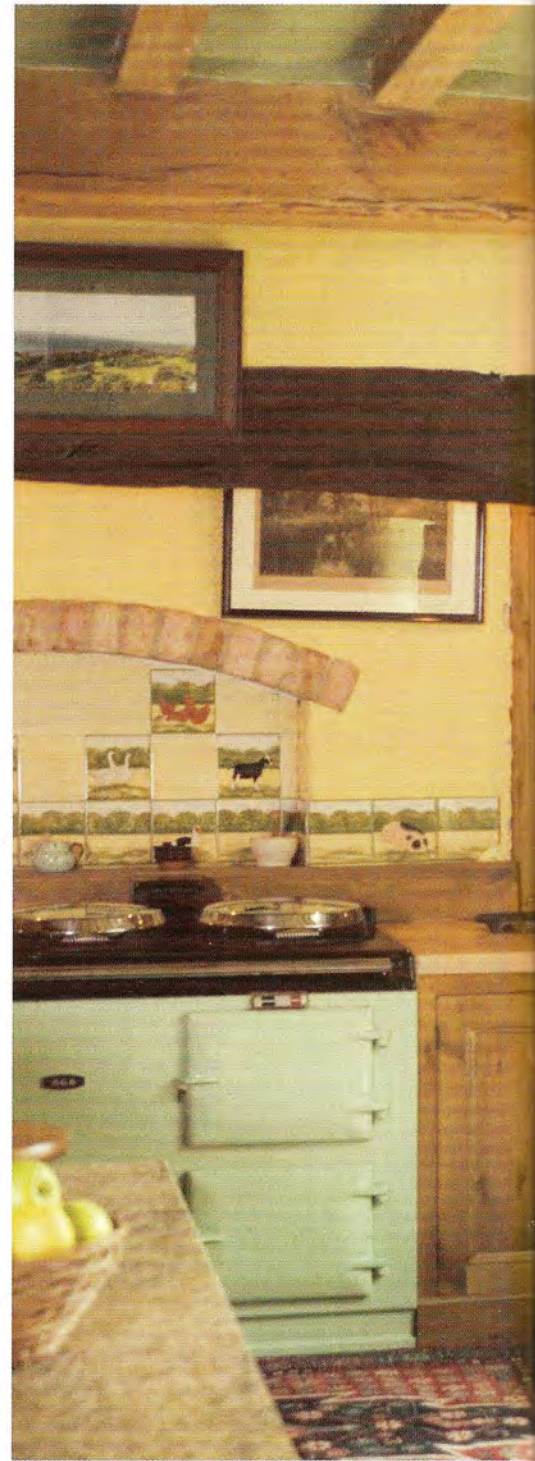


Cabinet decisions

Mike and Cathy Ashwin are a formidable team: his professional carpentry skills and her flair for design have transformed a formerly run-down 18th-century house into a unique home

WORDS TRACEY WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHS NICK WHITTON



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Cathy's eye for colour is demonstrated in the kitchen with shades chosen from the Farrow & Ball palette. The island unit, crafted by Mike, has been painted in Bringal and the vast inglenook in the kitchen (previously hidden) has been restored to its former glory. Calke Green paint on the ceiling echoes the unusual colour of the Aga, which is a reconditioned model from John Wray Country Stoves; Mike and Cathy Ashwin; lime mortar was removed from the house's exterior to leave plain bricks, which add warmth to the building; an original well complete with hand pump creates an interesting focal point in the garden

Cement render



Waiting a year after submitting sealed bids to hear whether you were the proud owners of your perfect home would frustrate many people, but not Cathy and Mike Ashwin. Realising the potential of what could be a fantastic home, they sat tight while the house's surrounding 800 acres were sold off leaving the landlocked property until last. 'It was a long year, but the minute all the land had been sold we were told that the house was ours,' remembers Mike. 'We were thrilled, despite the former owner being convinced that it should be bulldozed.'

Built in 1750, the house had undergone numerous poorly conceived projects over recent years culminating in a damp and musty house, totally devoid of character. 'It was structurally sound but badly modernised. All the beams had been boxed in, the fireplaces boarded over – each with an electric fire in front – and it had a cheap kitchen that had seen better days,' says Mike. 'The first job we did was to take out the plastic-framed windows and reinstate the fireplaces and chimneys so the house could thoroughly dry out.'

As their renovations continued, Cathy and Mike uncovered more about the house, discovering the original flagstones under a cement-covered floor and footings for areas of the house that had been removed. 'We found signs of an entrance hall that had been knocked down in the 1940s,' adds Cathy, 'as well as a blacksmith's forge and rooms that had been used to dye wool. With this knowledge, we were able to put the house back to how it was, keeping to the original footprint.'

