

# COTSWOLD IDYLL

Keri Gardner transformed a modest former rectory into a contemporary home that works perfectly for family life

FEATURE KATHY HURST PHOTOGRAPHS BRETT SYMES

## House fact file



**The property** 200-year-old former rectory in the Cotswolds, with a contemporary extension and garden.

**Bedrooms** Six.

**Bathrooms** Two bathrooms and two en suites.

**Improvements made** Added a large extension to create an open-plan living area with

folding doors that open out on to the patio. Fitted a new kitchen and utility room and added a guest bedroom with en suite. Decorated throughout.

**Buying price** £750,000 in 2003.

**Renovation costs** £300,000.

**Now worth** £1.6m.

The beams in the living space were sourced from Glulam Supplies (023 8045 7236, glulam.beams.co.uk).



**K**eri Gardner's home in Gloucestershire, which she shares with her three young boys, is a lesson in how to blend the old with the new. Constructed some 200 years ago from local stone, the modest former rectory is every inch the rural dream: gabled, stone-mullioned windows; gently weathered clay roof tiles; and elegant chimney stacks that reach upwards to the sky. 'It's what initially drew me to the house,' says Keri. 'I loved the period style and the original features.'

Yet, despite its antiquated origins, the property is no relic. After months of painstaking work – overseen by Keri, who has a keen eye for design – the house has been transformed into an enviable contemporary space where dramatic, decorative flourishes abound.

Bold, statement wallpaper is a defining feature throughout the house, cleverly employed as a means of introducing colour and pattern. In the vast, open-

plan living area, there are numerous chic touches – from oversized lamps and elegant barstools in leather and walnut share space with a beautifully aged console table and a cowhide rug, the latter bought from the roadside in Chamonix. And the extension itself – a light-filled, timber-clad space with bi-fold doors opening on to landscaped gardens – has been designed to ensure that the living space is bright throughout the day.

### TIME WELL SPENT

The Gardners lived in the property for four years before deciding to embark on the renovation. 'The house was in a good state when I moved in, just not to my taste, so I had the luxury of taking my time. It's a very valuable lesson: if you're in too much of a hurry, there will inevitably be regrets,' she says.

As a result, Keri was able to understand the rhythms of the house: to see where light falls at particular times of the day and the best angle from which to enjoy the sunset. 'By the time I sat down with an architect, I had a very clear idea of what I wanted to achieve,' she says. 'I'd taken time to research precisely which beams to use in the living area and exactly where to position the fireplace'»

### Design brief

'I've always liked the idea of barn conversions so when I came to renovate the house, I was keen to create an open, lofty feel with exposed beams, lots of light and soft, muted colours.'

**BELOW** The bar stools are from an interiors show, but Atlantic Shopping stocks similar (0121 230 1644, atlanticshopping.co.uk).

**RIGHT** 'The Aga is the only thing left from the original kitchen. I chose the colour scheme around it,' says Keri. (0845 712 5207, agaliving.com).



**BELOW** Keri had the dining table made. 'It's such a good size and means I can accommodate friends and family for Sunday lunch,' she says.

**ABOVE** The armchair was bought from a secondhand furniture shop. 'I love the warm, autumnal tone of the fabric,' says Keri.

and the soft seating area. Now I can sit and enjoy views in three directions: of the church, the gardens and cows that graze in the fields,' she adds.

### DREAM KITCHEN

While the existing kitchen was serviceable and attractive, Keri felt that it wasn't in-keeping with the contemporary extension. 'The old scheme had cream-painted Shaker units and wooden worktops - but as soon as I decided to knock through to create our new open-plan living space, I knew I'd have to update it. It would have been an almost *Alice in Wonderland* experience walking from a small cottagey kitchen into this lofty, modern space,' she says.

Keri was keen to create a seamless transition between the original house and the extension, opting for sleek, flat-fronted contemporary units and keeping handles on drawers and cupboards to a minimum. 'The units themselves are a muted grey, which is 60% gloss and 40% matt. They have a lovely sheen; I wanted to avoid high gloss, which shows every finger mark' >>



'When I came to style the house, I pretty much had a blank canvas'

### INTERIOR INSPIRATION

'My dream home is something akin to a boutique hotel - all crisp white sheets, bathrooms with clean lines and dramatic wallpaper. The master bedroom, with its velvet upholstered bedstead, always makes me feel like I'm on a fabulous holiday. There are lots of low, sloping ceilings in the upstairs rooms, which meant I wasn't able to hang pictures behind headboards. Instead, I have used wallpaper as it helps to give depth and personality to a room.'





