

Against the grain

An oak barn in the heart of Oxfordshire is updated with lavish materials and intelligent design

Report: Jackie Daly Photography: Jake Fitzjones Styling: Shani Zion

Nestled in the middle of the Oxfordshire countryside, a spacious barn conversion seemed like the perfect second home to Dawn and Keith Peterson. Its beams and views proved irresistible despite the fact that the property was in need of total renovation. But they didn't succumb to the temptation of creating a traditional interior within the ageing surroundings. Instead, they turned to designer Annie Stevens to create a light-filled, contemporary environment.

Dawn wanted a home as spectacular as its environs, which, explains Annie, "wasn't going to be easy to achieve. The barn had been used for rental and was in a sad state with a basic layout and poor finishing." Annie was given carte blanche for the redesign, from coordinating the structural work to selecting materials and schemes. "I decided to keep it very natural and easy because they don't live in the house all the time," she says. "I felt the structure really lent itself to a contemporary interpretation because what dominates the house are the views. By using clean lines and natural finishes we could blend inside and out."

The first step was a complete rewiring job, in order to install an intelligent lighting system that would provide different mood settings. "It was then we realised there was a huge amount of rodent damage in the building," Annie recalls. "So we put in armour-plated cabling to satisfy any worries about fire hazards when Dawn and Keith are not around." In the lower quarters of the barn, the bedroom spaces were in a reasonable condition. But a mezzanine level was constructed on the top floor to accommodate an extra bedroom-cum-children's room. This den-like area is accessed by an oak ladder, to complement the impressive central staircase made of oak and steel.

With the structural work complete, the kitchen was positioned within the newly formed space upstairs. As the barn has been extended, it has four wings, which form natural zones within the open-plan layout. So there is a

