

Lucky strike

After six years in New York the Simpson family returned to the UK and fortunately found their dream property in the shape of a Surrey barn

Words: Ysanne Brooks

Previous pages (p140-141): A mezzanine walkway enjoys a great view of the kitchen from above. Leading off the spiral staircase, it provides access to Sally and Dominic's bedroom. The remaining bedrooms are downstairs at the far end of the barn.

Right: Formed from two smaller barns and subsequently extended to its current footprint, the plan was for an extensive overhaul that included stripping out the interior and roof and then installing a steel frame to support the upstairs bedroom and spiral staircase.

A tip-off from a local estate agent led to Sally and Dominic Simpson's timely purchase of a barn in Surrey that needed complete refurbishment. With two young children – six-year-old Monty and five-year-old Isla – and only just having returned from six years living and working in New York, the couple were originally searching for a turnkey property. However, when they failed to find what they wanted, they completely reversed this decision.

"We went from thinking we'd move into somewhere that required little work because we had two young children and were working so it would be too hard, to completely changing tack and embarking on a really big project. Everyone thought we were totally crazy!" recalls Sally.

The couple had to move quickly, though, as the barn was prime fodder for property developers. They managed to view the house just 24 hours after the tip-off and put in an offer straight away. "Luckily, the owner was a true gentleman and accepted our offer and stuck with his decision despite lots of interest from elsewhere," reveals Sally.

Originally built in the mid-17th century to house the workers erecting the main house nearby, the barn had been part of the estate ever since. "By the time we purchased it in 2013, it was a disused function room that had seen many a local wedding and christening," reveals Dominic. "The owner of Brook House was dividing the estate and we leapt at the chance of converting it to a residential dwelling."

Fortunately the barn came with planning permission, but Sally and Dominic felt the plans weren't quite right for them, so they reapplied after engaging architectural practice Stedman Blower to refine new plans drawn by Dominic, who has a background in engineering. Six months later, planning was agreed and work started in earnest. Keen to move in as soon as possible, the couple knew that, along with the bedrooms, the kitchen would need to be completed before they could really call the barn home so this was the priority.

As it takes pride of place in the centre of the main room, they were both keen to ensure the kitchen became the centrepiece the space deserved. "We talked to other companies, but only Roundhouse demonstrated that it had the experience and acumen to design a kitchen that was sensitive to its surroundings and could deliver the wow factor we were looking for," says Dominic. "The kitchen is a very prominent part of the overall design and the brief for the conversion and therefore for the kitchen was clean, simple lines where the modern aspects were subordinate to the original frame of the barn," he continues.

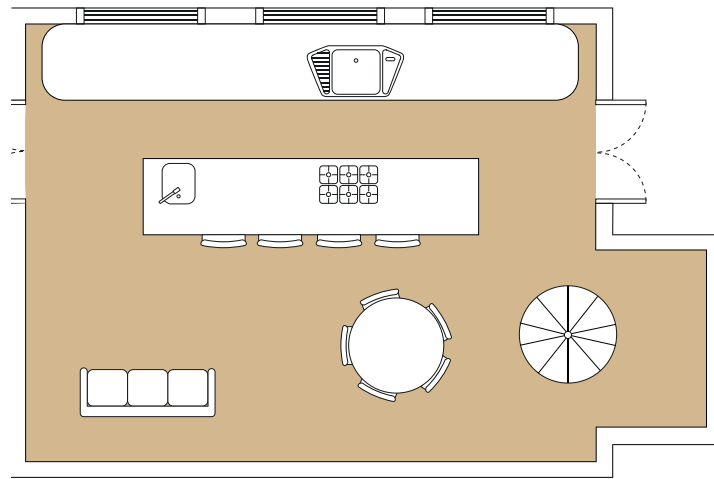
The shape of the room and the supporting beams dictated the layout and, although other companies produced similar designs, it was Roundhouse's bespoke approach that impressed the couple most. To counter the traditional beamed fabric of the building, the couple knew they wanted sleek, contemporary cabinetry. Roundhouse designer ▶



Paul Welburn drew up a scheme that included an island and long run of Urbo matt handleless cabinetry. Wall cabinets were not an option, so the base units incorporate a dishwasher, undercounter fridge and storage, while the island is home to the Miele oven and hob and a prep sink with Quooker boiling-water tap. The rest of the appliances, including a large American-style fridge-freezer, are hidden away in a utility room through a door to the right of the kitchen. Quiet appliances were also key to this open-plan space and Sally and Dominic had already researched the ones they wanted, including the stunning Elica Menhir island hood. That and the equally quiet Fisher & Paykel DishDrawer dishwasher ensure conversation isn't disrupted by the hum of appliances.

