

Minimal fuss

Words **Fiona Reid** Photographs **Phil Wilkinson**

Jill and Ian Mackay made some big changes to get their East Lothian steading just how they wanted it

JILL and Ian Mackay had been perfectly happy in their last house in Seton Mains: they liked the area and style of their property, but, as Jill says: "It was just too big for us." Five bedrooms had seemed like a good idea when they bought the house, but even with three dogs - labradoodle Dougle, Mashie the bearded collie, and Zoe the springer spaniel - there was simply too much space.

Number 8 Garvald Grange Steading, which is located just outside the East Lothian village of Garvald, is like a scaled-down version of the Mackays' previous home, from the astragal windows and thick walls to the inherent character of this former cart house, which was developed around 11 years ago along with the neighbouring buildings.

"I loved the house straight away," recalls Jill, who was also attracted by the fact that her horse, Dan, could be kept on a friend's land nearby.

Rather than five bedrooms, this house has three, one of which Ian has used as his study, with a guest bedroom and bathroom on the ground level and the master suite upstairs.

"We've used every room here," says Jill, who swapped a career in marketing for a change of scene with her dog-walking business, Doggon-Walks. "I've learned that redundant space isn't good."

The privacy of the garden was also an attraction, and this is accessed via French doors from both the sitting-room and the dining-kitchen, creating that lovely indoor-outdoor flow of space.

Even better, these doors stretch along the south elevation, flooding the living spaces with light. As Jill says: "I just loved that idea of the doors opening onto the garden, with the dogs running in and out, and yet being totally enclosed."

While number 8 had all the charm the Mackays were after, the interior was a bit tired for their tastes. "Even when we viewed the house I knew it needed a new kitchen and bathroom," Jill recalls. "We wanted a more functional kitchen as we enjoy having people round for dinner, but it wasn't just about functionality: it's about how we live."

It's about aesthetics, in other words, and having spaces that are as pleasing to the eye as they are practical. The old bathroom was the first thing to go: "I wouldn't use it, so we redid it within weeks of moving in," says Jill, and the cork flooring has now been replaced by a limed oak finish, along with contemporary fittings including a smart-looking vanity unit for additional storage.

The dining-kitchen has seen the biggest transformation, however. The couple wanted to enhance the effects of the natural light, resulting in the combination of limestone-style flooring and cream units with



chunky oak worktops. It sounds simple but interest is added in the hints of texture: rather than being flat cream, the units have a grain to the finish that complements the subtle pattern of the flooring. And it's practical with the dogs as, let's face it, you don't want glossy porcelain tiles with three sets of muddy paws scampering around.

This functionality also informed the budget. "Everything comes at a budget," says Jill. "Most of our stuff has either been sourced

locally, or from less expensive places, but it's about the way you combine things, rather than going out and buying a Christians kitchen or whatever." This kitchen is from Howdens and it looks great. Simplicity is also key as Jill shies away from creating an interior where everything becomes overly coordinated. As she says: "It can look like you've tried too hard."

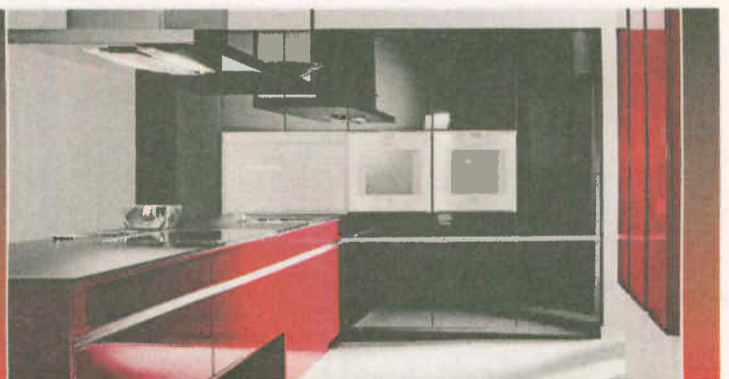
Ian, who works in IT, is as involved in the process as his wife, although they approach

