



Living in a barn

Its walls may have once been covered in cow muck but Wendy and David Nelson had the vision to see the potential in the Fulbeck barn which has been their home for twenty years

Words and photographs: Jenny and Chris Webb

Wendy and David Nelson's first sight of the barn that was destined to become their home, was not a pretty one. Surrounded by old broken down sheds and the abode of a herd of cattle, which were sleeping in front of it, the building was not the stuff of dreams. The couple were viewing the old farmhouse next door. They had found the perfect rural location, in the peaceful, unspoilt village of Fulbeck, but, they decided, not

the right house. The barn and surrounding buildings were part of a working farm owned by Julian Fane, whose family were big landowners and lived in Fulbeck Manor, in the middle of the village. The barn may not have been very alluring, but the couple had a vision.

This was ultimately realised, but now after twenty happy years, they are ready to move on and have put their stunning house, plus two acres of gardens and grounds, up for sale.

Below: The converted barn showing the massive window

Opposite from left: Wendy and David with dogs Shandy and Guinness; Thorney Brown



Wendy said that she and David had lived in London but after their marriage wanted to move to the country.

“Being poor teachers we chose Lincolnshire, as the house prices were so reasonable, and settled in Wellingore. We lived there for ten years but by now had two children, so we needed more room. I had always ridden and wanted some land so I could have my own horse. The barn came with several acres of grazing land and had wonderful views. Fortunately, Julian Fane was prepared to sell the property and we felt very fortunate until we learned that Nirex, (the nuclear waste agency) was planning to build a nuclear waste dump on the old airfield. This was not the best start to our new venture. Naturally we joined the local protest group but resolved to go ahead with our plans, whatever happened.”

However, the plan to establish a waste depository in the area was rejected, and the couple’s pioneering spirit gave them the courage to begin the barn conversion. Twenty years ago these types of projects were in their infancy and not for the faint-hearted.

“I remember the walls were covered in cow muck,” says Wendy. “It took a tremendous effort to clean them. David and I were both still teaching so we spent every evening and weekend working on the barn. As the children were only five and eight years old we rented a house for nine months. Our son Chris, and daughter Holly, thought it a great adventure and helped where they could. We did hire electricians and plumbers but David did most of the work himself with me as labourer. We finished downstairs after a year and completed the upstairs a year after. We have continued adding to the building and making improvements since then.”

As Wendy shows me round her charming home it is hard to envision its humble origin. Many modern barn conversions are mini-

malist, verging on the clinical in design, but despite its size, the couple have given their house a cosy farmhouse feel. They have cleverly retained many original features, including beams and exposed stone walls which add character to the interior.

The entrance to the house is accessed through a restored massive wooden door. Wendy proudly takes me to the large, beamed, kitchen which has recently been refitted with cream Shaker units. It is obvious this is a cook’s kitchen, judging from the large, modern cooking range and the copious amount of workspace. A country-style table and chairs occupy the far end of the room and the wide windows overlook the delightful garden. Wendy tells me she is a keen gardener and belongs to the local garden society. In addition to the conversion, she has worked wonders transforming what was a cattle yard into a beautiful landscaped haven.

An impressive Welsh dresser takes pride of place in the spacious dining room, which was originally an old dairy. “The dresser is very precious to me,” explains Wendy, “It belonged to my great-grandmother and I inherited it from my mother. The Willow pattern plates and lustre jugs, displayed on the shelves, came with it. A lot of the antique furniture, throughout the house, was given to us from our parents, and other pieces we have collected on our travels. We love entertaining and I fill this room with lots of candles and flowers when we have dinner guests. The candle-light, reflected in the huge mirror above the mahogany sideboard, gives the room a special atmosphere.”

The couple also have his and her studies, reflecting both their interests. David’s is filled with cricket paraphernalia so it is no surprise to learn he runs the junior teams at Caythorpe cricket club. Numerous medals and trophies, won by Chris, their son, line the





shelves. He is an accomplished sportsman who also played junior cricket for the county. Wendy's study contains lots of books, photographs of the family, pictures of horses and the computer. She says she used to belong to a small riding club but rides for her own pleasure nowadays. "When we moved here I was able to have my own horses. Several of these were ex-race horses which I nursed back to health. It just seemed natural for my daughter to love horses and ride too."

At one end of the building is a self contained flat and at the other end David built a split-level music room. This houses a piano and Chris's recently acquired drum kit. Wendy is proud of her husband's musical accomplishments.

