



Susan Williams and Mike Holland have sympathetically remodelled and extended a listed Norfolk granary into a stylish waterside home.



# Boutique CHIC

Story: **Eleanor Wilde**  
Photos: **Steve Taylor**



**W**e love renovating unusual properties, so finding an old granary which had been poorly converted in the 1970s was just our cup of tea," says Mike Holland. "The fact that it was grade II listed wasn't a problem, because we wanted to restore the original industrial elements of the building, but we were also keen to create a far more contemporary interior inspired by boutique hotels."

Mike and his partner, Susan Williams, hoped to restore the listed building and extend the ground floor into the attached boathouse to create a spacious home. Originally built in 1808 from brick, and partially clad in traditional timber weatherboarding, the granary is situated in Stalham Staithe – one of the gateways to the Norfolk Broads – and literally straddles the water. Boats would drop their sails and moor beneath it, collecting grain to transport down the River Ant to the coast. ➔



“Sitting out on the deck enjoying a drink and looking over the water makes us feel as though all the hard work has been worthwhile.”



The Old Granary was originally built in 1808 and has undergone a fantastic conversion – fusing industrial heritage and contemporary space. Exterior lighting has been positioned to wash over the feather-edge boarding and along the water. The sandstone terrace and timber decking offer views over the water. Steps lead down to a partially walled garden and there is a private mooring and an additional wet dock mooring beneath the building, where the wherries were once loaded with grain destined for the coast.





LEFT AND RIGHT The kitchen has been designed to reflect as much natural light as possible, with high-gloss white cabinets and glazed ceramic floor tiles. Folding glass doors open onto the sandstone terrace.



RIGHT The spacious sitting room has been fitted with a home cinema system and the original door hatch was replaced with a section of glass flooring, with lights that illuminate the wetdock below.

"We first saw the granary back in 2004, and were in the middle of buying it when the owner decided that he could get a better price at auction," Mike continues. "In the end we managed to buy it at the auction for less than the original asking price, so it was worth the wait."

Even by 1970s standards, the granary had been very badly converted using cheap materials, although the clay roof pantiles were in sound condition. Five bedrooms shared a single shower room on the ground floor, with ladders leading up to the first and second floors. The back door opened directly over the water, where Mike and Susan have now added a sun deck, and the whole place was tired and dated.

"We took a calculated gamble that we'd be allowed to extend into the single-storey boathouse next door, which had been fitted with up and over aluminium garage doors," says Susan, a freelance marketing consultant. "An existing bricked up doorway proved that the two buildings had once been connected, so the conservation officer was happy for us to reinstate this opening and put a single garage in one part of the outbuilding, with a new kitchen/dining room in the other part, which virtually doubled the size of the ground floor."

This boathouse also proved the perfect place for Mike and Susan to store their tools and materials during the build,

and they completed work on the main house before turning their attention to the extension and finally breaking through the doorway to link the adjoining brick structures. Mike tackled most of the physical work himself, employing occasional labour and tradesmen such as electricians when required. Once planning permission for the extension and new decking had been approved in 2005 – a process →









The boutique style principal bedroom features original floorboards, painted beams and wonderful views over the water through oak framed leaded light windows from both the bed and the free-standing bath.

which also included a flood assessment – he began on the top floor, working his way down through the granary over the next two years until every last inch had been restored with brand new plumbing and wiring.

“A lot of the wires and pipework needed to run underneath the building,” he explains, “so we were often working from a dinghy on the water. Every time we pushed into the wall with a drill the boat would shoot away in the opposite direction, so it wasn’t the easiest way of doing things,” says Mike.

Externally, the oak framed windows have been renovated and the granary has been stripped of its tatty weatherboarding and partially clad in pressure-treated timber, which was machined to match the size of the older timbers on the building. “In order to replace the timber cladding on the river side of the house we had to erect scaffolding on the new decking foundations,” recalls Mike, a retired graphic designer. “Some scaffolding companies wouldn’t even quote for working over the water, so we put in the concrete piers and then built the scaffolding off these so that we could fix insulation and a weatherproof membrane under the new cladding.”

Mike carefully stripped out the interiors of the three-storey building to leave a bare shell, removing flimsy partition walls and exposing the original pulley at the top of the granary which has been carefully restored.



All the floors were stripped, insulation installed, and new partition walls built, so the floorplan has now totally changed.

The entrance hall opens into a WC and a study (formerly the kitchen) with a new glass wall framed in green oak. A spacious sitting room/home cinema boasts exposed oak beams, white painted brickwork and a wall ➔



ABOVE The original granary pulley is a feature in the loft bedroom.

ABOVE LEFT Looking through an original trapdoor in the top floor bathroom to the main bedroom en suite below.

