



.BARN again

What happens when two architects turned designers with an eye for the quirky in life take over and make over an old stable block in a busy Yorkshire market town? Jacqueline Vinestock pays a visit to find out...



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he Red Barn, which is hidden in a lane behind the main street of Bedale, used to be a stable block which was used by the traders of the town to keep their horses during shop hours. Kevin and Janet Stevens acquired the property about three years after opening Red House Interiors, a shop situated in the centre of the town, and spent nine months converting the barn into a home. Fortunately for them it's directly behind their business so while they're not quite 'living over the shop', it's the next best thing!

They made the big decision to turn what would be their home upside down 'It made more sense to enjoy the light in the rooms we use during the day and use the darker area of the house for bedrooms' explains Janet, and as a result they have ended up with a living space that benefits from high ceilings and almost continuous sunshine pouring through the skylights on both sides of the pitch roof.

Their home is a reflection of their business – as well as the shop, Kevin designs contemporary furniture with a strong Arts & Crafts feel and Janet runs an interior design consultancy. The vibe, she tells me, is still leaning heavily toward the industrial. Despite the fact that the upper floor is a relatively small space, the kitchen is home to chunky wooden pieces including a small island and one of Kevin's dining tables. An old wooden settle provides half the seating in the dining area, and vintage leather-backed chairs the rest. Open oak shelves made by a local carpenter house an array of cooking equipment, oils and vinegars. Without solid-fronted cupboards, the light from above reflects off the ceramic brick tiles which cover one wall and match the industrial looking double sink with its huge tap and hose unit. It all has a great vintage vibe and yet Janet tells me that the units are from IKEA – they just changed the worktops to achieve the right feel for their home.

It takes a certain amount of courage and skill to be able to mix the old and the new successfully. Janet admits that the couple are very lucky in that they can try out pieces from the shop in situ and chop and change as they please – another form of recycling! Much of the vintage feel comes from the 'accessories' – the old shop scales with the graded weights holder on one side, the large pancheon (traditional bowl), the 1950s bread



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tin, the old bus destination sign that is printed on linen and framed by the same carpenter who made the shelves – these pull it all together. The carpenter also made the shutters on the window using the same heavy oak and old-style metalwork – the sills themselves are overlaid with slate and just deep enough to sit on. A series of Clare Leighton woodcuts of working rural life, originally book illustrations from the 1920s and typical of her work for esteemed authors including Thomas Hardy, Emily Bronte and Thornton Wilder, are displayed alongside two of Kevin's wicker wall lamps. Just beyond the kitchen lies a tiny terrace which is a perfect suntrap twice a day. There is a built-in seat at one end and an array of zinc pots filled with herbs and small vegetables are interspersed with vivid colour from sea thrift. There's even space to barbecue if the two rescue lurchers, Tara and Mags, will allow it.

The staircase that leads directly from the front door to the upstairs living space is lined with low level spotlights, leaving the superb A-frame rafters free. These huge beams highlight the massive volume of this room which adds to the New York loft feel of the space. Halfway up the stairs sits a tiny motorbike, made of wood, which was originally from a fairground carousel. Horses and vehicles from old rides and anything circus related are all much sought after at the moment. There is a lot of satisfaction in owning something that is a piece of social history. Janet also has a theory that when life gets difficult, such as in times of recession, people look back to what they imagine to be a golden age or a time of particular nostalgia in their lives and hunt out appropriate pieces.

The living room forms the other half of upstairs, the entirety of which is painted white using 'James White' by Farrow & Ball. Bookshelves line one wall, interrupted by the white painted brickwork of the chimney breast against which stands a great black iron wood burner. A low wooden table has been scrubbed beyond recognition from its original dark stain and repainted in lightly distressed cream and green which matches the throws on the cosy armchairs. 1920s portraits are displayed on the walls in a simple straight line – they're not family members but do provide a great talking point at dinner parties!

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The downstairs of the Red Barn neatly divides in two with one end for adults and one for children. At the grown-ups' end the space is cool and calm in shades of blue, light browns and creams. A fantastic tree decal which Janet found on the online 'handmade marketplace' www.etsy.com covers the wall behind the low bed which came from IKEA. Other pieces in the room are 'finds' including the tin box which acts as a bedside table and the gorgeous pine linen press in place of a more conventional wardrobe. A Bentwood chair has been given the decoupage treatment by Janet using old copies of The London Illustrated News. She also made some of the cushions – when she had time in between work and three young children – and others were designed by Victoria Pike who previously made wonderful patchwork quilts for Liberty and is now based nearby in Leyburn.

The ensuite bathroom has a cool slate floor and is home to an antique, roll top, free-standing bath. The oak console is one of Kevin's designs and is topped with a small version of an industrial Belfast sink which the couple found through a builders' merchant. Another 'find', in the form of an old wooden bird which looks as though it might once have been on the

end of a church pew, provides a safe place for Janet to keep her necklaces. Just outside the bedroom is another terrace providing just a hint of greenery on summer mornings.

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Towards the children's room is a large shower room which also houses, in 'continental' style, the washing machine and tumble dryer. This way all the laundry stays on one floor without cluttering up the daytime space. The children also have their walls decorated with decals from etsy only this time they are bright butterflies and birdcages. Double bunk beds provide sleeping accommodation although one bottom bunk has been removed to make space for a vast array of cuddly toys.

This house has a wonderfully peaceful feeling and is living proof that courage and experimentation can achieve great things. The key to this is that Janet and Kevin have paid more than just lip service to the wisdom of William Morris, who urged us to 'have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful'.

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