



COTTAGE INDUSTRY

Think that a traditional worker's cottage is too small to meet the needs of a 21st century family? Think again

WORDS: LYNN STEWART

Once modest homes for staff on farms or large estates, today workers' cottages can make for charming, cosy family properties. However they tend to be a little tight on space. For one East Lothian family, the solution to this problem was simple; they would knock two derelict, stone workers' cottages into one spacious family home.

The cottages are located in Blue Row in Whittingehame. They make up part of two rows

of cottages which were built for farm workers around the 1900s, and have since been upgraded and repaired. The family drafted in East Lothian architecture firm Low Carbon Studio (LCS) to make their ambitious dream a reality.

“Before any work had been done, the cottages were affectionately known by the owners as ‘the ruin’, and they certainly weren't far off it,” says Colin Campbell of LCS. “The roof on one side

had fallen in, the internal walls had collapsed, the windows were either missing or beyond repair and the external stone walls and chimneys needed a bit of repair work.”

To make these unloved buildings a family home was to be no small feat for LCS. The gardens hadn't been maintained for a while and were tangled and overgrown. However Colin and his clients saw real potential in the cottages, which had good outside spaces, with some existing outbuildings and mature trees.

The brief was seemingly straightforward; to retain the existing stone walls and provide a family home for the owners and their two children. The



layout of the house had to flow organically so that there wasn't a series of rooms and corridors. Rather, the owners wanted airy, modern and open spaces.

“A project like this can be daunting,” explains Colin. “I've done a few similar projects and if the walls are structurally sound, tidying them up and building a new roof is relatively straightforward. However you need to really use your imagination to visualise what's possible in terms of the internal spaces.”



The finished design is sleek and modern, perfectly fitting the demands of family life. On the ground floor, the living room, kitchen and dining room are open plan with a free-standing WC and store offering some separation between the kitchen and living room. There is also a bedroom and main bathroom on the ground floor, with an entrance area for coats and boots. A new open stair links the ground floor to the first floor which has two bedrooms and a studio space.

To combine the two cottages into one large home, the separating wall was removed to open up the whole space, while two new openings were formed in the rear of the building. A folding, glazed screen was inserted into one, allowing natural light to flood into a once-dark space. The second opening was inserted to allow for a link to a future extension.

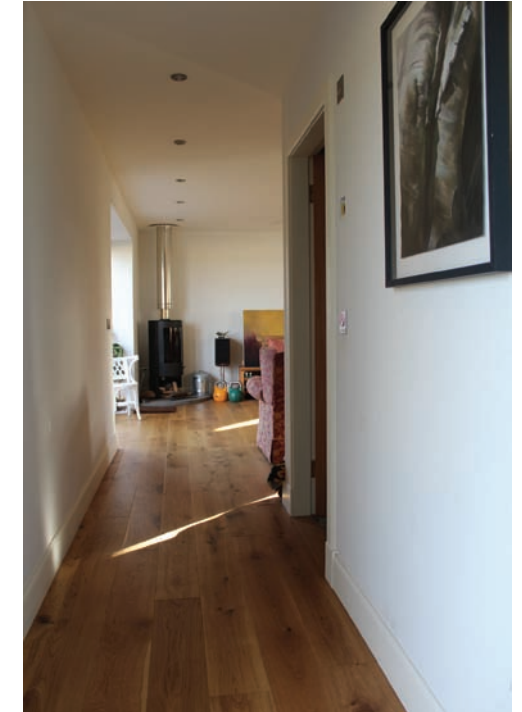
The roofs of the ruined cottages were a mess and as such a roof had to be re-built, complete with new rafters, insulation, sarking and slates. The original cottages had a simple pitched roof, however the new roof features dormer windows and roof lights to increase headroom in the attic and provide much-needed natural light.



Everything about the design has been carefully considered; the roof windows and dormers, for example, were positioned to take advantage of views out to the surrounding fields and Traprain Law. A new window was punched through the existing gable to maximise the view from the new kitchen.



The owners were keen that the building was as sustainable as possible, and LCS took every opportunity to install low-energy features, although Colin is quick to point out that, in terms of sustainability, re-using an old building and bringing it back to life is a great start.



Low-energy features used include triple glazing, air-source heat pumps and under-floor heating. They also re-used materials wherever possible. The existing slates were removed and re-used, while existing stone flags were removed and re-laid in the new kitchen.

In terms of finishings, the owners looked to a simple palate of natural materials. Stone, slate and wood all feature heavily, while they used timber and aluminium composite windows and glazed doors. Looking ahead to the future rear extension, weather boarding and a profiled metal roof will be used to offer a sleek contrast to the traditional stone.

The finished design is cosy yet modern and has given some charming but unloved buildings a much-needed new lease of life. TC