"David is the pianist. He plays the organ for the local churches and takes choir practise; he is very involved with music. The lower level of the room has been a playroom and games room in the past but we now use it as an extra sitting room. One of the joys of doing a conversion is that you can extend the original building and add as many rooms as you like. Fortunately, David enjoys building and has become very skilful over the years. We could never have attempted this project without his ability."

As we climb the stairs, which rise from the main sitting room, to the galleried landing, Wendy points out the height of the building and what was the former hay loft. The pretty master bedroom has courtyard views from the front and a countryside vista at the back. There are three other bedrooms, two bathrooms, a dressing room, and a very useful loft space. All the rooms are light, airy, and because the house is surrounded by its own private grounds, very peaceful.

We make our way downstairs into the sitting room, which is dominated by a huge window, the focal point of the room and indeed the house. "Obviously, it was specially made and terribly expensive but worth every penny as it is such a stunning feature." Wendy says.

It affords wonderful views of the garden and floods the house with light. For cosiness in the winter, the couple have a wood-burning stove. Another feature is the stained wood panelling, discovered in a reclamation yard, and used to good effect on several walls. Over twenty years the house has become filled with treasured possessions and is clearly a much loved home.

Wendy and I join David outside in the sun filled courtyard, decorated with large rustic plant containers, made by him, and overflowing with colourful summer flowers. The exterior of the barn is smothered in very attractive Boston Ivy. David has brought along their two dogs, Guinness and Shady. He explains that next to the barn there once stood a row of dilapidated cow sheds which were knocked down to create the courtyard.

The barn was built in the 1700s and was originally used for threshing, hence the huge wooden doors. Later a steel Dutch barn was erected but it was too difficult to get the modern machinery up the lane to the farm so it was dismantled. This left a large empty area adjacent to the courtyard so David built a block of stables, complete with a tack room and, more recently, a small gymnasium at the end.

I am introduced to Thorney Brown, Wendy's gentle chestnut horse who has been waiting patiently in his stall. Gingerly patting his huge head I confess I have never ridden. Wendy says she has owned him for five years and he is a darling. In the tack room are name plaques of all the horses that Wendy has owned, and she says will never forget.

The garden is mainly Wendy's province but David's handiwork is much in evidence here also. Firstly, there's a paved, sunken patio and barbeque area, which is sun-drenched all summer, and further down the garden the couple's version of the millennium dome, a brick and steel topped structure. A lawn forms the main area of the garden, surrounded by delicate silver birch trees and mature



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shrubs. From the dome, pathways lead down to a small stream, edged with large hostas and ferns, then upwards towards the orchard.

“I really enjoyed planning and planting the garden,” says Wendy, “I’ve used lots of perennials and mainly cottage garden flowers especially hardy geraniums, which are easy to propagate. When we moved in the banks were covered in weeds and brambles, I never dreamed I would succeed in transforming it to what it is now. There is a lot to maintain so I have a lady who comes in to help for three hours a week.”

The large beds are massed with nicotiana, tall delphiniums, verbena and Wendy’s favourites, white verbasiums. Fronds of foliage almost hide a tiny pond, home to several frogs. Naturally in such a rural setting there are many birds including both spotted and green woodpeckers, and swallows which nest in the stables and return year after year. Wendy recalls seeing badgers sitting under the tree eating pears with their paws. She is proud of the small Japanese garden she has recently completed. I put it to her that living in such an idyllic place it must be a wrench to leave, especially as they’ve spent the last twenty years working on it.

“Of course it was a hard decision to make but we are both retired now and our children are making their own way. We have lots of friends here and we love the village so ideally we would like to buy a property in or near Fulbeck. David and I don’t want to tackle a full conversion again but we prefer older houses and a smaller renovation project would suit us. In fact I am really looking forward to cre-

ating another home and garden and we like to keep a bit busy.”

This is a monumental understatement; I have never met a couple with so many hobbies and interests. I do not know how they fit every thing in, and their energy and enthusiasm is infectious.

Over a welcome cup of tea and some delicious cake, David and Wendy showed me the photographs charting the progress of the conversion. This confirms what a Herculean task it was. Their combined efforts turned an old farm building into a wonderful family home. All the memories of the last twenty years will go with them to their new one, but they leave behind a lasting record of their achievement.

The property is on the market with Humberts of Grantham.

Opposite from top: The huge window fills the house with light and sunshine; The dining room; The pretty master bedroom

Below from right: The couple’s own ‘Millennium Dome’; An inviting wooded pathway