**LEFT** Keri has used accessories, such as the handcrafted green vase on the window sill, to add depth to her understated colour scheme throughout the house.

**RIGHT** 'When I designed the house, I was keen to ensure that this guest bedroom, up in the eaves, had plenty of light. The glazed panels work really well,' says Keri. The chair is from Sofa Workshop (0844 249 9161, sofaworkshop.com).

**BELOW** The main bedroom is a luxurious, inviting space. The upholstered bed is from The Big Bed Company (0845 287 2376, thebigbedcompany.co.uk). The embroidered cushions are from an interiors boutique in Tetbury, for similar try Parna (01865 522272, parna.co.uk).



'My dream home is something akin to a boutique hotel'



and tends to be a nightmare when you're living with little people,' Keri laughs.

The kitchen is very much a family room and the palette has been softened with a variety of stylish touches: walnut worktops and open shelving; glass splash backs in a delicate duck-egg shade; and a composite white quartz work surface, with subtle blue flecks. 'I find the quartz a much more practical option than black granite, which can get quite watermarked - and I like the way it helps to reflect light around the room. I also installed wooden flooring as I find it so much more calming and quieter than tiles,' Keri adds. 'I can't stand the sound of chairs being dragged across stone floors - it's horrible!'

Keri's love of feature walls is clearly evident in this part of the house, in the form of Cole & Son's Cow Parsley wallpaper - a nod to the property's

countryside setting. 'I felt that with the hard, grey units there too many blocks of colour and I decided to break it up with some pattern. People thought I was mad to paper behind the Aga. But, despite the fact that the kettle's often on the boil, it's been absolutely fine - no peeling or stains whatsoever,' she says.

### STYLE POINTS

Much of the furniture was sourced from interiors boutiques and design shows. 'When I came here I didn't have many bits and pieces: it meant that when I came to style the house, I pretty much had a blank canvas,' explains Keri. 'I collected things over a three-year period - both during the build and after it was completed. I think it's helped the house to evolve and to develop a slightly eclectic look.' Luxurious purchases sit happily alongside rugs and vases from

Ikea; the blue and white urns in the kitchen were found in a local antiques shop; and rattan seating (designed for outdoor use) was picked up from a stall at nearby Badminton Horse Trials.

As Keri herself points out, however, the most impressive feature is the view through the bi-fold doors. 'It's like a huge picture,' she says. 'I'll often have them wide open and the whole area is transformed into a room off the garden. And we're in such a sheltered spot that, even in the autumn, the patio is warm and protected from the wind.'

### ALL IN THE DETAIL

Keri's approach to the renovation has been meticulous - from her sourcing of Glulam beams, used in place of steel supports, to her decision to alter the location of the kitchen sink. 'It's commonplace in design to install a sink >>

### Learning curve

#### What lessons have you learnt during the renovation?

'The whole project has really reinforced for me the importance of patience. The work overrun by four months, but I've had no issues whatsoever with the build, not even a single crack in the plaster. Given the age of the original house, I find it pretty amazing.'

#### Would you do anything differently?

'I probably wouldn't coincide the start of the project with the arrival of a baby! I'm fortunate in that I'm very organised though and had planned the renovation meticulously. It's very important to have a clear vision and strategy - things are far more likely to go to plan.'

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beneath a window but, in this particular property, it was completely impractical. For a few hours each afternoon, the sunlight would be blinding. When I reconfigured this area, I shifted the sink along a metre or so: it makes tasks like washing up just that bit easier.’

Keri also opted for sensor-controlled lighting and taps, which are energy efficient and conducive to relaxed family life. ‘Children are notoriously bad at switching things off and, without the sensors, I’d be forever following the boys around – or dealing with flooded bathrooms,’ she laughs. ‘It’s one of those boring details, but something that works really well in real life. It’s great to live somewhere that suits us right down to the ground – even down to the location of the kitchen sink!’ [GH](#)

**ABOVE** Carpet from Rivendell Carpets (0117 963 7979, [rivendellcarpets.co.uk](http://rivendellcarpets.co.uk)) and upholstered headboards from John Lewis, add texture to this cosy twin room (0845 604 9049, [johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)).

**RIGHT** ‘I love the sophisticated look of the tiles in the bathroom – I find grey such a calming colour,’ says Keri. Tiles are from Topps Tiles (0800 783 6262, [toppstiles.co.uk](http://toppstiles.co.uk)).

