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NATURAL HABITAT

Artist Angie Lewin and her husband Simon have transformed a trio of outbuildings on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park into a stylish live-work space

WORDS LOUISE ELLIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY CRISTIAN BARNETT
STYLING BEN KENDRICK





Artist and printmaker Angie Lewin and her husband Simon were firmly based in rural north Norfolk, having moved out of London two years previously to set up St Jude's Gallery in the market town of Aylsham, selling prints, paintings and fabrics by Angie and other contemporary makers. While there, they had transformed a 17th-century redbrick cottage with an inspiring mix of old and new. 'We loved life outside the capital but, after a few years of living and working in the same county, began to feel the need to have somewhere different to escape to,' Simon recalls.

As a contrast to the flat landscape of Norfolk, they were increasingly drawn to Speyside, with its green glens, crystal-clear rivers and often snow-topped mountains, where Simon had holidayed as a child. Searching property websites in 2002, they came across a derelict 19th-century cottage and farm, perched on a hill at the edge of the Cairngorms National Park and opposite the mountain Ben Rinn. 'We knew it would be a challenge,' Angie says, 'but we loved its sense of splendid isolation – the chance to be totally immersed in nature.'

Part of the Ballindalloch Estate, the cottage was built in 1860 to house a tenant farmer, and was surrounded by a cluster of outbuildings (known locally as steadings), but it had been unoccupied since 1960. Renovating the main property to create a comfortable hideaway was Angie and Simon's first priority. Work began in 2004 and included adding two extensions for a new bathroom and utility area, as well as a small studio for Angie. The interior now has a similar decorating scheme to their Norfolk cottage, with a strong 1950s influence and clever juxtaposition of pieces from other eras. The couple are keen collectors of furniture, ceramics and artwork, particularly by Lucienne Day and Ernest Race from the Festival of Britain period, as well as work by earlier 20th-century artists Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious, and current designers including their friends Mark Hearld and Emily Sutton.

With its cream Aga, bold red-and-white chequerboard Marmoleum floor, shelves of books and vintage china, the cottage kitchen has a cheery, welcoming feel. A solid farmhouse table is stylishly contrasted with a sleek stainless-steel and white ceramic pendant lamp and collection of favourite Ercol stick-back chairs. 'This is where we like to sit and make plans ▶

BARN DINING AREA

White walls and grey ceramic floor tiles by Ceramiche Keope provide a neutral backdrop to Angie and Simon's mix of mid-century furniture and contemporary artwork, including pictures by Mark Hearld and Emily Sutton. Similar pendant lights

can be found at Wayfair and bench seats at sellingantiques.co.uk

BARN STUDIO

Angie at work at her desk, crafted by Retrovius from old lab worktops

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Vintage chairs are placed to make the most of the spectacular panorama





for the day over a cup of tea,' Angie says. As the cottage's original flagstone floors had long since disappeared, reclaimed oak boards, sanded down for a lighter effect, were laid throughout the rest of the ground floor. In the summer sitting room (formerly Angie's studio), a modern woodburner (complete with a hot plate for boiling a kettle) blazes merrily on most days. Keeping out the chill is an important factor here and so the second sitting room (right) has an even cosier feel, with a traditional Welsh blanket in soft greens brightening a grey upholstered sofa, and lengths of Heard's thick Bird Garden material hanging at the windows. Upstairs, wallpaper adds an element of decoration to the muted scheme: in the main bedroom, a wall is covered in Heard's Squirrel and Sunflower pattern, while Angie's Nature Table in Lichen and Pale Rose draws the eye on the landing.

With the cottage redecorated, in 2007 Angie and Simon were able to turn their attention to the outbuildings. 'They were literally crumbling away, so we had to take action,' Angie explains. 'We'd been spending more and more time here and I wanted to have a larger studio. Transforming the steadings was a way to do this and also create an extra live-work space we could use when friends came to stay, while giving us the option to rent out the cottage in the future if we wanted.'

Initially, the couple discussed demolishing the buildings entirely. However, as they began working with the architectural practice Dualchas, known for its contemporary designs that complement the natural environment, they realised how well the structures fitted into the landscape and how the weathered grey, pink and granite stone echoed the hues of the surrounding countryside. 'It was a slow process, though, as layers and layers of mud and straw had to be removed,' Simon remembers. In 2011, when the lease for the Norfolk gallery came up for renewal, they decided to close it and run the business entirely online, allowing them to move permanently to Scotland. The three outbuildings have now been linked together to form a large vaulted open-plan kitchen and sitting room, a studio for Angie, an office for Simon, a bathroom and bedroom, all with a wonderful feeling of light and space.

Thermally-efficient windows and glass doors have been fitted into the original apertures. Architect Mary Arnold-Forster shared the couple's preference to limit the number ▶

BARN KITCHEN

Fascinating finds, including a figurine of Scottish folk hero Rob Roy, sit alongside practical kitchen items on the shelf. A framed St Jude's image nods to the couple's business, founded in 2005. The units are by Pronorm and the worktop is Zodiac by Dupont

LIVING ROOM

In the cosy cottage sitting room, Border Terrier Baxter enjoys the comfort of the retro-style sofa – Fancy Nancy from Sofa Workshop – complete with cushion by Angie. Similar vintage Welsh blankets are available from Jen Jones. For comparable stick floor lamps, try Heal's





The mountains and moorland, hill lochs, woodlands and rivers all provide inspiration for Angie's work

of materials used for the interior: large grey ceramic floor tiles complemented by simple skirtings, white walls and a concrete 'screen' that splits the space without losing light. All of this produces a beautiful, plain background for their trademark mix of furniture by Ercol and Ernest Race, which introduces a sense of character and ensures the contemporary design never feels stark or sparse. The large windows, fitted with roller blinds rather than curtains, showcase the views to stunning effect.

Angie's new spacious studio is filled with gentle light all year round. A large desk made by Retrouvius from old laboratory worktops provides plenty of room for her drawing board, lamps, linocut and wood-engraving tools, pots of pencils and brushes. In front stands her Albion press with a square vintage Ercol table displaying still-life compositions of natural finds she will capture in her limited-edition prints and one-off watercolours.

The area's mountains and moorland, the hill lochs, woodlands and rivers have all provided inspiration for her work. 'The chalky greens of lichen, the fiery scarlet of rowan berries and wild flowers such as devil's bit scabious, yellow rattle and wild valerian all feature,' she says. 'It would be impossible to be bored with this landscape. And after a day outside, there's nothing better than lighting the stove and settling down to an evening in the cottage.'

For more about Angie's work, visit angielewin.co.uk or stjudesfabrics.co.uk

BARN BEDROOM Above the bed hangs a series of letterpress-printed posters by Flowers & Fleurons LANDING AND BEDROOM

Decorative wallpaper in soft greens and pinks introduces eye-catching pattern to the landing

and bedroom in the cottage. The Nature Table wallpaper on the landing is by Angie, while the bedroom's Squirrel and Sunflower design – based on an original linocut – is by Mark Heard for St Jude's. The oak Radius bed and bedside table are from Habitat

