

# Chosen by DESIGN

The setting of Abbots Lodge make it the perfect place for a forestry workshop, a bed and breakfast and a home filled with space and light

BY: SHARON CHILCOTT PICTURES BY: GAVIN CRILLY



**Above:** John and Janet and the view that sold them their home

**Above right:** welcome to Abbots Lodge  
**Top right:** the kitchen with units bought from a photo shoot

Architectural designer John Williams specialises in designing contemporary timber-framed buildings, so it might seem quite a surprise to find him living in a 1970s property in Wigmore.

But when he explains the work he has done to transform Abbots Lodge Bed and Breakfast into the house it is today and the reason he and his partner Janet Morris chose this particular location, it all falls into place.

On a nearby wooded hillside, enjoying glorious far-reaching views over the valley below, is a beautiful timber-framed barn which John and a friend, an ex-forestry consultant, have been working on for the past 10 years. Their labour of love has created a forestry workshop and timber store, surrounded by the eight acres of woodland which they

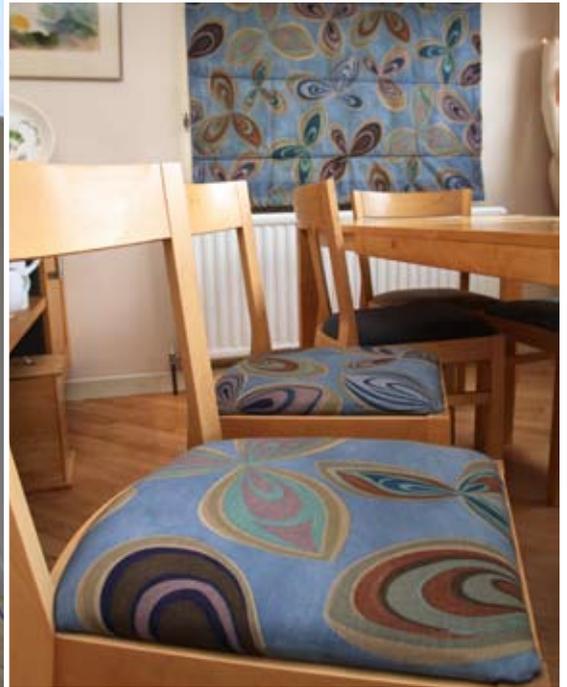
also own. Over the years, along with its beautiful setting, it has also been a magical venue for parties and barbecues with friends and long-term plans include the possibility of turning it into a location for workshops. Working on it has satisfied John's appetite to be physically creative. "We literally set about doing everything by hand. It adjoins 200 acres of oak woodland and the man who owns that was thinning it so we had 100 trees from him, so as much as possible in it has come from within three to four miles, if not right next door," he says.

When John and Janet started house-hunting together six years ago the barn and the woodland were the reason that Wigmore was the focus of their search. And while John might have been swayed by an older beamed property he says: "I don't regret the space and light of this

house and it would be difficult now to go back to a cottagey, old house with small windows. This house works nicely and the rooms flow into each other."

It was primarily the location that sold the couple on the property: "We had been looking in the village the day before and I said the only place I would want to live is up there," says Janet. "And I pointed up here. The next day John rang me and said you won't believe what I've found!"

Janet admits that when they first saw the house, she thought, "oh my goodness!" But she was won over by its beautiful, elevated position, which means it has south-facing views out over the neighbouring properties to the wooded hillside beyond. The couple were also looking for somewhere to run a small bed and breakfast, and they realised that the layout of this house was ideal. "We had looked at a



PICTURE: JOHN WILLIAMS

couple of places with a view to having a bed and breakfast and this one made sense because it had a room we could convert which was quite separate. That was something we hadn't thought of until then," says Janet. The extra room was a downstairs garden room with concrete floors. In John's words it was "very rough and ready" but they could both see it had potential.

However, the plans for the letting room were put on hold for the first few years whilst they focused on their own living accommodation and on replacing the dated kitchen, which was open plan to the dining area but surrounded by a high wooden partition. "It made the kitchen feel like a cage," says Janet. "The first thing John did when we moved in was take a saw to it."

Since then they have replaced the units with a beautiful and functional contemporary kitchen, which they

*“Each room has a bit of a throwback to the seventies”*

obtained straight from a photo shoot. "We had to go and pick it up from the set, and we had to get there the moment they rang. We got a van and bombed up there with friends to get it," says John. "It was amazing," adds Janet. "Even though it had been set up just for the shoot, it even had all the details down to the drawer runners!"

The couple have been very creative in sourcing supplies for the building work. "We have salvaged, reclaimed and recycled," says Janet. "The kitchen floor is reclaimed maple flooring from a squash court and we have bought lots on ebay." Similarly, when John needed oak beams to add character to his

conversion of the garden room, he bartered them in exchange for some architectural drawings.