## THE FLOORPLAN

The ground floor hallway opens into a cloakroom, a study and a spacious sitting room which overlooks the new decking – enabling views from the entrance right through to the water. Steps lead down into the single storey kitchen/dining extension with a door through into the garage. The master bedroom and integrated bathroom are positioned on the first floor, together with a guest room and shower room, and bedrooms three and four are located at the top of the house.

of glazing, with access out onto the new timber deck beyond, and one of the most unusual features is a section of structural glass flooring which replaces the original hatch over the water and may be illuminated at night.

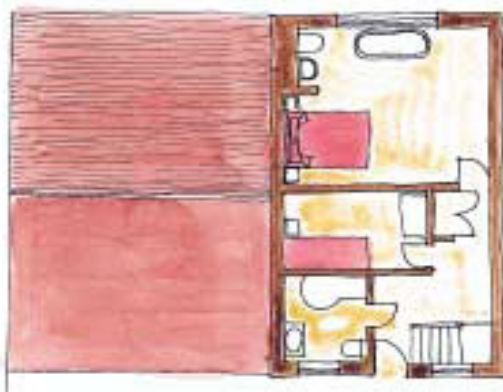
“You can now look right down into the wet dock, where the boats would wait to be loaded with grain,” Susan explains. “We wanted to give the house a nautical flavour without being twee, and the new chrome and timber staircase down into the lower kitchen extension was also designed with this in mind.”

With its exposed roof timbers, high ceiling and white high-gloss units, the kitchen has become the couple’s favourite room in the house. Underfloor heating has been laid beneath the ceramic floor tiles and new folding glass doors lead out to the sandstone terrace beside the water.

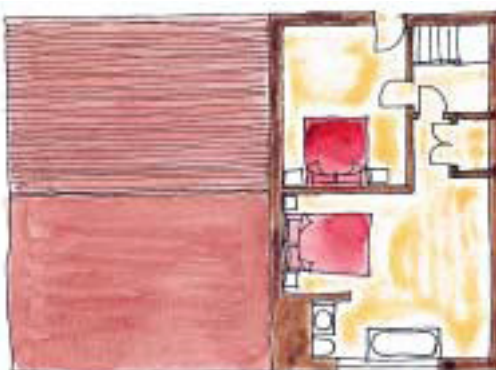
Upstairs, the large first floor landing has a glazed loading gantry door and exposed beams, with nautically-inspired banister rails. A boutique-hotel style master bedroom features original floorboards, painted beams and wonderful views of the water from both the bed and the free-standing bath, which has been positioned beside the oak framed leaded light windows.



Ground floor



First floor



Second floor

“We wanted the main bedroom to have a real wow factor, without breaking the bank, so we took inspiration from some of the European boutique hotels we’ve stayed in,” says Susan, who was responsible for designing the interiors. “Working with a listed building means keeping the original features, but anything new we’ve added is distinctly contemporary.”

“Sitting out on the deck enjoying a drink and looking over the water makes us feel as though all the hard work has been worthwhile, but we still can’t wait to find another property to restore and start all over again!”

## CONTACTS

The Old Granary is on the market with Unique Home Stays

01637 881942, uniquehomestays.co.uk

★ GLASS FLOOR PANEL Pilkington Glass 01744 692000

★ SANITARYWARE, RADIATORS, INTERNAL DOORS

B&Q 0845 222 1000

★ KITCHEN Ikea 0845 358 3363

★ RANGE COOKER Delonghi 0845 600 6845

★ TABLE & CHAIRS Habitat 0870 411 5501

## spotLIGHT

### WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF THE PROJECT?

We were replacing the external weatherboarding during the summer when it was pleasantly warm.

I managed to conquer my fear of heights to scale the scaffolding, and was rewarded with fantastic views of the Norfolk Broads from the top of the house.

### WHAT ABOUT YOUR WORST MOMENT?

Working in the freezing cold with temporary lighting and no plumbing or heating was pretty depressing!

### WHAT WAS YOUR BEST BUY?

We were extremely careful with our budget and managed to find some stylish individual items of sanitaryware from places like B&Q, including the free-standing Philippe Starck style bath in the main bedroom. We also made our own doors using old floorboards for a rustic effect.

### WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

The structural glass floor panel over the water in the sitting room was made by Pilkington and was quite expensive.

### DO YOU HAVE A TOP TIP?

If you’re planning to work with a listed building then contact the authorities before you start, and make sure that you plan well ahead for tradesmen to be on site at the right time to avoid delays.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

Mike and Susan paid £250,000 for the building in 2005 and spent a further £200,000 extending and remodelling it. The four bedroom house is currently valued at £575,000.