

Lighting was key in the kitchen design, with Jim Lawrence aged brass lights here and in the housekeeper area. The lighting also highlighted some key pieces of art from the couple's eclectic collection.



Betting on a *winner*

When the Birds flew their London nest, they fell in love with a property in Middleham, totally renovating it with the help of Richmond's Period House Store

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When Helen Bird wakes in the night at her lovely period home in Middleham, she hears the hoots of barn owls, or occasional contented 'neighs' from the equine residents of this renowned racing town. It's a far cry from London, where she lived for more than 20 years before heading up North.

Now Helen, husband Rich, and their three-year-old rescue lurcher Alfie are very happily ensconced in Middleham Grange, a beautiful Grade II listed building they have been bringing up to date and renovating to their taste. The property had everything they wanted, including a perfect Carriage house which was ripe for conversion into a luxury holiday let.

"We were looking for a home nearer to family," says Helen. "We had originally focused our house search around Kirkby Lonsdale and Settle, but ended up in Middleham as we fell in love with Middleham Grange and its location, in the heart of beautiful Wensleydale."

The house is in two parts – a 1720s three-storey building facing south, and the 'modern' extension, an 1820s two-storey Regency addition facing east on to the market square – and yet it functions well as one house and is very homely, despite its size. It sits directly off the town's main square, set back behind listed iron gates, and boasts two very private walled gardens. The property is surrounded by stables, housing some of Middleham's many racehorses, hence the neighs in the night.

Middleham Grange had been through a number of incarnations over the past 200 years or so, including as a finishing school for young ladies and, more recently, as a hotel, before the previous owners converted it back into a house in the early 2000s, ripping out a bar, loos and an external fire escape. "They also did a lot of work outside, including landscaping the gardens, but the house itself had a huge amount of bathrooms and needed reconfiguring internally when we bought it in 2017," says Helen.

The couple started with the carriage house, as it hadn't been touched for decades and felt dark, damp and very dated. It's now a luxurious two-bed, two-bath holiday home with private access to the large walled garden at the back of the house. The Birds opened up the sitting

room, adding a wood floor, and created a dining kitchen, installing a high-quality bespoke kitchen. "In the bathrooms, we used Burlington fittings and added column radiators throughout the cottage," says Helen. "Designers such as Kit Kemp – owner of Firmdale hotels, which I love – and architectural designer Ben Pentreath, a key influencer on Regency building design, were my inspiration for the colour scheme and overall interior design. We loved what we did so much in the holiday let, creating a warm, cosy and efficient holiday house, that we wanted to do something similar in the main house."

As it is in so many homes, the kitchen is the heart of Middleham Grange. And at the heart of a proper country kitchen, there has to be a range. Helen and Rich opted for a graphite-coloured Everhot from TN Cook in Skipton, and designed their kitchen around it. A wall between the kitchen and the inner hall was removed, connecting it to living spaces, and creating a breakfast area, and a Chesney wood burner was installed in the fireplace. "It's a lovely space to sit around in the winter months," says Helen.

In order to banish noisy appliances from the main part of the house, the utility area was relocated from the back of the kitchen to the boot room, and then painted in a

vibrant green to match the wallpaper in the downstairs loo.

Upstairs, in this house of many en suites, some of them had to go. Two house bathrooms were created, allowing bedrooms to be restored to their original sizes, and cornicing was replaced where it had been lost. Doorways were moved back to their pre-hotel positions, and black slate late Victorian fireplaces were replaced with reclaimed Regency marble fireplaces from North Yorkshire company Old Flames.

One go-to local firm throughout the renovations was the Period House Store, based in Richmond. "We wanted a hand-built kitchen that looked traditional for the style of our house," says Helen. "We spoke to Sarah (Pickering), and found we gelled when it came to considering designs, styles and practicalities. When I said I needed a 'housekeeper cupboard', she knew exactly what I meant and designed a practical large unit where the utility used to be to store the ironing board, the vacuum, a mop, etcetera. They use Little Greene paint, with a wide range of heritage colours that suited our style, and we opted for Joanna on the walls and units with Attic II on the island unit."

Helen wanted the kitchen cupboards to ➔

'A pot filler tap is a given in American kitchens – I find it super useful'



Living

hide all appliances except the range, and to have units that felt as though they were part of the house, so no wall units were added and the design of the cupboards was tied in with the existing woodwork. Another thing she hankered after, after working in the States, was a pot filler tap next to the range. "This is a given in American kitchens – I find it super useful, especially when using our super heavy cast iron pans," she explains. "We also introduced an antiqued glass splashback behind the range. That's also something that I'd seen in friends' houses in the States, and I discovered Rough Old Glass on Instagram. Indeed, Sarah from the Period House Store loved it so much too she now uses them for other projects."

Period House Store was also Helen's go-to for high-quality taps (Perrin & Rowe aged brass), handles and knobs (Armac Martin), Carron cast iron radiators, which were installed throughout the house, and the flooring, engineered aged oak in mixed width planks.

As it the case with old properties, the renovations weren't all plain sailing. "We thought the floor between the inner hall and kitchen was even as there were no steps between the rooms, but when the wall came down, we found an eight-inch difference," says Helen. "The old electric Aga was held up by luck and fresh air as the joists in the cellar were rotten and a whole new steel frame support was needed to support the new kitchen floor and range. We also had to put in new electrics and pipework.

Now it's finished, the Birds are very happy; upstairs, the house has been returned to its original Georgian proportions, while downstairs they have created a kitchen/living space that works for modern living whilst respecting the beauty of the house. Outside was an easier task as the previous owner had an amazing eye for garden design and was a great plantswoman, says Helen. "It gives us year-round colour and interest. We have plans to develop our other walled garden, next to our newly renovated orangery, but that's for another phase of the ongoing works."

As for Middleham itself, they feel right at home. "We are huge foodies and love the fact we have Campbell's in Leyburn. Campbell's, with its butchers and wine shop. We also have great restaurants nearby and especially love the Blue Lion in East Witton and the Wensleydale hotel in Middleham itself. "Middleham is really well located for the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales, so we really are spoilt for seeing the beauty of North Yorkshire. With our lurcher Alfie, we often head off on quiet circular walks that include a lake or river so the dog can have a paddle or just cool his paws."

Period House Store, Gallowfields Trading Estate, Richmond, DL10 4SX. periodhousestore.co.uk



'We spoke to Sarah at the Period House Store and found we gelled when it came to considering designs, styles and practicalities'



The Period House Store helped design a practical utility area



Column radiators from the Period House Store have been installed throughout the house



The Carriage House, Middleham, is available to rent through Beautiful Escapes. beautifulscapes.com