



EXTERIOR
The house dates from 1840 and was originally two separate workers' cottages

LIVING ROOM
Once hidden behind plasterboard, the stone fireplace is now the focal point of the room. Seagrass flooring complements the rustic stonework, while an antique chair upholstered in Sanderson's vibrant Festival fabric adds a contemporary touch

HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Sally Crabb, 57, who is a creative director, and her partner Tanya Burns, 49, a lighting designer

THE PROPERTY

A four-bedroom Victorian cottage in Achurch, Northamptonshire

PRICE £150,000

MONEY SPENT Around £60,000

WHAT IT'S WORTH NOW £495,000

WHEN TWO BECOME ONE

Two identical cottages have been knocked through to create an open-plan home that remains true to its 19th-century origins

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PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GILES

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DINING AREA
Open-plan to the kitchen, this space is full of character thanks to the exposed beams and quirky pieces such as the cuckoo clock. The table was bought at auction and the chairs are replicas of Hans J Wegner's 1949 Wishbone chair



MAIN BEDROOM
One side of the bedroom has been made into a reading corner. The modern painting is by Henrietta Dubrey



KITCHEN
Oak worktops add a rustic touch to the Magnet kitchen. The letters are from eBay



FEATURE WALL
The stags heads on the wall dividing the kitchen and living room are from Batemans auction house

It was a chance glimpse at a local newspaper that led Sally Crabb and her partner Tanya Burns to the door of a derelict stone cottage in rural Northamptonshire. 'We'd been staying with my parents for the weekend in Rutland and had just made the decision to move out of London,' says Sally. 'We saw the advert for the house – two cottages being sold as one lot – and decided to take a look through the windows on our drive back home.'

There was mould on the windowsills and the place had got into a terrible state of disrepair, but Sally and Tanya could see that it had plenty of charm. 'We didn't realise quite how much character it had until we'd bought the place and started stripping it out. Hidden behind plasterboard at opposite ends of the downstairs rooms we found two amazing identical stone fireplaces,' says Sally.

One of the aspects that appealed most to Sally and Tanya about the property, which dates from 1840, was the fact that the two cottages were mirror images of each other. They soon realised they could exploit this in

their renovation plans. 'Both cottages were a warren of small rooms so it was clear to us that we needed to open the place up,' says Tanya. 'Originally there would have been just two rooms upstairs and one room downstairs so, as with everything we've done with this house, we chose to keep it as close to its origins as possible.'

Walls were knocked down, plasterboard was smashed through and the downstairs internal doors were removed to increase the sense of light and space. New wooden windows were made to echo an existing early Victorian design, with narrow glazing bars to maximise light. 'We decided to expose the stone on both sides of the central wall that now divides the two downstairs rooms, the kitchen/diner and living room, because we wanted people to recognise that this is two houses,' says Sally.

Once new electrics and plumbing had been installed and the interior had been replastered, the next stage was to think about colour. The calming, creamy-toned walls in the living room were Tanya's choice.

