



EXTERIOR
The Grade II listed cottage has a charming riverside location in one of Northamptonshire's prettiest villages

HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Sarah Wassell, an advertising planning executive, her husband Richard, 52, a property specialist, and their children, Gabriella, 18, and Freddie, 21, who are both university students

THE PROPERTY

A three-bedroom former schoolhouse, built in 1604, in Barnwell, Northamptonshire

PRICE £400,000

MONEY SPENT £70,000

WHAT IT'S WORTH NOW

£550,000



KITCHEN
A selection of wooden spoons picked up at a market provide a simple yet striking display



WINDOW
This is Sarah's favourite feature. Originally an external window, it now lets light flood into the living area from the dining room in the modern extension

LESSON IN SIMPLICITY

A neutral colour palette and an emphasis on texture and light have turned this historic former schoolhouse into a family home

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FIRESIDE AREA

Simple decor shows off the original stone hearth and mullioned windows (see previous page). The floor was raised to resolve a damp problem

'It felt right to me that this house should be uncluttered and plain. I like it feeling quite monastic,' SAYS SARAH



When Sarah and Richard Wassell first viewed their picturesque Tudor cottage in a village in Northamptonshire, the floor in the living room was wet with damp. 'It was a real worry because the house is Grade II listed, and we didn't know what the planners would let us do about it,' says Sarah, who bought the property in September 2013. 'But the cottage had a lovely feel to it, and we immediately felt we could live here and make it our own.'

The planners initially vetoed the couple's suggestion of putting oak floorboards on top of the original Tudor flagstones, but they did allow them to protect the original floor with batoning so it could be raised three inches and then carpeted.

Another issue in the living room involved a dividing wall that bisected the original stone mullioned window. 'This is my favourite part of the whole house,' says Sarah. 'The property was built in 1604 as the village school, and you can see where all the children have carved marks into the stone surround of the window.'

Fortunately, permission was granted to reduce the width of the dividing wall to make it open-ended. This offered better views of Sarah's cherished window and allowed more light into the room. It also provided the perfect backdrop for Richard's much-loved antique sideboard, which had belonged to his parents.

Above this hangs a painting of a dog with a ball – an impulse buy, which Sarah and Richard made more than 25 years ago when they saw it on the wall of a restaurant in Oxford. 'One of the nice things about moving house is that you get to rearrange the pieces you already have,' says Sarah. 'The painting has been given a new lease of life in the cottage.'

Her vision for The School House was clear from the outset. 'I'm drawn to natural colours and textures,' she says. 'It felt right to me that this house should be uncluttered and plain. I like its monastic feel.' All the fabrics and floorcoverings are made from natural materials, including the chunky weave grey wool carpet, and the majority of the walls are painted in a soft shade of white.

On the kitchen floor the couple have used tumbled limestone. 'The floor ended up costing a fraction of what it would have been because we went for a stone that hadn't been colour selected. That means there's a variation of shade and texture, but we really like that,' says Sarah.

There are a few subtle nods to the building's origins, including an abacus in the living room, which the couple picked up for £40 at London's

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LIVING ROOM

The width of the dividing wall was reduced to show off the mullioned window. The addition of a much-loved painting and sideboard made the wall a feature in itself

**KITCHEN**

Open shelving provides easy access to crockery and glassware. The units are painted in Off-Black by Farrow & Ball





'I love the feeling of calm I have coming back here after a busy week in London,' SAYS SARAH

DINING ROOM
The family have had this Habitat table ever since the children were tiny, while the black pendant lights date from the sixties and originally hung in an Eastern Bloc car factory

Columbia Road market, and an old school desk in the kitchen, which a friend found languishing in the back of his barn.

Maximising space and light was really important to Sarah and Richard – they had previously lived in an open-plan barn conversion – so they opened up the ceilings in the upstairs bedrooms to create a more spacious feel in the cottage.

The upstairs airing cupboard was also removed to add extra floor space to the small bathroom. 'This room was one of our biggest challenges,' says Sarah. 'I wanted a big bath, but the kids preferred a walk-in shower. It's a small room so we had to choose all the fittings very carefully. We found that a wall-mounted basin made the best use of the space and we spent quite a lot of time positioning the loo in different places and sitting on it to make sure there was enough legroom.'

The old kitchen was ripped out to make way for a run of bespoke painted units. 'I wanted to keep the scheme simple and put the units down one side,' says Sarah.

'I was a little worried they might look too dark, but I'm really pleased with the result.'

It was particularly hard for Sarah and Richard to gauge the light levels because while all the work was going on they were only ever able to view it in darkness. With both of them working full-time in London, progress inspections had to be carried out in the evenings via torchlight as the property was without electricity.

When the family finally moved into the cottage in March last year, their biggest challenge was still to come. Problems with the gas connection meant that they ended up living without hot water for three months.

'It was horrendous,' says Sarah, 'definitely the worst thing that happened during the whole process. The highlight of the year for me was when the hot water was finally on and I was able to sit in my bath and enjoy the view of trees out the window.'

Now all the hard work has paid off and Sarah and Richard are delighted with their welcoming family home. 'It's such a warm, smiley house,' says Sarah. 'I love the feeling of calm here after a busy week in London. I feel myself relax as soon as I drive into the village. We love it, and I can't see why we'd ever want to live anywhere else.'

● The School House is occasionally available for holiday rental. For more information, contact Richard Wassell via richard.wassell@twentyretail.com

FOR STORE DETAILS SEE WHERE TO BUY PAGE



MAIN BEDROOM
After seeing the high ceiling in here, Sarah and Richard decided to open up the ceilings throughout the first floor to create more light and space



BATHROOM
Sarah positioned the bath under the window to make the most of the views. The black hexagon mosaic tiles are from Fired Earth