

Building Connections

Debbie Murray renovated this Georgian farmhouse linking it to the old stables to create her perfect family home



The oak trusses were made with freshly cut green oak to allow for shrinkage

DEBBIE MURRAY, OWNER



For London based soft furnishing expert and interior designer Debbie Murray, extending their 170-year-old Hampshire farmhouse meant a meticulously constructed and crafted extension to the family's stunning riverside country home.

The old brick and flint farmhouse lies on the picturesque banks of the River Test in rural Hampshire and was formerly part of the Portal Country Estate. It had for many years been let out to workers on the farm and Estate, but in latter years mainly rented privately. "When we bought Manor Farm, the house itself was structurally fairly sound but internally rather tired and most definitely in need of some TLC," Debbie says.

The property came too with a number of small rather derelict outbuildings, about one and a half meters from the main house, including grain storage, pigsty and stable barns. Also, right next to

the main house and barely attached to it, there was a sizeable garage with an ugly corrugated iron roof and old timber frame. Debbie's vision from the outset was to connect this ramshackle collection of farm outbuildings to the main house.

"Whilst we had five spacious bedrooms, the reception rooms in the farmhouse were much smaller and seemed disproportionate by comparison. We knew that there was a fantastic opportunity to extend the ground floor living space at Manor Farm and that we had great potential to create the comfortable family home and space to entertain we wanted in the future."

A home for life

Over the next seven years, whilst building her successful soft furnishings and interior consultancy Curtain Connections in London and raising their two children, Debbie focused her expertise on the



Debbie's Top Tips

- There is no substitute for a good architect – look for a company that is not only experienced in period domestic architecture but also, most importantly, adequately resourced and interested in your project.
- Before looking at the style of the existing building and in detail at the interior, first consider the external fusion when viewed externally.
- When first considering an alteration or extension to a period home, a generous amount of time must be allocated to the planning and design stage.
- Using traditional materials and craftsman can take longer but it worth it to get a classic look that will be built to last.
- It may seem obvious, but do choose your builder wisely, not on price alone. Not all builders are experienced in period property alterations.



I love clean and classic lines – the stone fireplace whilst a traditional style fits in with the contemporary feel of the room

DEBBIE MURRAY, OWNER

Another essential part of achieving the carefully crafted fusion for her grand new design was finding R W Armstrong, a specialist builder with over 50 years experience of renovation and refurbishment of period properties.

Debbie says: "I was delighted that we found a building company that not only worked so well with our architect from the outset but had this wealth of knowledge, experience and a bank of traditional skills, including a large joinery workshop. I am so passionate about well-made, beautifully crafted structures and it was very important to me to achieve

high quality finishes throughout, to give real impact as soon as you walked into the rooms of the house."

Old meets new

A year later early in 2009 planning permission was given to commence building the grand new drawing room with vaulted ceiling and to rebuild and convert the existing barns into a guest bedroom with en-suite and also a utility room. The final drawings kept to the original footprint of the existing structure and were joined together with an ornate glazed link conservatory.

PERIOD IDEAS SAYS...
Beautifully crafted windows and doors were handmade to Debbie's exacting requirements



interior decoration at a slow pace, it really did give us the time to get to know the house and its wonderful surroundings. Also as the children were growing, we had a better understanding of the extra living space we needed to suit everyone's lifestyle and so a much clearer idea of the end result we wanted to achieve."

In 2008, Debbie appointed London-based architects Caroe & Partners and began designing and planning submissions for the new extension, including the conversion of the existing stable buildings to create large areas for entertaining and accommodation for guests.

Debbie says "Whilst we wanted the new extension to be built using the same materials and construction methods as the original house, we didn't want to copy the exact style. We wanted to make the building appear as if it had evolved over time rather than having

been built as one and to have a space inside with grander proportions and scale. So we chose a Georgian farmhouse style to give us the high ceilings and spacious rooms inside that we wanted, rather than following the more modest design and architecture of the existing farmhouse."



refurbishment and restoration of the main house carefully updating it room by room.

"It was always my plan to finish the main house before we contemplated starting work on the extension and renovation of the outbuildings," Debbie says. "Whilst we undertook the work and



I love a combination of traditional classical structures combined with modern clean lines suited to contemporary living

DEBBIE MURRAY, OWNER



We love
Debbie's guest room and en-suite which were rebuilt using the original brick and flint from the old stable shell

The two key features of the impressive new drawing room are a huge stone fireplace, designed by Debbie herself and the stunning handmade oak trusses that adorn the high vaulted ceiling.

"The huge handmade windows give us an amazing aspect onto the river and surrounding countryside with lots of natural light flooding into the room," says Debbie. "Also by reconfiguring and rationalising a number of existing small utility rooms in the main house, we created a grand hallway from the main house into the new drawing room. This really has done wonders opening out the main house, it feels and flows like it was meant to be there."

"The sympathetic and beautifully crafted extension to the old farmhouse really has made it a special house," she explains. "From the footprint of several outbuildings, we have been able to design and build something truly stunning but with carefully thought out modern touches for contemporary living. I love to sit and relax in our wonderful new drawing room but we now also have such a great place for entertaining and having our friends and family to stay."

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **R W ARMSTRONG** 01256 850177, rwarmstrong.co.uk
- **CURTAIN CONNECTIONS** 07973 149174, debbie.murray@virgin.net
- **CAROE & PARTNERS LONDON** admin@london.caroe.co.uk