively. The curtains are the fruit of Jo's labours: 'Because they were so big, they were hard work,' she admits. 'As I'm not a natural seamstress, the process takes me a long time, but it's undeniably fantastic to have made everything yourself.' She has also ▶





right shade. Layered on top of this modern Arts & Crafts approach are displays of vintage finds, many from France; each of them with a story to tell. 'Our eclectic style might be considered knick-knackery,' jokes Peter. 'But Jo and I would actually rather have a blank wall than the wrong thing. Our tastes are extremely similar too, so that makes decorating easy. We both like to change things and move stuff around.' Eye-catching collections and one-off curios include a set of Toulouse sausage pots, tall candlesticks stained with Jo's favourite pigmented linseed oil, a bread cupboard with a slatted door and a set of four caster wheels from an old Heal's bed, now on display on a shelf in the kitchen. There are also antique amber bottles in the bathroom; a traditional French Godin stove in the kitchen; vintage terracotta pots gleaned from a house clearance in the

garden room; and the old towel ladder in the bathroom was rescued from a cherry orchard. 'Once a year on a summer weekend, the villagers where we lived would have a *vide-grenier*, which translates as empty attic,' says Jo. 'Everyone would put their unwanted things out on the street for sale - anything from children's bikes to crockery and old mirrors - like a village-wide garage sale. It was such a brilliant way to get rid of unwanted items; people really should do it here in the UK.'

Their days in France may be filled with happy memories, but Jo and Peter both agree that their homecoming to this quintessentially English house was the perfect cure for their wanderlust. 'We'd spent years doing up properties to sell on,' says Jo. 'But we knew this place was finally the one for us to live in. It's our bubble; a real home where we escape from it all.' **GH**



**SHOP THIS ROOM**

Panelling in smoked trout estate eggshell, £60 per 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. For a similar bath, try the petite millbrook cast iron bath, £875, The Cast Iron Bath Company. Basin pillar taps in inca brass by Barbara Wilsons, £380, Holloways of Ludlow

**GOOD CHOICE**

100+ BEST BUYS

**LUXURY TOUCH**



This small braided rug from Myakka is handwoven in a jute and cotton mix

↓ Dār Lighting's Frederick black and copper wall light is directional



Frame a circular dining table with the round Bloomingville from Amara

↓ An elegant pick, Task at Original BTC is available in a range of finishes



↘ For a period look, try Victorian Plumbing's Old London Richmond traditional basin with full pedestal



**GET JO'S LOOK**

↙ Burlington Bathrooms' classic basin comes fitted with an invisible overflow



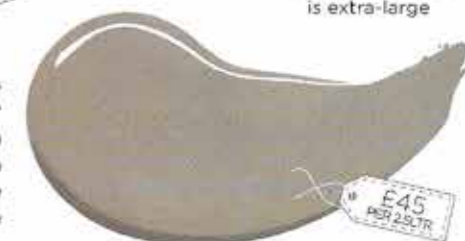
↑ Abode Living's recycled-glass bottle vase is inspired by vintage wine casks



↑ Garden Trading's Wells hand-blown glass bubble vase is extra-large



← Colours taupe matt durable emulsion from B&Q is good for high-traffic areas of your home



→ Farrow & Ball's Charleston gray estate emulsion will add a warm and earthy tone to any space



Ikea's streamlined Stenstorp kitchen island offers extra worktop space inexpensively



The Westcote blue island from The Cotswold Company incorporates a wine rack