



Home maker

Former civil engineer Tom Hawson had no illusions when it came to refurbishing a derelict property outside Jedburgh... which is why hot water and a toilet were not priorities



AT the brightly striped door of Thomas Hawson's home, a stone set in the ground bears the inscription 'Know Thy Self'. A metalwork sculpture of a squawking bird welcomes guests, while the kitchen boasts a large cow. A beautiful red abstract image represents the couple's characters, colouring an unconventionally furnished living space.

Since rejecting a career in civil engineering, Tom recognises his happiness lies in a creative life as a furniture maker, based for the last five years in the Scottish Borders.

Tom's wife, Jenny, was certainly keen to ascertain how well he knew himself (and his capabilities) when they bought a derelict farmhouse and mill on the outskirts of Jedburgh.

"Jenny's father asked if I was scared," laughs Tom, undaunted since he'd helped friends and family with refurbishment projects in the past.

Wise to the commitment involved, he put work on hold for a year and from the outset adhered to the context of the stone buildings, set aside woodland from which his resources –

including oak, birch, elm, willow and alder – are harnessed. Rather than follow a template of rustic style, the couple created a home sensitively tuned to environment, and mirroring the unaffected nature of Tom's work.

Initially, the absence of hot water and a toilet made things interesting, the priority being to make the leaky building watertight. A perforated pipe was placed in a trench dug to foundations, draining water and drying stonework, dehumidifiers positioned beneath suspended wooden floors. Wall cavities were filled with mason's lime mortar, complementary to the building's fabric.

Internal plaster was retained and coated with lime paint that doesn't hide the background condition, allows the building to breathe and moisture to evaporate.

"Jenny was alarmed by the mottled walls," Tom says, "but appreciates them now." The effect, combined with sandstone flooring in the kitchen, evokes a sense of time-honoured practice, in line with Tom's furniture-making skills.

Of late, however, he's been distracted from practical work by a PhD on contemporary Icelandic craft. Back in 1999, Tom studied



The Hawson philosophy encompasses original designs, recycled and salvaged items and, on occasion, Ikea. It was not revealed whether or not the chalk outline at the bottom of the stairs was that of a particularly difficult client

Photographs: KIRSTY ANDERSON

Viking shipbuilding, using its principles in the creation of a chair which was presented in 2000 to the Icelandic parliament as a gift from Holyrood.

Subsequently, Tom visited Iceland as part of a trade mission, establishing support for a project aimed at conserving Icelandic culture while exposing the country's crafts to a wider audience.

A casualty of the project is the round table in his kitchen, repaired after damage in transit between Scotland and Iceland (when it looked as though it had fallen out the plane). Above it, a Perspex pendant light from Denmark reinforces Tom's enthusiasm for Nordic design, encompassing all countries under this umbrella – he even has time for Ikea.

The kitchen is an array of freestanding pieces, from stainless-steel cooker to cast-iron stove and a Belfast sink set within Tom's branch-supported shelving.

Exactly a year after moving in, Tom and Jenny were married in the garden, and evidence of that day is all around, in gifts from artistic friends and pieces the couple commissioned with money received.

Outside, a metalwork sculpture of a squawking bird by Dick McTaggart welcomes guests, while the kitchen boasts a large cow painted by Sally Matthews. A beautiful red abstract image by Alan Turner represents the couple's characters, colouring a living space unconventionally furnished with sofa, bed and bright textiles. A wall-mounted cabinet with spherical insets, in which Tom stashes inspirations and personal artefacts, is one of his first designs.

In the bright study, there's a concession to mass production in the form of an ergonomically designed chair, which allows movement while sitting. It would be futile, Tom suggests, to create such a thing on a bespoke basis, as a whole team exists behind its design.

Jenny enjoyed free rein in specific areas and for the wet room – in an old larder and benefiting from underfloor heating – she chose a wall of bright Moroccan floor tiles. One of Tom's didgeridoos (all hand made to match acoustics of various rooms) produces splendid results there.

Exposed floorboards lead

upstairs, where a loom reveals an experiment in mixing methods and materials – yarn and timber pieces. For Tom, the making process is integral to discovery, one person's mistake another's triumph. He believes, too, that everyone is creative but it isn't always nurtured. Certainly, their son, sleeping as a baby in a willow basket and now in a cot crafted from timber and branches, won't lack creative stimulation.

The main bedroom's stunning centrepiece is a four-poster (Tom made within a few hours) with 'rocket ship' columns providing an illusionary rise to infinity. A willow frame covered in raw wool makes a tactile wall light. In the main bathroom, cupboards were built around an original sink while the toilet and cistern were salvaged from a scrap yard.

Soon, Tom returns to his mill studio, the making process allowing him to determine the impact of his studies on future designs. From making furniture to making a home, his resourceful journey is one of constant self-discovery.

Furniture created to commission: www.thomashawson.com