The work on each room began by stripping the walls, as Mike explains: 'It's the only way to see exactly what you've got.' During this process they uncovered French doors in the sitting room, which were immediately reinstated and which brought in much needed extra light and ventilation. However, it's the fireplaces in both the sitting room and dining room that really change the >





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The framework for the conservatory was made by Mike and painted in Stonework by Farrow & Ball. The table and chairs are from Swinderby Antiques Fair; almost every element of woodwork from the stairs and banisters to the doors and architrave was made by Mike using reclaimed wood; the chair in the library was re-covered in red damask from Dunelm Mill; the hall is full of Mike's guitars, which sit comfortably alongside antique furniture; exposed brickwork in the sitting room complements the wood panelling



appearance of the rooms; clearing out the rubble that filled the fireplaces has been well worth the effort.

While the work was progressing downstairs, Cathy and Mike received a visit from an elderly lady who was a former resident. 'She left here in 1939 but the house had left such an impression on her that she still missed it – 50 years later,' says Cathy. From this encounter the Ashwins developed more confidence with their renovation decisions, particularly in the dining room. 'We took out the concrete floor and found wonderful flagstones underneath and I knew that wood panelling would sit comfortably in the room. It was when our visitor looked at it and said: "Oh, you've put back the panelling," that we knew we were on the right lines. She remembered the original panelling being taken out in the 1930s. We continued it through the rest of the house after that.'

With the panelling in place, Mike turned his carpentry skills to the furniture. He designed and made much of the furniture using reclaimed wood so each piece is unique. They've been unified by Cathy's choice of colour: she

other parts



KEY FACTS

Location Nottinghamshire

approximately

Period Built in 1750 as farm dwellings and stables, the building had been converted to a home and modernised over the years.
 Size ^{Five} Three bedrooms. The master bedroom has an en-suite bathroom.
 Owners Cathy Ashwin is a midwife and her husband Mike is a cabinetmaker. They have three cats (Muff, Saff and Jack) and two horses (Pearl and Nibs). The Ashwins have restored the house, carefully keeping to the original footprint. Mike owns and runs Hill Farm Furniture and made all the furniture and woodwork in the house.



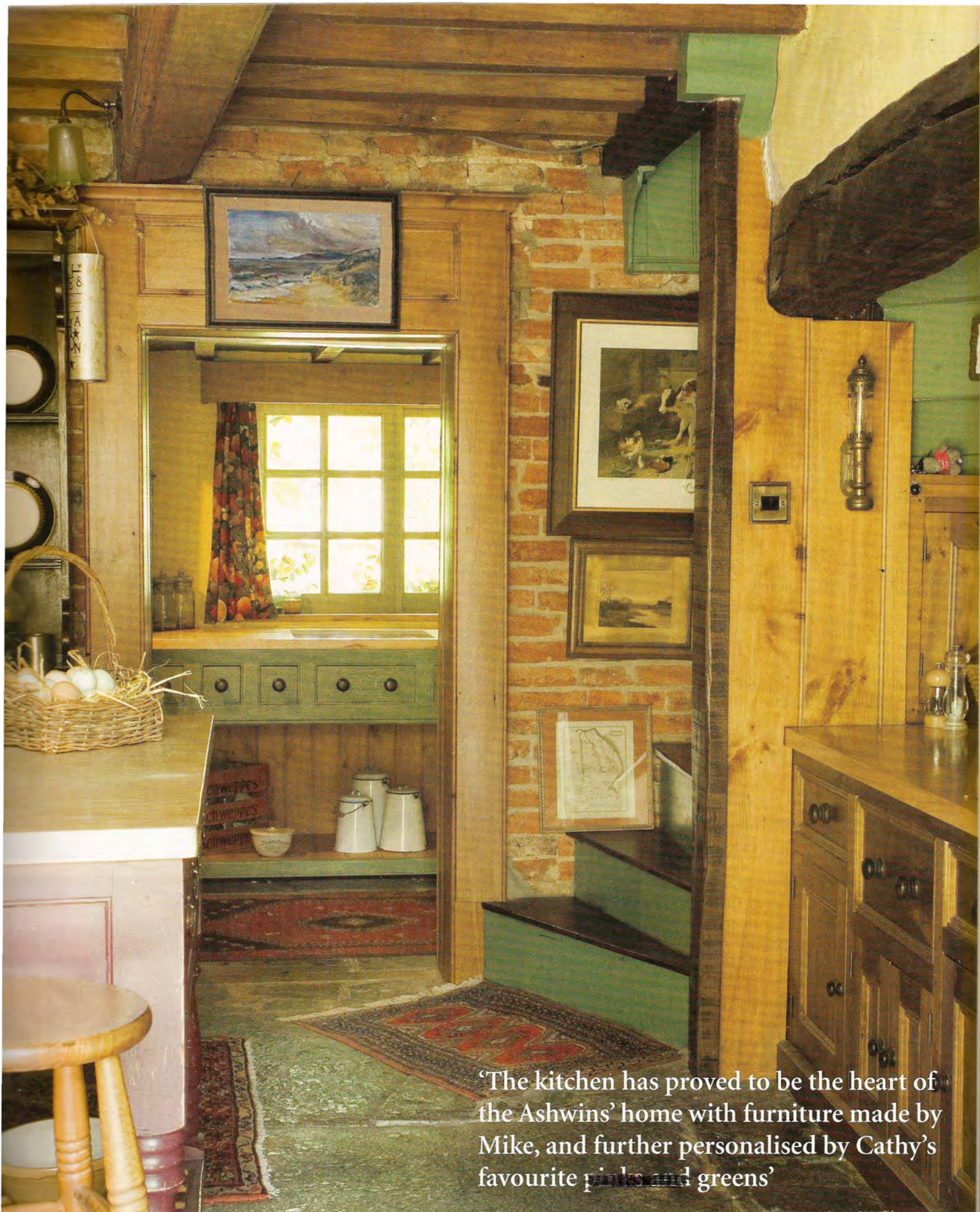
Choose a rich selection of upholstery fabrics to pull the look together. 'She has a great flair for colour,' says Mike.

