

Life in the country

FRENCH CONNECTION

JACKY AND CHRIS HOLTON'S RENOVATION OF A MANOR HOUSE HAS RESULTED IN A STYLISH, CONTEMPORARY INTERIOR WITH A DISTINCTLY ENGLISH TWIST



AT HOME WITH...

OWNERS Jacky Holton, a pharmacist, and her husband Chris, a structural engineer, run an organic farm. They live with their daughters, Alice, nine, and Eliza, seven. They have a border collie, two cats, two ponies, two guinea pigs, cows, pigs, chickens, fantail doves, rabbits and a golden pheasant. They have lived here for four-and-a-half years

BUILDING Eighteenth-century manor house in 116 acres with a medieval tower

ROOMS Entrance hall, boot room, kitchen, pantry, piano room, cloakroom, salon, bathroom, four bedrooms, two en-suite bathrooms



EXTERIOR The manor house and associated buildings date from the 1700s. The property is set in more than 100 acres of land, allowing the family to coppice their own wood and use it to heat the house. Misty the border collie peeps out from the barn (left).



We've always travelled and this was the perfect opportunity for the family to experience another culture,' says Jacky Holton of her and her husband Chris's decision to renovate a stunning small manor house in the Dordogne.

Having restored a farmhouse in Cumbria, Jacky and Chris wanted the challenge of doing up another property with more land but couldn't find anything suitable. 'A series of events gave us the chance to be our own bosses so we decided to up sticks and try France,' says Chris.

Jacky was familiar with the Dordogne from childhood holidays. 'We wanted to open a gite and knew that location was key,' she says. Eventually they came ▶

across a rundown manor house with a medieval tower in more than 100 acres of land. 'It was absolutely perfect,' says Jacky. 'I instinctively felt it would be a lovely place to bring up children and I knew we could have a wonderful family life here. The house was so pretty but when we went inside we were disappointed to find it had been gutted – all the fireplaces and many of the original features had been removed. However, as we've spent years trawling around reclamation yards, we were confident we could restore it.'

Fortunately for Jacky and Chris, once they moved in they found treasures such as old sinks, windows and beams in the medieval tower, which they were able to incorporate in the renovation. Work on the main house took two years, including replacing oak beams, building staircases, fitting reclaimed fireplaces and putting in internal walls. An extension joined the medieval tower to the house to create extra living space.

When it came to the interior, Jacky had definite ideas. 'We were aiming for a contemporary look that combined old and new, yet was also classic and elegant. It was important to me that the house had a calm and relaxing feel. I'm passionate about natural materials, ▶

ENTRANCE HALL A welcoming space. Blackboard, Coeur d'Artichaut in Bergerac (similar from Dibor). Cupboard, a brocante (French bric-a-brac sale) find.



WHAT MAKES THIS HOUSE A HOME...

“ The knowledge that after years of neglect, it is once again full of laughter, family and friends ”

COUNTRY CLASSIC

Farmhouse table

The tops of these traditional tables were regularly scrubbed after a day's baking. Look out for versions with chunky square legs from John Lewis of Hungerford or try Kit Stone for refectory-style designs.

KITCHEN Chris made the polished concrete worksurfaces and painted concrete block supports. See-through chairs were chosen to show off the bespoke reclaimed oak and chestnut table. Farmhouse table, made by Stephen Copestake. Chairs, Ikea. Lights, Philippe Starck.



SALON Vintage and modern mix in this calm and elegant scheme. Sofas, Laura Ashley. Coffee table, a brocante find. Rug, Simply Rugs. Cupboard, antiques shop. Walls, painted in Clunch by Farrow & Ball.



ENTRANCE HALL The woodburner keeps the area cosy. Woodburner and basket, Charnwood. Chair, Laura Ashley. Cushion, Ada & Ina. Rug, Simply Rugs.

such as wool, wood, leather and stone, and I have used a natural colour palette of greys and browns. The exterior shutters, for instance, are painted in a beautiful colour (Blue Gray by Farrow & Ball) that is very gentle, elegant and French.'

The Holtons are thrilled at how life in France has worked out. 'Our neighbours have been so welcoming and generous,' says Jacky. 'We really enjoy being here – we live a very country life.'

To rent Jacky and Chris's house or gite for holidays, visit rigal-gites-dordogne.com or call 00 33 5 53 27 33 16. ▶

HOW TO... CHOOSE A WOODBURNER

Using a woodburner is an environmentally friendly form of heating.

- First, do a heat calculation for your room so you buy the right size of woodburner – try the output calculator at woodburnerwarehouse.co.uk.
- Consider the technical instructions when you buy as some woodburners require a 125mm constructional hearth and others need a 12mm non-combustible hearth.
- The chimney must be at least the size of the woodburner outlet.
- When you position your woodburner, make sure there is plenty of space around it for heat and air to flow – your installer will let you know if you need to install a ventilation grill to increase the airflow.
- If you live in a smokeless zone, you must use a smokeless fuel or a DEFRA-approved appliance to burn wood.
- Make sure you use a local installer who is approved and experienced in the installation of woodburners – try hetas.co.uk.



PIANO ROOM A cool colour palette of blues, greys and limed wood contrasts with the wooden beams and exposed stone. Piano, Ebay. Rug, Simply Rugs. Chandelier, Directlight. Mirror, antiques shop. Walls and woodwork, Clunch and Blue Gray by Farrow & Ball.



CHILDREN'S ROOM Wrought-iron beds, bunting and pastel quilts create the perfect room for little girls. Brass-trimmed bed, Divine Dreams. Daybed, a brocante find. Wicker baskets (under bed), Ikea. Quilts and framed picture, Susie Watson Designs. Rug, Simply Rugs. Rocking horse, made by Chris.

BATHROOM The alcove behind the bath contains an original stone sink. Bath, Victoria Plumb. Soap, Sedbergh Soap Company.



ON OUR DOORSTEP.. DORDOGNE

Jacky and Chris Holton recommend their favourite local haunts
VISIT... 'Limeuil, considered one of the most beautiful villages in France. It clings to a hillside and has stunning views of the confluence of the Dordogne and Vézère rivers. You can hire a canoe, picnic under a willow tree, paddle, skim stones or simply enjoy an ice-cream'
SHOP AT... 'Lalinde market – held all year round on Thursdays. It is one of the largest in the area and a great place to enjoy speciality shopping. We love its little florist, Vert Tilleul (00 33 5 53 27 00 85) – a chic Aladdin's cave of interior and exterior decor and, of course, beautiful flowers'
GO FOR A MEAL AT... 'Ferme Auberge du Rebeyrotte (00 33 5 53 61 13 87) at Pressignac-Vicq. It serves delicious regional specialities and it's where the French themselves eat on a daily basis. The restaurant even has a tiny aerodrome so you can fly in if you want!'

FEATURE VIVIENNE AYERS PHOTOGRAPHS BRENT DARBY



WHAT WE LOVE MOST...

📖 Flinging open the shutters each morning and seeing the countryside and wildlife all around 📖

MAIN BEDROOM Beams and tall windows provide an eye-catching backdrop to the statement bed. Bed, Divine Dreams. Bedcover, made using fabric from Ada & Ina. Trunk, Dovetail Antique Pine.
SEE PAGE 153 FOR PHONE NUMBERS AND WEBSITES