

Words **Jennifer Harper** Photographs **Neil Hanna**



A stonebuilt home on their Borders farm has been upgraded by **Hamish and Susie Dykes** with a view to a very comfortable retirement

FOR years, Hamish Dykes and his wife Susie have had the idea of restoring a cottage on their 1,000-acre Peeblesshire farm with a view to it one day becoming their retirement home. Now, after 11 months of hard work, they have finally achieved their goal. The forward-thinking couple, who run South Slipperfield Farm near West Linton, live in the sprawling farmhouse with their children, Rosie, 5, and Murdo, 3, but it is to Hardgatehead Cottage that they eventually see themselves retreating. It is easy to see why.

The pre-1900 farm cottage sits on an old Roman road that runs through the farm. Mary Queen of Scots is known to have travelled along here. The views are spectacular over a site of special scientific interest and towards Peebles, the Broughton Heights and Biggar. But the real charm of the cottage lies in the original craft and workmanship.

The couple didn't just opt for a simple refurbishment. They have maximised the south-facing cottage's unique position by adding a large barn-style extension that runs the full length of the front of the property, creating a magnificent open-plan cooking, dining and living space that embraces a view of every inch of the countryside before it.

"For as long as I have known Hamish he has wanted to do something with this cottage," says Susie. "The biggest issue for us was the fact that it is off the grid. However, off-grid power is much

better now and we can be more self-sufficient, which is why we chose to go down that road. I wanted the Dutch barn effect for the extension with the wood cladding and curved roof with the corrugated iron."

Having managed to tap into the grant system through the Scottish Rural Development Programme, the couple decided to make the cottage as self-sufficient and as environmentally sustainable as possible. They opted to create their own electricity with a wind turbine and decided on a wood pellet boiler, which fires the underfloor heating. Behind the cottage, Hamish built a wooden carport and insulated boiler house which doubles as a drying and boot room. Although the cottage has a private water supply, they now tap into the mains system.

Having spent some time scouring the country for an architect who related to their ideas, they ended up with one just a few miles down the road in Penicuik.

"We spoke to architects from Ullapool to Lancashire but went with Gavin Jefcoate at Jefcoate Anderson Architects," recalls Hamish. "Gavin was so enthusiastic and was as excited about the cottage as we were. He brought in Lothian Design and Build to do the work."

Ideas were thrown around until they all agreed on the striking barn-style extension with an arched roof, with the roof lined with corrugated iron and the exterior walls clad with Scottish larch. Hamish

was able to incorporate some salvaged and reclaimed wood, which came from a former gasometer in Glasgow, into the build. He also commissioned a local carpenter to make the dining table and benches, and a coffee table, out of the reclaimed timber.

The extension incorporates a wood-burning stove and living space which affords open views through expansive sheets of glass. The other end claims the kitchen and dining area. A door leads out to a large deck, half of which is covered with a canopy that follows the line of the arched beams on the inside. An engineered wooden floor runs throughout the cottage, where both double bedrooms have direct access to the garden, with the master bedroom now also boasting an en suite. The couple managed to salvage the original roll-top bath and had it re-enamelled. The second bedroom was created out of an existing stone-built lean-to – they had to knock through the three-foot thick wall to create the doorway.

When work started on the cottage in June last year, the entire building was stripped out, damp-proofed and insulated. An old lean-to extension that housed the kitchen had to be knocked down, but some original doors were able to be salvaged. Other doors and the windows were imported from Scandinavia, as were the curved gingham beams that have been used in the roof of the new extension.

Despite its rich history and solid stonework, when you initially walk through the door of the cottage you are met by a surprisingly →



Cottage industry

"The cottage sits on this old Roman road which runs from Edinburgh to Carlisle"

The barn-style extension is clad in Scottish larch. Opposite, clockwise from top left: an original window divides the living space; the re-enamelled roll-top bath; a bedroom; the kitchen space with bespoke table of reclaimed local wood; the exterior

contemporary scene, with the hallway open to the full roof height and a glass balustrade leading up to a mezzanine loft room which is a third sleeping space. The couple are presently renting the cottage out for holiday lets.

"The cottage sits on this old Roman road which runs from Edinburgh to Carlisle and we get lots of walkers, horse riders and day trippers coming along here," says Susie. "We have had so many people come to us asking if we would sell the cottage but it is right in the middle of the farm so we would not sell it. It is such a lovely spot that we decided to use it for holiday lets until we retire. We had our first holidaymakers on Good Friday and we have been full since then."

Susie took lots of photographs of the surrounding area and livestock and has framed them for the walls of the cottage. She has also hand-picked items – such as her mother's old riding boots, a set of antique leather suitcases and a reclaimed pew which came from Carllops Church – that add to the cottage's rustic charm. Hamish too insisted on some quirky recycled furnishings for the living space – namely a cable drum which is used as a coffee table and a 1950s leather swivel chair and footstool which he bought on eBay for £300.

"This project was very much about the cottage, though I would love to be living in it just now," says Hamish. In the meantime, all the hard work that he and Susie put into breathing fresh life into Hardgatehead Cottage is all for the pleasure of holidaymakers.

Hardgatehead Cottage (01968 661 597; www.hardgatehead.com). Jefcoate Anderson Architects and Lothian Design and Build are exhibiting at the Scottish Homebuilding & Renovating Show at the SECC, Glasgow, 15-16 May. (www.jefcoate-anderson.co.uk; www.ldb-ltd.co.uk; http://scotland.homebuildingshow.co.uk)



The living room with wood pellet boiler and Scandinavian curved beams, main. Above, Hamish and Susie Dykes on the deck; a third bedroom was created in the loft



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