Thanks to the changes which John and Janet have made, helped by their builder, Janet's son Joel Finch of J Finch Building, Bishops Castle, Shropshire, the property is now almost unrecognisable from the tired-looking house they first set eyes on, with Leylandii growing right up to the front windows. Now it's a light and airy contemporary home set off by a well-planned and well-tended sloping garden. They have taken down the Leylandii, hacked away the sprawling undergrowth and given the exterior of the property a complete make-over by having the original plastic boarding removed and the walls insulated and rendered with lime from Ty Mawr Lime.

The couple also rebuilt the dilapidated covered veranda and

**Top:** retro fabric on kitchen chairs and blind  
**Above left:** living room  
**Above centre:** ground floor guest bedroom reflected in mirror  
**Above:** the exterior of the barn



**Top:** ground floor guest bedroom  
**Above left:** bathroom  
**Above right:** ground floor guest bathroom  
**Below:** Janet's eye for design brings interesting features to each room, as here with the fairy lights and bold wallpaper

now, with glass doors opening to the kitchen diner, it forms an extra rain-proofed living space which brings the outdoors in. Says Janet: "We also changed the balustrading, which was white wooden boarding." This has now been replaced with stylish rails made by Leominster blacksmith Owen Mabbort,

Janet, who has worked in catering and designing children's clothes, has found the property quite a challenge to decorate. "I didn't quite know where to go with it, but because it is a seventies house I have kept a nod to that era. Each room has a little bit of a throw back to the seventies, like the feature wallpaper in the lounge and the sideboard, an ebay find. It's a seventies piece and I have stripped and painted it and put panels of wallpaper in to match the wall behind it. The nest of tables in that room also dates from the seventies."

Her love of fabrics shows in the choices she has made for the drapes and soft furnishings and she has also introduced an element of quirkiness into her interior décor.

After three years hard work renovating

and decorating their home, it was time to start on the garden room, where John has used wooden beams to bring warmth and character to the living space. It's a large bedroom with a cosy sitting and dining area beside the open fireplace. French doors open onto a pretty private patio with views over the garden and John has converted a former boiler room which was part of the adjoining garage into an en suite bathroom and a separate kitchen.

He designed and crafted the beautiful oak staircase that leads down to the room from the main part of the house above, and he did most of the conversion and fitting out himself. Meanwhile Janet took charge of furnishing it. "I didn't want it to look like a hotel. I wanted it to look a bit more natural and to look like our house – a bit quirky." The result is a very private, bijou bedroom which oozes comfort, charm and character. It's no wonder that when guests come to stay, they often forego a trip out to a local eatery to enjoy the home-cooked evening meal Janet is happy to serve in their room, in addition to the tempting, freshly cooked breakfasts she also delivers on demand every morning. ■



**Get the Look**



The doors and ironmongery were from Marches Architectural Hardware Ltd., 33 Ddole Enterprise Park, Llandrindod Wells, Powys. 01597 823822 [www.marchesironmongery.co.uk](http://www.marchesironmongery.co.uk)



The translucent porcelain wall lights are decorated with the delicate impressions of allium flowers. They were made by Shropshire ceramicist Yen Robinson, The Old School, Lingen, Bucknell. 01544 267735 [www.yenrobinson.co.uk](http://www.yenrobinson.co.uk)



The carved picture frame was made by Alex Finch, Janet's son, who is a wood carver based at Ivington, Herefordshire. 07971 495967

<http://atfwoodcarvers.co.uk/about.htm>

The wood burner in the living room is from Clearview Stoves, Dinham House, Ludlow, Shropshire 01584 878100 [www.clearviewstoves.com](http://www.clearviewstoves.com)



Janet found the fabric for the bed canopy in the letting bedroom and the blinds and upholstery in the

kitchen at Stanway Fabrics, Shipton Hall Barn. Shipton, near Much Wenlock, Shropshire 01746 785151 [www.stanwayfabrics.co.uk](http://www.stanwayfabrics.co.uk)

The front door, windows and French doors in the bed and breakfast room were made by joiner Chris Bullock. Chris Bullock Joinery, 3 Foxwood Court, Rotherwas Industrial Estate, Hereford 01432 264992 [www.chrisbullockjoinery.co.uk](http://www.chrisbullockjoinery.co.uk)



The front door rake and carpets are from Leominster Carpets, 3-5 Drapers Lane, Leominster 01568 612447

**Enjoy the experience**

To find out more about Abbots Lodge Bed and Breakfast, Wigmore, Leominster, visit

[www.abbotslodgebandb.co.uk](http://www.abbotslodgebandb.co.uk)