The large room with the kitchen at its heart is now the gathering place for all the family. "Behind a bookcase is a playroom for the kids, but to be honest they just dump their stuff there and play in the open space, which is where we usually are," reveals Sally.

One of the first rooms to be finished, the couple moved into the barn just 24 hours after Roundhouse completed the kitchen installation and are delighted they opted to create a unique home of their own rather than move into an already-finished project. For Sally, particularly, the kitchen is the realisation of a dream inspired by their time in New York. "I'd always aspired to have a loft apartment when we lived in the States, which sadly never happened. When we finally moved into the barn I said 'this is it – this is our Manhattan loft apartment in Surrey,' and it really is," she smiles. KBB



Left: Most of the large appliances are in a separate utility room, but there was still plenty of space to incorporate a double drawer dishwasher to one side of the sink and a small fridge below the counter for essentials such as milk.

Above: Sitting at the centre of this vast renovated space, the unfussy lines of Roundhouse's Urbo handleless cabinetry allows the fabric of the barn to be the real hero. The couple added a touch of personalisation with the bold red on the island facing the dining area. "It was colour matched to a red bookcase we already had," reveals Sally.

Q&A

Owner Sally Simpson says...

Where did you find your contractors?

Our architect Stedman Blower recommended a few contractors. We met and interviewed two of them and made a decision to go with Deeks & Steer based on the people we met and the fantastic projects it had completed.

Did you make any major U-turns during the project?

We originally tried to scrimp and save by reusing things like roof tiles and cladding but quickly realised that this was a false economy. Labour is more costly than materials and builders will always prefer to work with new materials.

Do you have any advice for someone embarking on a similar project?

A conversion of any historical building is a big undertaking so be prepared. An architect is invaluable both at the design phase and throughout the build. Problems will arise during the build and working with your builders and architect ensures that compromises aren't made. It's important to have a vision and opinions but you should also trust your architect/designer to do their jobs. Make as many decisions as possible before the build commences and don't change your mind: changes cost money! And when you have to make a decision make it quickly or you will delay the build.

Is there anywhere you managed to save money?

The flooring came in under budget. We preferred a floor with knots and other defects, as it was more in keeping with the gnarled frame of the barn. Luckily this was a preference that was cheaper than the other 'higher quality' options. Also, we didn't use Roundhouse for the utility or boot rooms where we wanted more of a traditional vibe. Instead we sourced the furniture from Greenheart Kitchens in Cardiff – it's highly recommended and great quality.



Corian is a composite surface that can be moulded and templated into almost any shape, so it was the perfect choice for enveloping the beams in the breakfast bar. "It's the feature most people comment on," reveals Dominic.

SourceBook

DESIGN

Kitchen design Paul Welburn, Roundhouse Design (020 7297 6220 or www.roundhousedesign.com)

Architect Stedman Blower (01252 783574 or www.stedmanblower.co.uk)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry Urbo matt lacquer in Signal White (RAL9003) and Ruby Red (RAL3003), from Roundhouse, as before

Worktops (Island) 4cm Corian in Light Ash (0800 962116 or www.corian.co.uk); 1cm stainless steel, from Roundhouse, as before; 3cm Mont Blanc Silestone (01256 761129 or www.silestone.co.uk)

Appliances Multifunction oven, combi oven, induction hob and warming drawer, all Miele (0330 160 6600 or www.miele.co.uk); DishDrawer dishwasher, Fisher & Paykel (0800 088 6605 or www.fisherpaykel.com/uk); Built-under fridge, Neff (0844 892 8989 or www.neff.co.uk); Menhir island extractor hood, Elica (01252 351111 or www.elica.co.uk)

Taps Fusion boiling-water tap and Nordic square, both Quooker (0808 102 0677 or www.quooker.co.uk)

Sinks Peak undermounted, Franke (0161 436 6280 or www.franke.com)

Flooring Askham oak, Hawwoods (01524 737000 or www.hawwoods.co.uk)

Barstools Made in Design (020 7692 4001 or www.madeindesign.co.uk)

Coffee machine Francis Francis X1, from Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk)

Table For similar try The Conran Shop (0844 848 4000 or www.conranshop.co.uk)

Dining chairs For similar try John Lewis (0345 604 9049 or www.johnlewis.com)

Lights Ultra wall lights, Delta Light (0870 757 7087 or www.deltalight.co.uk); Osca pendants, Astro Lighting (01279 427001 or www.astrolighting.co.uk)

Radiator Classico, MHS Radiators (01268 546789 or www.mhsradiators.co.uk)

Sofa For similar try The Conran Shop, as before

COST

Kitchens from Roundhouse Design start at £35,000



Stools at the breakfast bar are great for relaxed dining, but for family dinners an old faithful dining table and chairs are close by. "The Conran table has been with us in our last six properties, as evidenced by various bumps and scrapes," reveals Dominic.