Cathy also has an eye for a bargain, sourcing furniture from antiques fairs, then hunting out the right fabric from warehouses such as Dunelm Mill to create the look they like. 'We decided very early on that the sitting room and dining room are winter rooms,' she explains, 'so we chose deep reds, gold, blue and brown to suit them.'

However, it's the kitchen, complete with the reconditioned Aga from Country Stoves, that has really proved to be the heart of the Ashwins' home. The furniture has been designed and made by Mike, and further personalised by Cathy's favourite ~~pink~~ and green - the latter inspired by the pistachio-coloured Aga.

One of the biggest projects was the roof, which had perplexed Mike more and more as time went on. 'It was almost flat,' he explains. 'Yet we had seen photographs from 1926 that depicted a more angled roof. We had to get planning permission to put the roof back on but it totally changes the appearance of the house.' The newly >





‘The kitchen has proved to be the heart of the Ashwins’ home with furniture made by Mike, and further personalised by Cathy’s favourite pinks and greens’

THIS PAGE The view from the kitchen into the utility room, which is painted entirely in Sudbury Yellow by Farrow & Ball, with cabinetry that has been distressed to create a different look to the walls. Cathy and Mike discovered the original flagstone floor in the kitchen, which they cleaned up and scattered with colourful rugs



MIKE SHARES SOME RENOVATION ADVICE

Dealing with damp

‘I capped the chimney, replaced the plastic-framed windows with wood ones and opened up sealed areas – such as chimney breasts – to provide ventilation. Just those few changes made a huge difference.’

Designing holistically

‘Stand back and listen to what the building is telling you rather than rush ahead. Don’t change for change’s sake.’

Being eco-friendly

‘Ask local businesses for advice and products first. Most of our purchases have been made locally; it’s our way of reducing our carbon footprint by not travelling too far afield. We also sourced all the bricks and roof tiles from our own area so that the building work blended seamlessly with the original.’

Repeating your own salvage

‘Don’t throw anything away – you never know when it might come in handy, especially on a large project.’



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Wood panelling by Mike creates a stately feel in the master bedroom, which has been softened with India Yellow emulsion by Farrow & Ball. The silk and velvet bedcover is from Camden Market; the screen is believed to date back to the turn of the last century and adds a feminine touch; panels either side of the bed have been hung with Chinois Red fabric by Turnell and Gigon – the wall lights are made by Victoria Bradshaw at Vintage and Antique Textiles

renovated roof has also made a noticeable difference to the character of the upstairs rooms, immediately adding an extra two feet to the ceiling height. ‘That was the only job we had to get someone in to do,’ says Mike.

The en-suite bathroom, however, he did do himself, converting it from a small bedroom. Cathy has decorated the room in rich gold and deep red to match its adjoining master bedroom. Here, dark panelling fills the walls, some of which Cathy covered in silk to create a backdrop for the half tester bed – another of Mike’s impressive creations.

This house has seen a dramatic transformation by Mike and Cathy; this is a home which showcases in the most welcoming way the combined creative talents of its owners. ‘I really enjoy the house now with its new lease of life,’ says Cathy. ‘We may have had to wait a whole year to find out whether we’d bought it or not,’ says Mike, ‘but living here repays that patience every day.’