

at Home

SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

AUGUST 28, 2011

INSIDE
52 PAGES OF
PROPERTIES,
INTERIORS
AND IDEAS

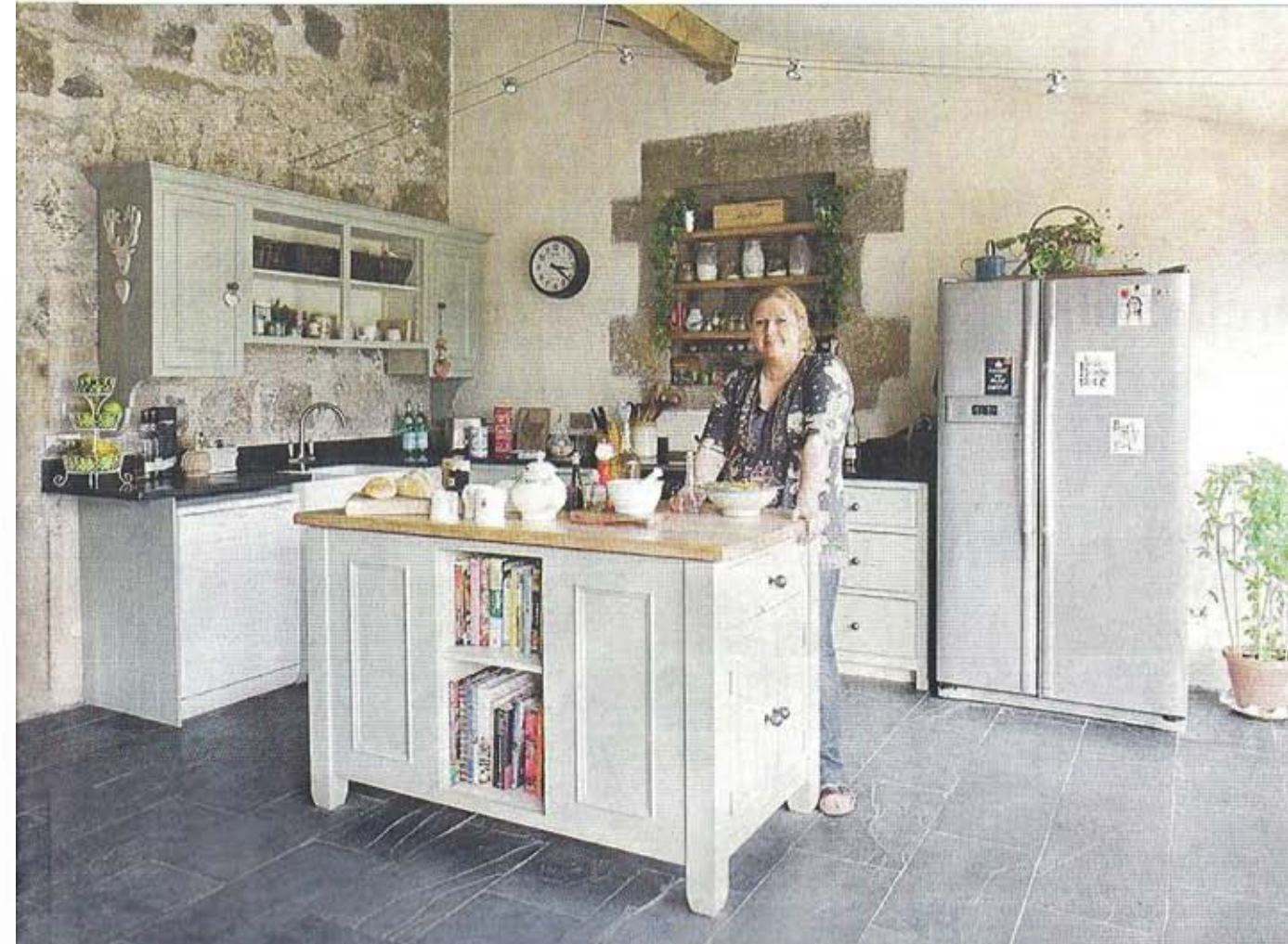
WARM WELCOME

Nadia Sawalha throws open the doors to her family-friendly home

COVER STORY 14 ■ GARDENS 22 ■ CASH FLOW 25 ■ FINISHING TOUCHES 50



UNDERNEATH THE ARCHES



Words **Jane Crittenden**
Photographs **Douglas Gibb**

ANCIENT agricultural buildings in Fife had the potential to be a unique family farmhouse for Vikki and Alex Bruce and their three daughters. But the enormous responsibility that came with this piece of history delayed any work for five years. "The site had these amazing stone walls and we wanted to salvage as much of them as we could, but we were worried we'd build the wrong sort of house in the wrong materials," says Vikki.

"It wasn't until we found an innovative clay building method and our fantastic builders at Craig's Eco Construction that we felt confident to begin."

The project began in 2004. Vikki, who runs Olive & Rose, selling vintage and antique pieces at the Scottish Arts & Antiques Centre, and Alex, who is managing director of Adelphi Distillery, had been living in a rented farmhouse for 13 years. During this time, they inherited two acres of land and the derelict out-buildings from Alex's family.

The 200-year-old steading was in a poor state, with the exception of some impressive stone walls and two intact stone arches. The couple knew they had to find a way to build their home around these magnificent arches.

After countless plans and amends on a journey with two different architects, the couple finally settled on a design. However, it was just as important to build a home that was eco-friendly. "We felt, in this day and age, it would have been inexcusable to build without considering the environment," says Vikki.

