



Open *all* hours

Adding a conservatory to the reworked ground floor of their former lodge house has given the Watkinses a light-filled kitchen space with great views

Words: Ysanne Brooks Photography: Darren Chung

Living in an area of outstanding natural beauty clearly has its benefits, but when it came to planning a complete reworking of their former lodge house, Sandra and Ian Watkins found it also had its own particular set of problems. The house, part of the Sudbourne estate in Suffolk, had been owned by the same family for almost 20 years. The ground floor, originally used as a storage space, was a collection of small rooms, while upstairs had a typical Edwardian interior, so the couple knew they'd have to work hard to reconfigure it into the light, open kitchen, dining and relaxation space they were keen to achieve. "We had one set of plans that didn't get the green light because of the area, so we had to resubmit, which delayed things somewhat," reveals Sandra.

Fortunately, they weren't deterred as Ian's business, running a company that buys, leases and manages properties for American students on overseas study programmes, meant he had dealt with planning departments before. The plans were swiftly rejigged and resubmitted and eventually signed off, and it was just as well. "The house as we bought it just wouldn't accommodate the nice open-plan kitchen we wanted. Neither did it have a conservatory, which was important to us. We had one on our previous house and found it worked especially well with our dark winters," says Sandra.

Luckily, the house came complete with planning permission for an adjoining large stable so the couple requested a change of use to turn it into a garage and studio before the work on the main house started so they would be on site to oversee it. After employing a local firm to undertake the building work, and sourcing and commissioning the conservatory, Sandra and Ian set about finding the perfect furniture for the kitchen.

Moneyhill Interiors was well known to the couple; as well as designing a previous kitchen of theirs, owners Celia and Martin were good friends, so the company was an obvious choice. And once Sandra saw the simple-lined Shaker-style Davonport cabinetry, she was sold. "I just wanted something as plain as possible. The island is painted in Farrow & Ball's Downpipe and the base units in Pavilion Grey. Because of the size of the room the layout was already in my head; I knew it needed a big island, but lots of people I spoke to thought it was a mistake. However, Celia and I agreed that it was the size the room required."

To match the cabinetry's Shaker aesthetic, the design itself is clean-lined and simple and Sandra knew exactly what she wanted in terms of storage. "I'm a bit over wall cupboards and besides I'm not very tall so I'd need to get a ladder to get into ►

Opposite page: Although the room feels both light and open, the lower tongue-and-groove ceiling could have made the kitchen area feel comparatively dark, so homeowners Sandra and Ian Watkins have added a vaulted ceiling and included plenty of spots and pendant lights.

Right: A swathe of floor-to-ceiling windows allows for stunning views out to the Suffolk countryside, while the ceiling lantern over the conservatory ensures the sitting and dining area is bathed in light.

them!" she admits. "The kitchen is so big anyway that it doesn't need them and I've also got a walk-in cupboard behind the kitchen kitted out with racks of metal shelving for pots and pans and plates on one side and dry goods on the other."

A keen cook, Sandra is delighted with the way the kitchen works. "It's the most fabulous place to cook. The tall larder built-in cupboard with all my baking equipment in is fantastic because I can get to it easily from the island, but I can also shut it off and the relaxed feel of the whole space means I'm never fazed about how many pots and pans I have out or how many people I might have to feed."

Throughout the finished space there's a real cohesion, from the textures and colours chosen for fabrics and finishing touches to the limestone flooring. "I'm especially pleased with the flooring. We bought it locally and got a really good deal. It stretches outside and all the way through the inside of the house, including the hall into the boot room, larder and downstairs cloakroom, giving it a sense of continuity."

From a collection of small, dark rooms, the couple have reimagined the ground floor of their home into one with bags of light. "The conservatory gets the sun from quite early on and by afternoon it's quite hot so we're thinking about getting an air conditioning unit for when it gets really sunny." However, the success of the space can be measured in how much time the couple spend in here. "In fact, we have another sitting room," Sandra concludes, "but since we finished the work two years ago we've spent just one night in there. The rest of the time we practically live in the kitchen conservatory, come rain or shine." KBB





Above: The simplicity of the cabinetry surrounding it allows the imposing island to be the real centrepiece of this design. A bank of wall-to-ceiling cabinetry to the right conceals the larder and an integrated fridge.

Below: This is quite a traditional scheme, but Miele appliances were chosen for their streamlined feel and ease of use and, where possible, they've been integrated to allow the cabinetry to be the star of the show.

Opposite page: A warm wood worktop and Farrow & Ball's Downpipe on the island help to counter paler tones used elsewhere. Before she retired, Sandra had her own curtain business, so she made the blinds herself from Designers Guild Madhuri Birch fabric.

Q&A

Kitchen designer Celia Warbrick says...



Which element took up the majority of the budget?
Without doubt the cabinetry. It is all hand-crafted in Colchester by Davonport Furniture and then hand-painted.

Biggest challenge with the project?
With a room that size, it was imperative to get the scale of the island correct. We also needed to plan several elements carefully to ensure they all became a harmonious whole as the space needed to incorporate a kitchen, island, dining table with chairs, and an area for relaxing.

