

SECOND COMING

A hopeless case on the edge of North Berwick is now an award-winning piece of architecture, thanks to the vision and determination of its owners

Photography Jane Barlow Words Catherine Coyle



DETAILS

What A restored farmhouse and its steadings

Where North Berwick, East Lothian

Architect Studio LBA

Contractor XTO BE ADDEDX



[Left] A number of new openings had to be made to bring in light and to act as entrances. These have been lined in corten steel. [Above] The site plan shows how the various buildings are grouped around the courtyard. This sheltered space was a key element in the reimagining of Williamstone, and both architect and owners were keen to retain as much of it as possible. [Below] The view from inside the glazed corridor attached to the Bothy. Note the metal hooks in the wall, remnants of its previous incarnation as a working farm. [Previous pages] The striking colours of the pantiles and the local sandstone are an integral part of the appeal of these beautifully restored buildings, and the addition of the glazed corridor in no way detracts from this

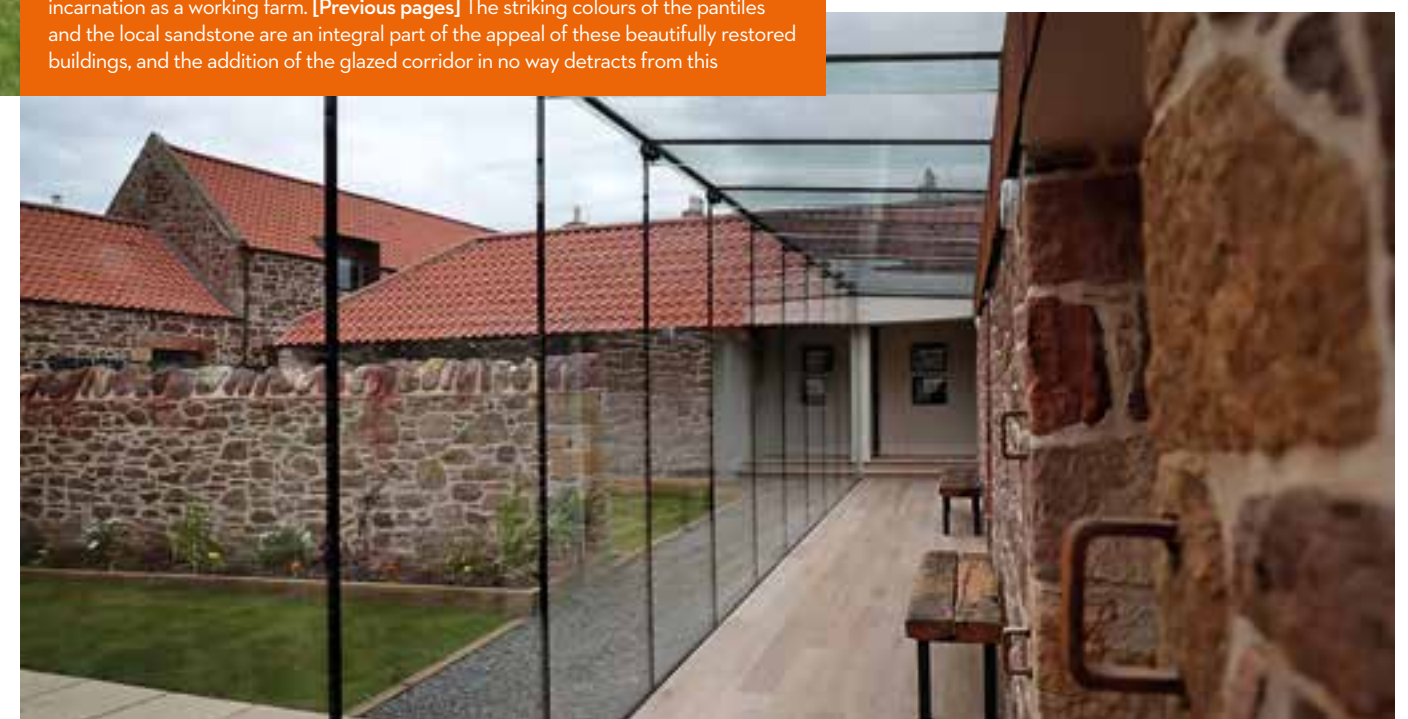
In 2016, when Steph Lothian took on Williamstone Farm Steadings, close to North Berwick, the property had scarcely been touched for nearly 35 years. Not so long ago, it had been an extensive working farm owned and run by a local woman named Stella Moffat; but, as she aged, she began selling off fields to neighbouring farms and the place became increasingly run-down.

“She was a bit of a character, by all accounts – a cigars-and-whisky kind of woman,” says Lothian.

She and her husband Ryan had developed properties before and had been looking for their next challenge

when they came across Williamstone and its steadings near the East Coast seaside town. Stella Moffat’s farm might have been dilapidated, but it was too enticing a prospect to pass up. The Lothians researched the area thoroughly before they went ahead with the purchase. They were looking for a home but also for a business opportunity: “Once we began looking into it, we realised pretty quickly that the farm had a lot of potential and that it was in an ideal location.”

The B-listed farmhouse came with several derelict outbuildings – these they hoped to renovate with a view to running them as holiday accommodation. They ▶





SOUTH WEST ELEVATION, COURTYARD



[Above] So much of the original character of the farm steadings has been retained through the efforts of the architect, builders and owners. [Left] The Bothy's interior, like that of the Barn and the Byre, is spacious, calm and full of low-key luxury. Exposed stonework and ceiling beams add authenticity. The wood-burner is one of RAIS's Scandinavian-style models, supplied by Bonk & Co. Local blacksmith James Boam made the dining furniture



approached architect Lynsay Bell of Edinburgh-based practice Studio LBA, in search of innovation, dynamism and lots of ideas. She was happy to oblige: "The project was to include the conversion of the derelict steadings, as well as major alterations to the farmhouse," recalls Bell. "The aim was to preserve this beautiful collection of original buildings that date back to the 1880s, and allow their character and form to be the focus of the conversion."

