

'A light colour scheme was key to our new look'

Using a mix of classic units and neutral colours, Barry and Tina Hathaway have turned a dark cottage kitchen into a warm, welcoming space

WORDS VICTORIA JENKINS PHOTOGRAPHS WILLIAM GODDARD

FACT FILE

THE OWNERS

Tina Hathaway (below), who runs a printing business, lives here with her husband Barry, a teacher

THE PROPERTY

A three-bedroom detached cottage, built in the early 19th century

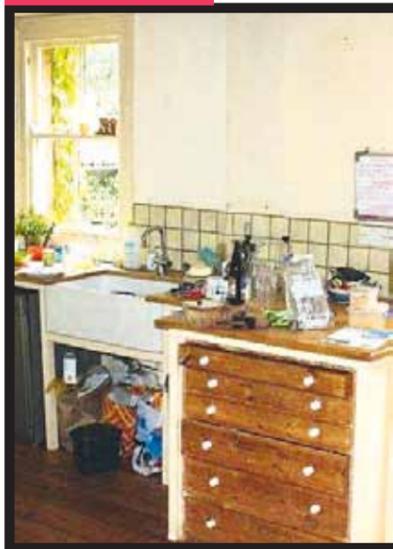
THE LOCATION

Near Stroud, Gloucestershire

WHAT THEY SPENT

The couple's kitchen project cost around £26,000

BEFORE



OLD KITCHEN

Right The units were quite basic because the cottage had been a holiday home for its elderly owners



DESIGN TIP
If your kitchen has uneven flagstone flooring, ensure the plinth beneath fitted units is accurately scribed in to follow the contours of the floor, or go for freestanding furniture

NEW KITCHEN

These Shaker-style handmade units were built by Woodchester Cabinet Makers and handpainted in Bone by Farrow & Ball. Tina made the blinds from gingham throws she bought locally to match the rusty red streaks in the granite worktops. The walls are painted in Dulux Brilliant White



ISLAND UNIT

Right The kitchen company added the island unit for extra work space and storage. Waste and recycling bins are concealed in a slide-out section at one end. The Aga cooker is from GB Cooker Electrics



When Tina and I decided to downsize in 2009, as we wanted a more manageable-sized house to look after, we sold our home in Gloucestershire and rented near Cirencester as we were not sure where we wanted to live,' says Barry. 'Then a neighbour, who is an estate agent, told us that a 200-year-old cottage near Stroud had just come on the market and asked if we wanted to see it.'

Barry and Tina were intrigued by the sound of the property, which had originally been two separate cottages before it was knocked into one property more than 25 years ago. 'As soon as we walked in, we loved it – the rooms were more spacious than in most cottages,' Barry recalls. 'An elderly couple had used it as a holiday

home, and the owners before them had extended part of the hallway and sitting room, plus part of the landing and a bedroom, around 25 years ago.'

The couple put in an offer for the Cotswold stone cottage, which was accepted, but they continued to live in their rented property for six months while they set about completely renovating the whole house.

The kitchen – despite its strip lighting – was very dark, and fitted with units that had certainly seen better days. Barry and Tina got stuck into the project and gutted the kitchen themselves.

A four-foot-wide window was knocked through and the space enlarged to create an opening of seven feet to fit a pair of double-glazed doors leading out to the

courtyard garden. Barry called in local joiners ND Brunson to make the new patio doors. As the original window lintels were too short for the new doors, they had to be taken out and replaced with longer steel lintels, which required building regulations approval. 'The joiners had to install three steel RSJs, because the wall there measured 66cm thick,' says Barry. 'It was worth the expense though, as the new doors changed the look of the kitchen instantly, bringing in much-needed light and, of course, it improved the access.'