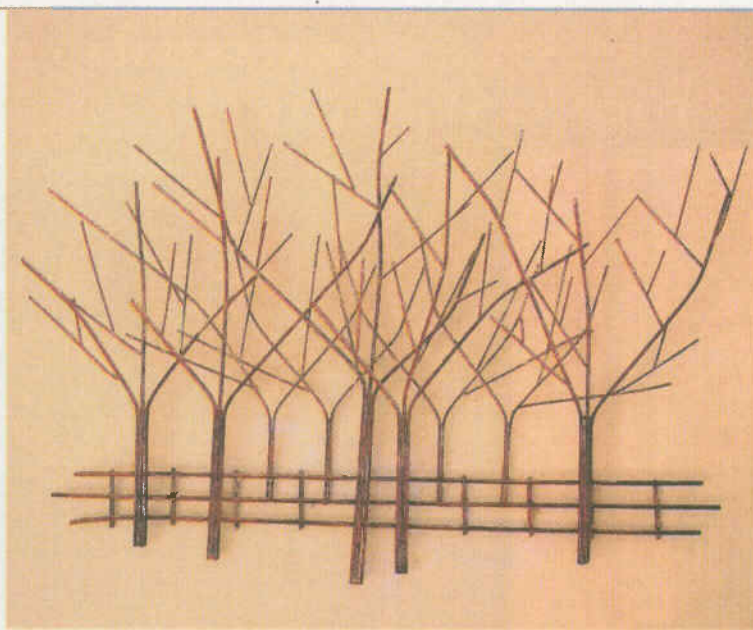


(Kitchens with personality)

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Clockwise from above: the sitting-room (inset, Jill with one of the dogs); one of the couple's artworks; the dining-kitchen; the garden terrace

things differently and bring diverse skills to the table. "Ian's really practical; he has more vision in the planning stages and can visualise things more easily than I can," says Jill.

He drew up the plans for the kitchen, and had a wish-list of elements including those oak worktops, the soft-close doors and drawers, and the Smeg range cooker with its induction hob. "A cooker's just a cooker to me!" Jill admits. Rather, she appre-

ciates the two glass-fronted dressers – again, entirely practical pieces with timeless good looks that exemplify this modern country styling.

Ian also takes the credit for being a dab hand at sourcing things. The sculptural glass-topped coffee table in the sitting-room is a prime example: Jill wanted a glass finish and something a bit different, and Ian found this design on eBay. "I always know what I want but I get bored waiting on →

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← it, so I'll go and look for something else instead," she admits, "whereas Ian will stick with the original idea until he finds it."

Elsewhere in the house the couple simply redecorated to lighten the palette, although if they'd stayed here longer they would have created a dressing area on the landing upstairs. Indeed, this upper level, containing the master bedroom and en-suite shower room, is one of the features that Jill instantly liked about the house, as guests can be downstairs while the master suite feels like a self-contained apartment. The coombed ceilings grant these spaces a more cottagey feel, while Velux windows again add light and views. "You can lie in bed on a Sunday and see the morning change," she says.

Most of the furniture throughout came from the couple's previous home, although, given they were downsizing, they did offload various pieces in the process. "It was nice to start again as it makes you change things," says Jill. The chalky blue sofas were previously in their "posh" sitting-room, "the one we only ever used at Christmas", yet they fit well with the light palette here. Cosy, tactile

finishes are added in cushions and throws – the throw over the couple's bed is a favourite from Linda Barker's range – while some of the artworks, including the piece hanging on the chimneybreast above the log-burning stove, are by Jill's mother, June Currie.

The garden has also evolved since the couple moved here last year. The previous owners had had a hot tub in one corner, but with that removed Ian lifted the timber decking and rebuilt it on the other side of the garden to form a sun-trap terrace, while stone chips have replaced the small section of lawn.

Although the couple hadn't intended leaving so soon, they're now hankering for a return to a seaside location. "Living here has felt like a gap year; it's brought the two of us closer together because we're further away from people, but we're a bit too far away from those other parts of life that we enjoy," Jill reflects, before adding: "This was the perfect house; I can't imagine finding this again next time round." *

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Top: French doors leading out into the garden.
Below: French-style spice jars



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