Alongside the farmhouse, which was to be the family's home, three distinct spaces were created from the outbuildings. These, named the Bothy, the Byre and the Barn, each have three bedrooms and a kitchen, and have been designed for self-catering guests. The couple and their architect looked to the buildings as a guide on how to strike a balance between the heritage of the site and the desire to create something distinctive.

The Lothians knew that they wanted something contemporary and, from what they had seen in Bell's project portfolio, were confident that she would be able to connect the historic elements of the buildings with a more modern scheme.

The architect was equally keen to respect the local

vernacular and to work with whatever could be salvaged of the ruined buildings. "Our aim was to create a progressive and contemporary conversion project that was very different to its nearby counterparts," she explains.

"We took a design-led approach, with the intention of defining the original fabric of the steadings; any new alterations were sympathetically applied to minimise the impact on the listed buildings.

"The steadings date back more than 130 years and were constructed from a stunning rich, red local sandstone, with red pantile roofs. The picturesque rural setting and the interesting original detailing presented us with a fantastic opportunity to create something unique and progressive."

The buildings are arranged in the form of a closed courtyard, with the two-storey farmhouse sitting to the south. As their names suggest, the Byre had originally been used to house livestock and the Barn was a grain and cart store. The Bothy – thought to be the oldest of the three – enjoys views across farmland and a private orchard. All have now been thoughtfully converted into spacious accommodation, with open-plan living-dining areas. "When we bought them, we could see that they were all pretty derelict, and an in-depth survey confirmed our worst suspicions," says Lothian. "With buildings of this age and style, it was no real surprise that not one wall was straight, and we lost quite a bit of space in straightening them out."

The Bothy, she adds, was the most challenging of the three. "This was due to the falling eaves height and the narrow floor plan," she explains. "The only solution was to extend it into the courtyard."

The most sensitive way to do this turned out to be by adding a glazed corridor, which links the spaces but does not detract from the original stonework or pantile roof. Thanks to a frameless glass roof, the corridor disappears into the eaves of the Bothy, without obscuring its façade, blocking the light or diminishing the impact of the restored exterior. It's a smart means of increasing the footprint without eating up too much of the courtyard, while at the same time reflecting the contemporary nature of the new arrangement.

These old agricultural structures had been designed originally purely for shelter, so new openings in the form of doors and windows had to be created to ▶

“WE’VE DOTTED OLD METAL HANDLES AROUND THE STEADINGS TO ENSURE THE AGRICULTURAL PAST REMAINS DEFINED AMID THE CONTEMPORARY INTERIORS”



[Above] The Byre shares the general scheme of rugged wood and industrial metal paired with stylishly restrained furnishings. Rachel Richmond of Edinburgh’s Hen & Crask was responsible for much of the interior design. [Opposite] Two views of the main living area in the Barn. The mezzanine helps give it an open, airy feel, enhanced by the thin banisters and open treads of the staircase

countryside, as well as for its weather-resistant qualities. The architect is also fond of the way it looks: “Corten steel is characterised by its initial reddish-brown colour,” she explains. “But, as it thickens and its texture become rougher, the colour deepens to a rich dark-brown patina.”

This framing helps to distinguish the existing openings from the new ones, shows off the thickness of the stone walls and serves as a link with the palette of exposed red sandstone and traditional roof tiles. Here, the existing openings have been glazed in line with ▶

give better light and access. Corten steel has been used to line all of these new openings; the material was chosen to match the rural farming aesthetic of the surrounding





[Left] The owners didn't want to disguise the fact that these were once fully operational agricultural buildings, but some of the rougher edges have gone. Now it is the beauty of the stone that comes to the fore, with hints of the farm setting. The touches of green in this bedroom in the Byre, for instance, echo the expanse of fields and farmland beyond the windows



the new ones to maintain the buildings' thermal line and to highlight the contemporary sleeve that is layered behind the existing stone.

The interiors of the Byre, Bothy and Barn are deliberately different so each has a clear identity, but they also have features in common, such as exposed beams, vaulted ceilings and bare internal brickwork.

“As a nod to the fact that this was for a long time a working farm, we have dotted old metal handles and hooks around the steadings,” points out Bell. “These features ensure the agricultural past remains defined amid the contemporary interiors.”

Lothian pushed for a pared-back and fresh feel, even while referencing the farm's roots. In the Barn, for example, a mezzanine keeps the space open, while a RAIS Scandinavian wood-burning stove from Bonk & Co is a modern take on an open fire. Poggenpohl kitchens for each of the buildings were sourced and installed by kitchen specialists JS Geddes, with the soft furnishings by Rachel Richmond at Hen & Crask. There's a blend of bespoke, high-street and artisan elements in each dwelling. Local blacksmith James Boam was drafted in to make breakfast-bar stools, dining tables and benches, each set of which has its own quirks specific to the building it was designed for.

“We wanted each of the three steadings to feel different,” says Lothian, who project-managed the build. Industrial-style lighting by **ADD NAME** and engineered oak flooring by **ADD NAME** offer a sense of continuity, but each space has its own personality thanks to textiles, accessories and gentle colour, without upstaging the rural location. It's no surprise to hear that this project won the Best Renovation/Conversion category at The Herald Property Awards for Scotland at the end of 2018. ■