



# Modern vintage

DESIGN HISTORIAN LESLEY JACKSON TELLS HELEN MEAD HOW SHE TRANSFORMED AN 18TH CENTURY FARMHOUSE INTO A SHRINE TO 20TH CENTURY INTERIORS







When dozens of people describe a house as 'gorgeous' it is clearly a very special place.

The word crops up umpteen times in the many plaudits delivered by guests at an 18th century Pennine hilltop farmhouse brimming with character and with views that take your breath away.

Carefully revived from dereliction to the beautiful holiday home it is today, the house thrills and inspires guests from across the world.

'As many have said, the house is gorgeous', writes a London family after staying at the property, 'beautifully restored and full of lovely things, warm and completely comfy.'

Another family, from Australia, describe the Grade II-listed holiday retreat as 'Absolutely gorgeous' - there's that word again - 'Everything was perfect'.

Visitors from around the world have enjoyed the exceptional furnishings and interior design of Elmet Farmhouse in the village of Peckett Well near Hebden Bridge.

Surrounded by meadows, the stone-built house has spectacular views across the steep wooded valley of Hardcastle Crag towards Stoodley Pike and the ancient village of Heptonstall.

Lesley Jackson and her partner Ian bought the farmhouse in 2012, having lived next door since 1997 and before that in Hebden Bridge.

The house, which dates from 1728, could not have been placed in better hands - as a design historian as well as a freelance writer and curator, Lesley had clear ideas as to how it could look, and drew on her extensive knowledge and experience to transform it.

'I've spent my whole career researching and writing about the history of design - 20th century textiles, furniture, ceramics and glass in particular - and curating exhibitions for various museums and galleries around the country.'

'Decorating and furnishing the farmhouse was a bit like curating an exhibition as I was able to choose all the textiles and wallpapers and hand-pick the furniture and lamps. All the pictures and textile hangings, glass and ceramics have been carefully selected - many from my own

collection. The idea was to create somewhere special and unusual, so that holidaying in the house is an experience in itself.'

The building was completely derelict when Lesley took it on. 'The roof was leaking, the windows and doors were rotten and the house was riddled with damp,' she recalls, 'The renovation took about 18 months, starting with the stone slate roof and the lime mortar pointing, then tanking the ground floor and replastering.'

'I was fortunate to find a great team of artisans,' says Lesley, who took on the role of 'project manager, chief navvy and decorator'. 'They did a fantastic job, "and the farmhouse is a credit to them."

The views from the stone mullion windows are captivating. 'I wanted to make the most of these features - hence the long window seats,' says Lesley. 'I've also planted a pretty cottage garden so that guests can sit outside sipping wine and drinking in the views.'

Lesley named the farmhouse, drawing upon a famous literary connection. She discovered the area on a creative writing course in an 18th century house previously owned by the poet Ted Hughes, who gave a reading on the course.

'In 1979 he published a book called 'Remains of Elmet - A Pennine Sequence,' about the Upper Calder Valley where he grew up,' explains Lesley. 'The view on the cover is virtually identical to the view from here.'

She later discovered that Ted Hughes' cousin used to live at the neighbouring cottage and that Hughes used to visit there in the 1950s and 60s.

Lesley - who has written numerous books on 20th century design, focusing on textiles and furniture - had never tackled a major restoration project before.

'The interesting thing about renovating the farmhouse was excavating and restoring the original 18th century features, such as the mullion windows and the magnificent carved stone fireplace, which had all been covered up.'

She aimed to make the house as light as possible, installing extra skylights and opening up the kitchen. 'The house now feels really spacious and sleeps six very comfortably. It's

got three bedrooms and two bathrooms, a large lounge and a roomy farmhouse kitchen.'

Lesley used a warm orangey-yellow colour in the lounge and sage green in the kitchen - 'both Farrow and Ball paints, which I swear by.'

Most of the rest of the paintwork is white, lending the upstairs a serene, pure feeling. 'But I'm also addicted to pattern, so there's plenty around the house,' she adds, 'Including a quirky bicycle-patterned wallpaper - a nod to the 2014 Tour de France and the 2015 Tour de Yorkshire, both of which came right past the top of our drive.'

Another really special feature of the interiors are the wonderful wallpapers, cushions and lamps by local Hebden Bridge-based designer Hannah Nunn.

'Hannah's designs are very subtle, with a mellow timeless quality that complements the building,' says Lesley. 'They're perfect for the farmhouse because they feature dandelions, alliums and meadow grasses - plants you can see in the garden and surrounding fields.'

'Her exquisite cut-paper lamps are installed throughout the house, creating a lovely atmosphere.'

An enthusiast for post-war design, Lesley has incorporated some special pieces into the farmhouse, including Ercol chairs - the subject of her most recent book.

'The other furniture was mainly bought from a shop in Nottingham called the Danish Homestore, which specialises in vintage Scandinavian furniture. It's all natural wood, which complements the stone. The screen-printed fabrics used for the curtains and for textile hangings are all original pieces from the 1950s and 60s. Guests really enjoy them because they're such striking and unusual patterns - like works of art.'

Lesley enjoys meeting guests and seeing how they respond to the farmhouse.

'It gives me a tremendous buzz to see how enthusiastic they are about the interiors. We get lots of enthusiastic comments in the visitors' book. A lot of people have said that staying in the farmhouse has given them ideas for their own homes.'