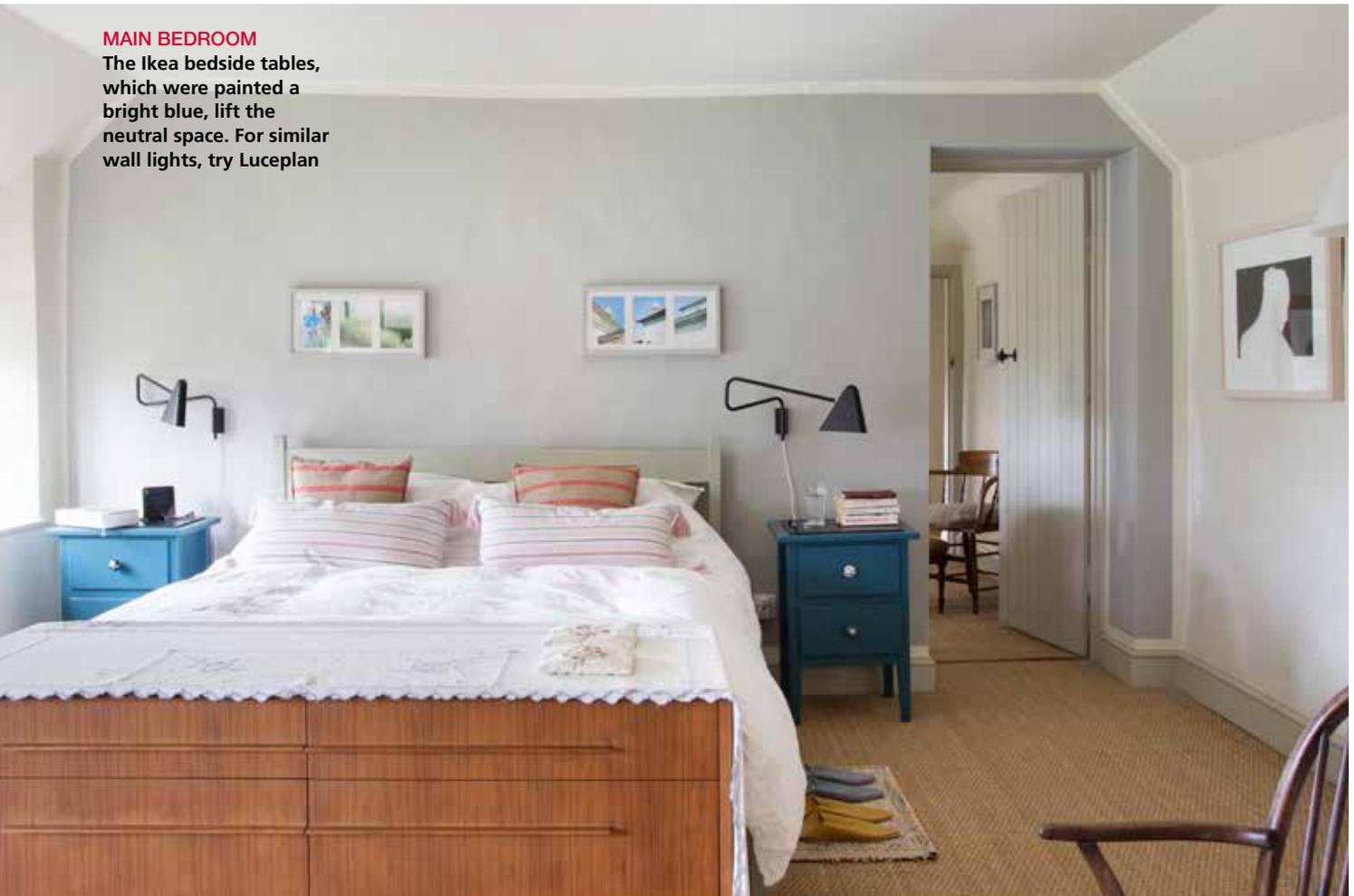
'The colour was determined by the stone wall,' she says. 'I chose a cream that has a lot of green in it and when the light bounces around the room that's what it picks up. Matching the paint to the stone gives a calm first impression, and it also meant that I could put pieces like the modern chair in what's quite a traditional setting. It's about doing things sensitively so there's a blank canvas on which there's scope to be quirky.'

Upstairs Sally and Tanya resisted the temptation to create a corridor running alongside the bedrooms. This means that access to their bedroom is via one flight of stairs and access to the other three bedrooms by a staircase at the other end of the house. 'When friends come to stay they have their own half of the upstairs,' says Sally. 'It makes for a much more relaxed set up. And then when they come downstairs they walk into a big, open, sociable space. We often have a houseful of friends staying with their dogs and children and although the house isn't that big, even when it's full of people

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MAIN BEDROOM

The Ikea bedside tables, which were painted a bright blue, lift the neutral space. For similar wall lights, try Luceplan



‘We’ve learned that if you go for it with this mixture of new and old it can work really well,’ SAYS SALLY



BATHROOM

Each wall is painted a different colour. The panelling is in Farrow & Ball’s Green Ground

it doesn’t feel any different. It expands and contracts according to what we need it to do.’

One thing the couple admit they’ve learned is that mixing modern designs with period elements can prove incredibly effective. ‘We bought the house in 1998 and when we first moved in we had mainly modern furniture,’ says Sally. ‘But our approach has changed over the years and now we have a happy marriage of pieces such as our elm 19th-century dining table and modern oak chairs. And we have a high-gloss white coffee table in the living room surrounded by older things. We’ve learned that if you go for it with this mixture of new and old it can work really well.’

Tanya and Sally adore country life. ‘I love the peace and quiet here,’ says Sally, ‘and the fact that in the summer we have all the doors and windows open and the garden comes into the house and the house goes out to the garden. I couldn’t think of anywhere lovelier to be.’ **HB**

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