"These glorious walls have been here much longer than we have, so the design had to be respectful and the house built in a construction method using local and natural materials."

Vikki and Alex sought advice from their friend John Rennie, who works at Natural Building Technologies (NBT). He suggested they build the new walls using a natural clay building material called Ziegel blocks, as this wouldn't compromise the original stone walls. John also recommended they clad the blockwork with a wood-fibre external insulation to give the building increased thermal mass. Warmth is stored within the fabric so the walls act like a storage heater, keeping the house at a stable temperature all year round.

Vikki and Alex struggled to find a builder who was comfortable with working with the unusual building

Clockwise from main: stone arches were retained from the original steading; Vikki in the rustic-style kitchen; fallen trees were used for flooring; the rear of the property; an open fire sits at one end of the vast living space



Vikki and Alex Bruce spent years deliberating how best to create a home around the old farm buildings they inherited – until they sought help from an eco building company



Clockwise from top: the open-plan dining kitchen features an original stone wall; pretty lights on the kitchen dresser; the oak staircase

technology. John was able to help again, and put the Bruces in touch with Craig's Eco Construction, a firm that had used NBT materials before.

Vikki says the couple hit it off with builders Michael and Findlay straight away. They were as positive and enthusiastic about the eco project as they were, and it was a relief to hand over the reins. "I suppose that was our 'Eureka' moment," she says, "as it wasn't until we met them that we stopped procrastinating. It seems extraordinary now that it took us five years to get to this point; I think we just needed someone who knew what they were doing to take control."

The builders started the work in June 2009 and completed the 350m² farmhouse in just nine months, so by March 2010 the family were able to move in.

The layout is simple and fluid; the stone arches run through the spine of the house, separating the vast hallway



from the kitchen-diner. Here the house has an oak frame, crafted from fallen trees gathered from the couple's estate. The frame was the perfect solution to tie the old external walls together and has allowed one side of the room to be made of glass, which overlooks the courtyard garden.

In total, 16 oak, beech and larch trees were used in the house, all gathered from their land after falling down or

because they had to be taken down. Each was carefully crafted into not just the stunning timber frame, but also the oak-frame porch, the oak staircase, exterior larch cladding and flooring for various rooms downstairs. "It was an amazing experience seeing these huge old trees becoming beautiful lengths of cut timber and then becoming part of our house," says Vikki.

Inside, Vikki decided to paint the

"It seems extraordinary now that it took us five years to get to this point; I think we just needed someone who knew what they were doing to take control"



From top: patterned wallpaper and a sleigh bed add to the vintage style of one bedroom; bunting and patchwork quilts decorate a girly bedroom; dandelion wall stickers in a bathroom



walls downstairs in cream so they wouldn't detract from the dramatic stone arches. She has created a homely farmhouse feel by choosing traditional patterns and styles in her furnishings and re-using most of the furniture they already had - much of which came from family, auctions or junk shops.

Vikki's natural flair for seeking out second-hand treasures and spotting the potential in furnishings that others might have thrown away have been the

key to making their new-build feel as comfortable and lived-in as any truly old farmhouse might be.

It's hard to believe that the Bruces had any concerns about the design of their house now, so much does it look a part of the landscape. The existing walls stand firm and hold their own, but are also cleverly absorbed into the new design and merge seamlessly with traditional materials of clay, timber, slate, lime and stone.

Understandably, this eco-build, so steeped in its own history, brings a lot of pleasure to the family. "Although it was frustrating we took so long to get started, it has been worth it," says Vikki. "We love that our home is sturdy and quite masculine, yet feels so safe and welcoming. We feel it really reflects our tastes, our lives and the honesty of its agricultural history."

Craig's Eco Construction (01506 840009, 07870 639705, craigsecoconstruction.co.uk); Natural Building Technologies (01844 338338, natural-building.co.uk); Scottish Antique & Arts Centre (scottish-antiques.com)

SHAPES

Fine Art Auctioneers & Valuers

Uniquely our sellers pay no commission on lots selling for over £5,000, This ensures that Shapes are the most cost efficient auctioneers in the UK. As one of Scotland's leading independent firms of Fine Art & Valuers we have access to a network of International buyers.

Fine Art and Antiques Auction Saturday 3rd September at 10.00am

VIEWING:

Thursday 1st September 10.00am - 7.00pm
Friday 2nd September 10.00am - 5.00pm
& Saturday 3rd September 8.45am - 9.45am

This sale features a good selection of Georgian and later Victorian furniture, fine oil paintings, watercolours and a collection of WWI Recruitment posters, with silver and jewellery to include an impressive single client collection of Victorian and Edwardian gold and gemset tiepins, rugs, coins, dolls, architectural and garden ornaments and a large selection of ceramics and collectables.



James Dixon
Candlesticks
£600 - 800



Taxidermy Tiger's
Head & Crocodile
£600 - 800



Archibald Knox
Pedestal Garden
Urns £500 - 800



Archibald Thorburn,
watercolour
£2,000 - 4,000



John McGhie,
Fisherwoman,
£6,000 - 9,000



John MacLauchlan
Milne Still Life
of Roses,
£6,000 - £9,000



Jack Hoggan
(Vettriano)
The Oyster
Gatherer,
£3,000 - 5,000



Set of twelve walnut
dining chairs in the
manner of Gillows,
£5,000 - 8,000

Sellers at Shapes pay 0% commission on lots over £5,000

Further entries are currently invited for all forthcoming Fine Art & Antiques sales with all enquiries to
Lindsay Brown 0131 453 3222
Bankhead Medway, Edinburgh EH11 4BY
View Online catalogues at: www.shapesauctioneers.co.uk