

# 'Our house is full of surprises'

Despite a hitch in the buying process, perseverance and hard work have created the perfect home this family dreamed of



## PROPERTY DETAILS

**Type of house**  
Three-bedroom Victorian terraced cottage

**Location**  
Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire

**Purchase price**  
£186,000

**Money spent**  
£60,000

**What it's worth now**  
£450,000

**SAM COURT, 40,** lives with her architect husband **Richard, 37,** and their children, **Rebecca, six,** and **Steven, three,** in an old coaching inn. Sam works for **British Airways** as cabin crew and describes how they came across their home

Back in 1999 Richard and I began to think about starting a family and knew that the quaint one-bedroom cottage we were living in at that time would be too small.

After months of house-hunting we spotted this house in the pretty village of Lower Heyford. The location was perfect, with good schools close by, fast train links to London, a lovely canal and fabulous rural walks on the doorstep. Richard is brilliant at spotting the potential in a place and as we looked around he grew more and more enthusiastic. "This one has bags of potential, Sam," he said. "Don't you think we could put our own stamp on this house?"

I was in complete agreement and we made an offer straight away, which was accepted. By that stage we had

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*Above Sam and Richard relax and enjoy the living room they worked so hard on*





White leather sofas from DFS complement the new chimney breast that Richard designed for the living room



*Left* Local cabinetmaker Brian Cook was commissioned to make the living room's useful storage unit, which was designed by Richard

*Right* Modern appliances in stainless steel have been teamed with antique pine units to give the kitchen an air of rustic charm. The shutters were painted in Victorian 23 from Dulux's Heritage range

*Below* Family pictures accentuate the striking red and cream theme, which was chosen by Sam to create a cosy and relaxed feel

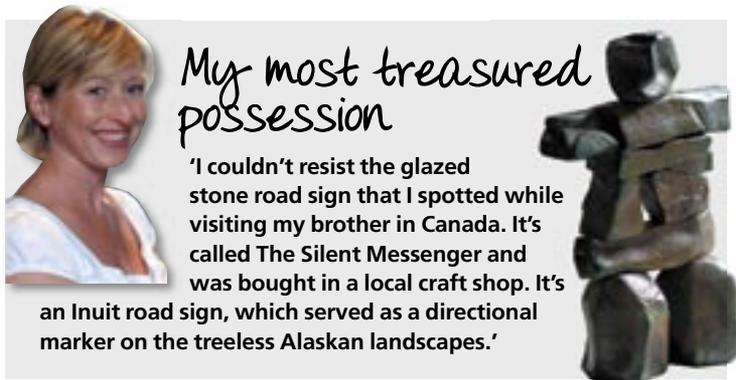
*Bottom right* The waist-height pine unit and open-backed shelves mean that the space under the stairs is put to good use in the kitchen



a cash buyer for our cottage and moved in with my parents to wait for the sale to go through. We were devastated when, a few weeks later, we discovered the owners couldn't find a house they liked and took the house off the market. There was nothing else we could do but pick ourselves up again and begin house-hunting once more. After months of searching, nothing else had come on the market that was anything like as special. In desperation, I decided to approach the owners again to ask if they'd consider putting the house back on the market. Amazingly, they agreed and it was all systems go, because within a week they'd found a suitable property. We were over the moon and finally moved into our new home in November 1999.

The first major project we tackled was the kitchen, replacing the Shaker-style cupboards with antique pine units made by a local carpenter, who had made a lovely larder for our previous house. He was a great craftsman but there was a long delay when he broke his arm. In the end, it took eight months, and during that time we struggled on with a kitchen equipped only with a double sink, a cooker and a trestle table.

One thing that had to go was the 1970s-style stone fireplace. It was eating into our living room space, so we removed it, and Richard designed a slim, contemporary chimney breast to go in its place. Although this sounds



*My most treasured possession*

**'I couldn't resist the glazed stone road sign that I spotted while visiting my brother in Canada. It's called The Silent Messenger and was bought in a local craft shop. It's an Inuit road sign, which served as a directional marker on the treeless Alaskan landscapes.'**





like a huge job, it was relatively straightforward compared to the floor tiles we wanted for the living room. To save money, Richard undertook the work himself. He'd not laid a floor before and, since the bargain Fired Earth grey slate tiles we'd discovered were uneven, it took a massive effort. It took about two weeks, with Richard working late into the evenings. Matters were made more difficult because Rebecca had just been born and Richard was exhausted, having night after night of broken sleep. Despite wearing protective pads, his hands and knees were raw by the end of our "fortnight from hell".

In our bedroom we made a surprising discovery when we uncovered a high vaulted ceiling, which was previously hidden by plasterboard. The surprises kept

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coming as we removed more plasterboard and found the original stepped chimney breast, another wonderful feature. I felt that a stylish French country look was the ideal way to complement them both.

The bathroom was given a complete overhaul, as we ripped out all the bathroom fittings, including a large tank used for the previous boiler. We replaced it with a neat combination boiler and screened it away in a new cupboard, which has since proved useful for storing towels and toiletries. Aside from the huge boiler, the previous bathroom only had a bath, basin and loo, so with the bonus of the additional space, it



The couple splashed out on an original French antique bed from Seventh Heaven. The walls were painted in Laura Ashley White, and family portraits hung above the bed

**Above** The glass-top table, with its ornate rim complements the light and airy feel in Sam and Richard's bedroom

**Right** An accent colour of pillar box red was chosen for both the furniture and accessories in Rebecca's room make it look bright. The wardrobe and chest of drawers were bought unpainted from Scumble Goosie in Gloucestershire and given a coat of Dulux's High Gloss Volcanic Splash





*Above* Sam took a gamble by choosing Dulux's Moroccan Velvet for the bathroom but is delighted with its bold effect

*Right* By removing the bathroom's original units, Sam and Richard made space for a roomy walk-in shower and a roll-top bath



made sense to include a lovely walk-in shower and an elegant roll-top bath. Choosing red for the walls was a daring move, but because the room faces south it gets plenty of light, and can carry a deep shade.

To cut costs we did a lot of the work ourselves. It's been hard at times but always extremely rewarding. We've also picked up quite a few bargains at salvage yards and antique shops. We've all loved living here and are very proud of what we've achieved, but lately both Richard and I have been getting itchy feet. We've put the house on the market but this time we've no particular property or even location in mind. After our last experience, that's probably not such a bad thing. 

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FOR STORE DETAILS SEE 'WHERE TO BUY' PAGE AT BACK OF ISSUE

## Diary of a COTTAGE TRANSFORMATION

**July 1998** Sam and Richard view the cottage for the first time.

**November 1998** The couple move in and begin planning the changes.

**July 1999** Work starts on the garage.

**September 1999** The new kitchen is commissioned and the old one taken out.

**October 1999** New bathroom fitted.

**July 2000** First bedroom is redecorated.

**November 2000** The kitchen is finished.

**March 2001** The living room and dining room are gutted and redecorated.

**August 2001** Richard finishes the slate floor in the living room and dining room.

**April 2002** The garden is landscaped.

**July 2002** Second bedroom redecorated.

**March 2003** Third bedroom and landing are gutted and redecorated.