As work continued on renovating the kitchen, the couple realised that their plan to tile the floor with thick flagstones would make the low-ceilinged room feel even more enclosed. To solve this, they raised



SINK
Left A Belfast Rouen single-bowl sink from Brass & Traditional Sinks has been sunk into a granite worktop. The Mayan taps are by Perrin & Rowe. The crockery is from Laura Ashley



WORKTOPS
Right Warm granite worktops and upstands from the Bristol Marble & Granite Company complement the new units. The style is called Australian Juparana Persa



UNIT DRAWERS
Left Handy pull-out units are a great way to maximise space in awkward corners, as well as providing easy access to essentials



FLOORING
The couple opted for limestone flooring from Choice Tiles and chose local company Woodchester Cabinet Makers to lay it

the height of the ceiling by removing the plasterboard and exposing the ceiling joists. A local plasterer helped Barry to install new plasterboard between the joists, leaving a series of holes in which downlights could be fitted later. Tina then painted both the plasterboard and joists white. 'The joists weren't original or old, so we didn't mind painting them white, plus it has made the room feel even brighter,' Tina explains.

When the plasterer came to re-plaster the walls he was taken aback at how uneven they were, telling the couple it would need several layers to make them look even and straight. 'We told him not to worry as we liked the slightly wavy effect,' says Tina. 'The only areas that would need to be straight were where the floor units would be attached.'

With the plasterwork all finished, a local electrician carried out a complete rewiring for the downlights, sockets and a new fuse board in order to conform to building regulations.

Barry and Tina settled on a classic country-style scheme for their new space, and local company Woodchester Cabinet Makers was commissioned to make bespoke kitchen units, which would run along two sides of the room. 'We chose a simple Shaker style in cream with crackle-glazed china knobs and light

tortoiseshell granite worktops and upstands,' says Tina. 'The emphasis had to be on light shades, because of the lack of height in the kitchen.'

Halfway through the design process, the Hathaways decided that they would like an island, too. 'Admittedly, that's why we went over budget on this project, because we kept adding things,' says Barry. 'We don't regret it, though, as the island completes the look. It doesn't have a sink or hob fitted in it because we wanted it purely as a large working surface.' Its base, however, holds concealed storage, plus a deep pull-out drawer for recycling and waste bins.

'We chose a Belfast sink to continue the country-style theme, and the only other appliances are an integrated fridge and dishwasher,' adds Barry. 'The washing machine is in a cupboard beneath the stairs in the hallway and the fridge-freezer is in the garage. We're planning to add a utility room and conservatory to the kitchen some time in the future, so most of the appliances could then be housed in the utility room.'

Finishing touches to the new scheme include the couple's reconditioned 1956 Aga, which they bought specifically to fit

their new kitchen. 'We've had Aga cookers since we were first married, which is more than 45 years ago now,' says Barry. 'We bought it from a local company that had converted it from solid fuel to electric. We keep it switched on all year round – it's so lovely and warm that we didn't need underfloor heating in here.'

Almost the last job to be done was having limestone flagstones laid by the kitchen company, and once again the couple opted for a pale shade to maximise the available light.

'The final task for me was to build the two steps from the courtyard up to the kitchen through our new patio doors,' says Barry. 'I used two concrete slabs on two pieces of Cotswold stone that I dug up in the garden.'

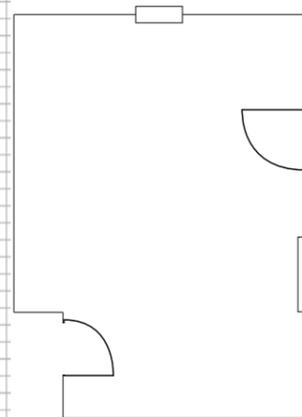
The couple are thrilled with their new space. 'It's so light and spacious here now. In fact, we recently had a party of 14 people in the kitchen – it was a real test of the space when we were trying to serve up the food,' says Barry.

Tina adds: 'We love the Aga as it's where we gravitate to when we come home from work, tired and cold, especially in winter. If the kitchen is the heart of our home, then the Aga is the heart of our kitchen.' 🏠

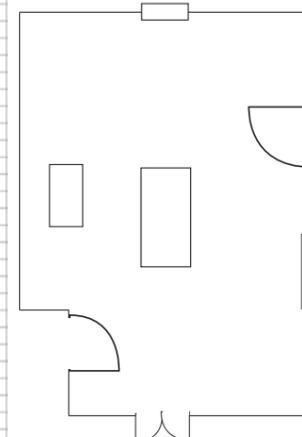
The joists weren't old or original, so we didn't mind painting them to brighten the room

THE PLANS

BEFORE



AFTER



A window was knocked through and the space enlarged for patio doors. The ceiling height was raised by removing the plasterboard and exposing the joists. A new kitchen, including an island unit, was fitted in the new space