What advice do you give clients on finding contractors?
This job was in a very rural area, so the Watkinses found their own builders, but for local jobs we will suggest two or three builders with whom we regularly work. We also offer in-house help with lighting, colours and decoration, if required.

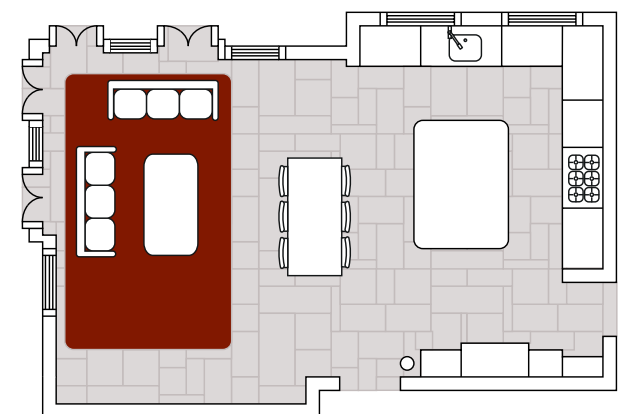
Any tips for people embarking on a similar project?
Make sure you factor in enough time, especially if you need planning permission. Think six months from the first day you start planning your project – then triple it! This is the second large kitchen we have designed for Sandra and she knew exactly the type of kitchen she wanted and even then there were lots of delays because of planning and building issues.





Above: The sink is topped with a Franke tap and also a Quooker boiling-water tap. "Once you've had a hot tap you'll never go back I think. It speeds things up so much," says Sandra. The couple were planning to keep the kitchen uncluttered, but Sandra's passion for collecting ceramics has added a few special pieces.

Left: The wooden dining table is big enough to accommodate family and friends and benefits from plenty of lighting overhead so it is a comfortable place to sit both day and night.





Above: Sandra is a regular home baker so the built-in larder, with its natural wood interior, has been sited at arm's length from the island, making it the perfect place to store all her equipment and ingredients.

SourceBook

DESIGN

Kitchen Celia Warbrick, Moneyhill Interiors (01923 773906 or www.moneyhillinteriors.com)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry Davonport Kensington range (0845 468 0025 or www.davonport.com) hand-painted in Pavilion Grey and Downpipe (on island) by Farrow & Ball (01202 876141 or www.farrow-ball.com)

Worktop 3cm Silestone in Lyra (01256 761129 or www.silestone.co.uk)

Appliances Two single ovens, Sous Chef warming drawer, induction hob, stainless-steel and glass extractor, fully integrated dishwasher and fully integrated fridge, all Miele (0330 160 6600 or www.miele.co.uk)

Taps Franke filter flow mixer tap (0161 436 6820 or www.franke.com); Quooker Pro 3 boiling-water tap (0345 833 3555 or www.quooker.co.uk)

Sink One-and-a-half-bowl stainless-steel undermounted sink, Franke as before

Flooring Limestone. For similar try Fairstone Aluri Riven in Rustic Ochre multi, Marshalls (0345 308 3030 or www.marshalls.co.uk)

Table For similar try Bethan Gray for John Lewis extending dining table (0345 604 9049 or www.johnlewis.com)

Chairs Reproduction Eames DSW chair. For similar try The Conran Shop (0844 848 4000 or www.conranshop.co.uk)

Lights Black pendants, for similar try Franklite FL2290/1/924 Vetross 1 light ceiling pendant in black/gold, Ocean Lighting (01642 245066 or www.oceanlighting.co.uk); Decorative bulb pendant lights, for similar try Buster + Punch (020 7407 0888 or www.busterandpunch.com); Large pendant, Snape Maltings (01728 688303 or www.snapemaltings.co.uk)

Sofa Dalston sofa, The Conran Shop, as before

Rug For similar try the red kelim rug, The Rugs Warehouse (0845 643 6652 or www.therugswarehouse.co.uk)

Curtains (conservatory curtains) Saraille in Zinc and (Roman blinds) Madhuri Birch, both Designers Guild (020 7351 5775 or www.designersguild.com)

Wall clock For similar try Newgate Knightsbridge, John Lewis, as before

Casserole dishes Cream and blue casserole dishes, Le Creuset (0800 373792 or www.lecreuset.co.uk)

Wooden bird For similar try flying seagull mobile, Buy The Sea (01460 57405 or www.buythesea-bymail.co.uk)

Wooden spoon and fork Snape Maltings, as before

Coffee table For similar try the Salcombe driftwood table, Tristan Cockerill (07917 320572 or www.tristancockerill.com)

Decorative ceramic plate Blue hare pattern plate, Old Piggery Pottery (01449 721166 or www.aldercarrfarm.co.uk)

COST

A kitchen from Moneyhill Interiors starts from around £35,000



Top left: The open potboard is ideal for storing yet more of Sandra's cooking paraphernalia, making it easy to access when she's working at the island.

Above: The Silestone Lyra work surface has a gentle vein design, giving it a natural appearance and creating an interesting, textural look without being fussy or overbearing.

Left: A deep warming drawer in the island is large enough to contain several plates at the right temperature before serving. It's adaptable, too, as it can set to cook sous vide or prove bread.