



**SITTING ROOM**  
A sense of symmetry is evident here, with twin Love seats opposite a set of Perspex chairs. Upholstered Love seats, price on request, Brightwell Interiors. Louis Ghost chairs, £179 each, Heal's

Some opportunities are too good to miss, as Julie Nicholls can testify. She first came across her home, set in the unspoilt Suffolk countryside, while driving back from the school run. The property, comprising a former farm cottage and granary, was a complete wreck and had been unoccupied for more than 30 years. Nevertheless, within 12 months, Julie and her husband Guy had become its proud new owners and enthusiastically began to restore and extend the buildings.

'As the cottage and the granary are located on a slope overlooking a valley with natural springs located in it, we decided to start by digging a lake at the lowest point, while waiting for planning permission to connect the two dwellings,' Julie explains. During the 17th century, the land had been the site of a grand stately home, so she was able to trace historical records of the old gardens and landscaping to inspire her new designs, which included terraces and a walled vegetable garden.

After much deliberating, Julie and Guy decided to keep to the exact footprints of the original cottage and granary, linking them with a glass-and-oak structure. 'We ended up by building a second skin around the old walls, which insulated and blended them with the new extension,' says Julie. 'In due course, the granary became our bedroom wing, and we've kept the rafters



**MASTER EN SUITE**  
This bathroom has the look of a five-star spa. Castello Oceanus bath, £4,430, Brightwell Interiors

INSPIRATION 'Being an interior designer, I'm obsessed with details – they're the

difference between mediocrity and quality'



**DINING ROOM**  
This large space is made for entertaining: 'The house is perfect for parties,' says Julie. David Linley sells equally elegant dining chairs, from £725 each. Fired Earth's Minervoire, £124.85 per sq m, is another limestone floor tile



**MASTER BEDROOM**  
The Juliette balcony offers stunning views across the lake and gardens. For bespoke seating, try The Chair People; its Piccadilly design, from £199, is available in a range of vibrant velvets

and beams open to view, for sheer visual pleasure.' Meanwhile, at the other end of the building, the former cottage now houses the couple's sitting room, kitchen/breakfast room and family room.

During the course of the project, the builders uncovered many delightful period features, such as a sunken well in the hall. Topped with glass and illuminated with LED lights, the well has become a major talking point with guests. Another plus point occurred when the couple's daughter, Holly, returned from her interior-design course and teamed up with her mother to help dress the recently expanded house. 'Mum and I have much the same taste, with one major difference,' says Holly. 'I'm a pinks and purple person, while she's into greens and turquoise.'

Despite their different preferences, Julie and Holly visited UK and European furniture fairs together, surfed the internet and shopped tirelessly to put together the new schemes. This creative endeavour not only resulted in an elegant new home, but also in the forming of an interior design business, which the pair now run from a showroom in a nearby converted stables.

'This place is designed to be a proper family home, and to stand up to lots of wear and tear,' Julie explains. 'For example, our son Jake is a professional motocross rider, and he's forever stomping around the house in biker boots, which is part of the reason I chose furniture and fittings that are made to last.'

Julie is equally adamant that she and her family are here for the long term. 'I wake up early each morning, then take the dogs for a long walk through the woods, before looking down onto the house from the surrounding hill and thinking how beautiful it is,' she says. 'I can't imagine living anywhere else.'