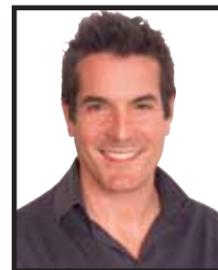
THE COSTS

Kitchen, including units, worktops, sink, tap, appliances and fitting	£19,000
Aga	£6,500
Flooring	£910
TOTAL	£26,410

THE CONTACTS

Joinery ND Brunson, 01452 862873
Kitchen units Woodchester Cabinet Makers
Worktops Bristol Marble & Granite Company
Sink Brass & Traditional Sinks
Flooring Choice Tiles
Appliances Neff, GB Cooker Electrics
Paint Dulux, Farrow & Ball

What to do if... your kitchen is dark with a low ceiling



Experienced home renovator **Michael Holmes** offers his advice on how you can solve this problem

If you want to increase the sense of light and space in a room with a low ceiling, there are two main choices when it comes to increasing the height of the room. You can either replace the ceiling at a higher level, or you can lower the floor. Read on to work out which option is best for your property.

RAISING THE CEILING

With old houses, it is not uncommon to find that a plasterboard ceiling has been added to the underside of the original timber ceiling/first-floor joists in order to conceal repairs, service runs, or just to create a more modern look. Removing this ceiling may do little to increase the practical height of the room (perhaps 15-25mm), but visually it will appear higher because the space between the beams is revealed.

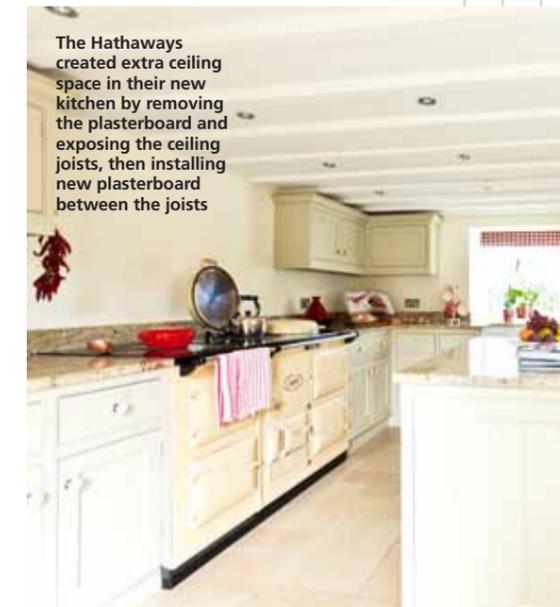
Any damaged joists may need to be repaired or replaced, and the service runs for central heating, electrics and plumbing may have to be diverted via other routes. Alternatively, plasterboard can be fitted between the ceiling timbers, to form a smaller service void where it is needed.

On properties that have a lath and plaster ceiling – which was used widely up until the 1930s – it's not uncommon to discover a false ceiling has been added underneath to create a void to house low-voltage downlighters, or to conceal damage without the mess of removing the entire ceiling. The false ceiling can be removed, adding 150-200mm in height and sometimes more, but an alternative lighting solution, such as uplighters, needs to be found, and the original ceiling repaired or replaced.

In some instances it is possible to remove the entire ceiling structure and raise it up to a higher level – for example, where there is a flat roof or loft space above, or a room where the floor level can be raised without compromising the ceiling height. Where

there is a loft above, another option is to remove some or all of the existing ceiling and insulate between and underneath the rafters, creating a vaulted ceiling.

The Hathaways created extra ceiling space in their new kitchen by removing the plasterboard and exposing the ceiling joists, then installing new plasterboard between the joists



LOWERING THE FLOOR

Where the room is at ground-floor level with no basement or cellar, the floor level can be reduced to increase the overall room height. Lowering the floor relative to other rooms needs consideration – it is best to reduce by whole steps, so multiples of 170-220mm, to avoid a trip hazard. There is a limit to how far down the floor can be excavated relative to the foundations before it becomes necessary to underpin the walls, which is an expensive option and likely to be prohibitive.

Laying a new floor can be a good opportunity to add insulation, damp-proofing, underfloor heating and to accommodate new floor finishes. 🏠