



Design in Mind

Ian Wilkinson discovers a charming former fisherman's cottage in West Looe that has been renovated by an interior designer



Many of the properties featured in this series are easy to find. Set the sat nav to the postcode and as like as not you're delivered right to the front door. Some, however, are more elusive and so it proved with Teylu Cottage in West Looe. Parking my car on the waterfront I set off on foot to find Chapel Ground, off which, I had been told was a row of cottages known as Park Terrace.

West Looe is a charming spot, less touristy and therefore quieter than its big sister across the water. However, it is not well endowed with street names! Eventually I stumbled upon a steep and narrow lane, which I felt had to be Chapel Ground and began the long ascent. There were several little terraces of cottages, none of which announced themselves as Park Terrace. Out of breath and confused I descended the hill back to the main street, where I asked directions from a local. "That's Chapel Ground," he assured me, pointing to where I had just come from. "But I've no idea where Park Terrace is. I've only lived here for 83 years and I can't be expected to know everything!"

Back up the hill I met a lady who did know Park Terrace, for she had lived there herself, and in no time

I was sitting in the front room of Teylu Cottage talking to the owner, Alison Kelly.

Alison, her husband, Tom, and their two children live in Paignton in Devon. For many years she worked for the Department of Work and Pensions in various Job Centres until 2005 when she embarked on a full-time degree course in interior design. Graduating in 2008, she has undertaken several commissions in the Westcountry, including a recent project at the Falmouth Hotel (see her website: inventivespacedesign.co.uk for more information).

Opposite
The cottage's diminutive size is clearly seen

Opposite inset
Alison Kelly

Below
The light in the lounge creates a feeling of space

"We wanted to retain as many of the original features as possible and create a more comfortable modern living space"

Alison and her husband purchased the cottage just over a year ago, partly as a long-term investment and partly as a design project. The property was built in the 19th century, almost certainly as a fisherman's cottage. It is part of a small terrace of cottages clinging to the side of the steep river valley overlooking the harbour and East Looe.





With just two bedrooms, no back garden and a small front garden it is certainly the smallest property ever to appear in our 'Through the Keyhole' feature. It is an excellent example of what can be achieved with a little determination, flair for design and of course time. The couple started work on the property just over a year ago. Alison explains: "It hadn't been lived in for some time and it was dark and cold with brown carpets and mustard yellow walls. The dining room and kitchen had no natural light and next to the kitchen was the shower room, which wasn't ideal. We wanted to retain as many of the original features as possible and create a more comfortable modern living space."

The works were substantial and involved gutting

the property and undertaking some major structural alterations, so a firm of local builders was employed. The dividing wall on the ground floor was removed to create a lounge/dining area with a central staircase. The kitchen layout was completely changed, with a large Velux window installed to allow more natural light to the rear. A new bathroom and shower was installed on the first floor and, in order to improve the layout of the second bedroom, a new staircase was constructed to the attic floor. "Of course in an old house unexpected things come to light as works progress," says Alison. "We had real problems with one of the chimney breasts, all of the ceilings needed to be redone and the roof needed quite a lot of attention."

Through the Keyhole

However, all the works were completed in August 2010 and the cottage transformed into a stylish and comfortable home. I asked Alison if she had any advice for people considering a similar renovation project. "Always budget for more than you think you'll need. We exceeded our budget by a not insignificant amount mainly because of the unexpected problems. The only other bit of advice I'd give is to consider very carefully the size and amount of furniture that you are going to cram into a small cottage. Very often, less is more!"

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The lounge is entered directly from the front door and apart from the removal of the internal dividing wall, redecoration and furnishings, it has remained largely unchanged. The original fireplace and floorboards have been retained and the overall colour theme, like the rest of the cottage, is white. "The builders moaned about too much white," says Alison. "But it's clean and bright and you can introduce all the colour you want through furnishings, paintings and photographs." The white-painted floorboards are relieved by a dark



Above

The sleek kitchen has plenty of storage space

Right

The bathroom has been updated





Above
The airy second-floor bedroom

Left
The dining room has a feature fireplace



maroon rug and an abstract painting and a collection of Alison's own photographs of Looe adorn the walls. A modern leather settee and an Ercol easy chair make the most of the space available and the overall effect is of a cosy contemporary living space that seems more spacious than it actually is.

The dining room is neatly divided from the lounge by a central staircase and is dominated by the exposed stone chimney breast and brick fireplace. It is simply furnished with a modern table and white contoured Eames chairs, giving the room a pleasing 1950s retro feel. A door leads to the re-orientated kitchen, which has a black tiled floor, high-quality white units and granite worktops. A built-in hob, oven and stainless-steel cooker hood completes this hi-tech kitchen.



Above
The attractive paved garden area

Right
The lounge and hall



The central staircase leads to the first floor and the newly constructed bathroom – a pleasing combination of old and new. A modern bathroom suite blends seamlessly with original wooden floorboards, Travertine tiles and chrome fittings to create a stylish and luxurious space.

The master bedroom swallows up a large double bed with ease, together with a wicker chair and pine furniture. There are lovely views across the valley from this room. The cleverly re-configured staircase to the attic bedroom maximises the space in this charming room, with its exposed stone wall and dormer window with views of the sea and surrounding countryside.

Alison is delighted with her cottage. “We spend as much time as we can down here and when we drive across the bridge at Plymouth I give a deep sigh and

leave our rather hectic life behind. I love Looe – I’m originally from Brixham and I think the two towns are very similar. There’s the harbour, everything’s on a hill and there’s nowhere to park! When we’re down here we seem to have time to do things together. Our children go off crabbing to the harbour and there are some wonderful walks. But most of all, people are so friendly. Our neighbours have made us really welcome, so Teylu – which means ‘family’ in Cornish, is really our home from home!” □