

Attention to detail brings stunning results



Main House

From the very first, the guiding principle at this recently restored and refurbished Elizabethan cottage was to let the building's beautiful architecture speak for itself. Set in an idyllic part of West Berkshire and overlooking undulating countryside, the owners had a clear vision of how their finished property should look.

Meticulously adhering to traditional construction techniques and using the best craftsmen, this Grade II listed 17th Century cottage has now been carefully and lovingly restored to accentuate many of its glorious features.

"The project took just over a year from start to finish. Whilst we worked closely with their architects Donald Insall Associates and interior designer, many of the ideas came directly from the owner," says Stuart Pearson, Contracts Manager for R. W. Armstrong & Sons, the specialist building company who undertook the complete renovation. "The owner paid great attention to detail and very much wanted us to employ traditional techniques using as many natural and reclaimed materials as we could. He wanted to match as closely as possible the exact original finish." ►



Gunnells in progress

By working hand-in-hand with specialist contractors in order to make everything dovetail, using suitable labour to undertake the specialist techniques, and coming up with ideas for hiding wiring, pipework and plant equipment, ensured that the owner did not lose or compromise the character of their home. Armstrong's took a great deal of time sourcing the right timber and many other reclaimed materials, such as the huge pieces of Yorkstone flag flooring typical in a house of this period.

"The timber frame of the cottage over time had, as one would expect, undergone a number of repairs to it, and many of the original iron straps on beams had been replaced by modern ones," says Stuart. "We removed all of these modern straps from the building and used reclaimed old iron to make the iron straps which would have been in place in the original construction."

All of the walls were re-plastered with lime and horsehair, or wattle and daub, with pigments, not paints, to recreate the original natural effect. "It was very important that the colours, textures and shapes were exactly right throughout and that we achieved a hand finished effect on all of the surfaces, walls and floors," adds Stuart. "So this meant no straight edges to really get the right look and many sample stages in liaison with the client to prepare the exact mixes used."

The initial stages of the renovation also involved the removal of any 'foreign objects', that is anything that was not in-keeping with the original cottage. Armstrong's meticulously took out all of the softwoods added or used for repair in the past, together



The modern glass in the windows were replaced and re-leaded using hand-made glass

with mouldings or other materials which were not in keeping with the original. All of the modern glass in the windows throughout the cottage were replaced and then re-leaded using hand-made glass, and one window was taken out and custom made by Armstrong's own joinery workshop using reclaimed oak to exactly

match the style of the existing windows.

"As you walk into the cottage, you go straight into a living area with an open fireplace and the main staircase. The staircase bent and creaked as you would expect in a building of this age, but it was not the original having been replaced at some stage. It had been



Oak Staircase with a clever addition of a handmade oak sliding bookcase



The Kitchen - beautifully exposed and natural oak timbers contrast with a modern stainless steel worktop



Contemporary Bathroom suites - simple lines and stylish but not dominating the room with design

rather crudely made with softwood and old wooden crates but somehow worked with the look and feel of the cottage. So it was decided to carefully remove it, use each piece as a template and then our joinery workshop reconstructed the exact same staircase out of reclaimed oak," says Stuart.

The uncompromising approach to detail has also been cleverly used in the kitchen and bathrooms. The kitchen was hand built and custom designed to fit. The old oak timber used to make all of the kitchen units was sandblasted so that it did not look machine finished but also to bring out the natural grains

of the wood. Stainless steel worktops contrast with the wood, and a new Aga completed the design.

The upstairs of the cottage was reconfigured from three bedrooms into two bedrooms, each with an ensuite bathroom. The third bedroom was divided using the original structure of the low beams. Each bathroom has high quality sanitary ware, none of which was actually fitted level. This unlevel fit has then achieved the best blend of old and new in these rooms. The bath was sunken into the floor and all pipework carefully boxed and then rendered in with lime plaster.



Upstairs Bedroom - walls unpainted but left with the lime plaster finish here and throughout the cottage. The finished effect is stunning

Armstrong's completed the restoration with the addition of underfloor heating throughout and completely rewiring electrics to modern day requirements. All rewiring has been hidden by running it between the wattle and daub of the walls and then lime plastered.

"The success of this project owed a great deal to the care, attention to detail and respect given to the fabric of such a beautiful old building," says Stuart. "It is not worth trying to rush any project like this and there will always be a substantial amount of unforeseen works, that may add time and money, but the finished product makes it all worthwhile. Our 50 years experience in this business has given us a lot of knowledge but there isn't a day goes by where we don't meet new challenges on old buildings."

Useful Contacts

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R.W. Armstrong & Sons has established an enviable reputation as a traditional building company of the highest standard, specialising in the renovation, extension and refurbishment of period and country homes. With offices based in Basingstoke and Haslemere, projects are located in Hampshire, Surrey,

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