



# A NEW CHALLENGE

John and Deborah Garner have doubled the size of their historic hillside cottage so seamlessly that few visitors can distinguish the old part from its more recent additions

FEATURE **PATRICIA PETT** STYLING **KATHRYN TYLER** PHOTOGRAPHS **JOAKIM BORÉN**

**T**he Tamar Valley in the glorious county of Devon knows a thing or two about passion. It was where the scandalous duchess Georgina conducted her affair with *Monarch of the Glen* artist Sir Edwin Landseer and where, two centuries later, in 2006, John and Deborah Garner were captivated by a small former holiday home that was built in 1900. They loved the cottage so much that they bought it without even knowing whether their plans to extend it would be permitted. John had recently taken early retirement and their daughter Sarah had left home to study at university.

So it was the right time for the Garners to downsize from their Northamptonshire house and follow their dream of living in the Devon countryside where they'd so often visited. 'We decided to make the move right away while we were still young enough to take on a new life and a bit of a project,' says Deborah. Their ideal home would be located close to a river, have wonderful rural views and afford total peace and tranquility. They started buying the *Western Morning News* and spotted this cottage for sale among the property ads; it seemed to offer everything they wanted, so they went to view it.

**ABOVE** The original cottage was built in 1900 and extended two years ago  
**OPPOSITE TOP** A vintage jar and old packaging add interest to the windowsill in the kitchen



## KEY FACTS

**Location** Devon

**Period** The property was built in 1900 as a fishing lodge for the Duke of Bedford. It was occupied by the estate's ghillies (fishing and hunting guides) until 1956 when it was sold to pay death duties. The cottage was then rented out to holidaymakers for 50 years before being sold to the current owners

**Size** Three bedrooms with two acres of garden

**Owners** John and Deborah Garner have two border collies, Dusk and Sky, and three chickens. Until he retired, John worked in healthcare marketing



'We almost didn't find it because it's off a lane and along a winding half-mile track of private woodland,' recalls Deborah. 'Then quite suddenly we were gazing at this little fairytale cottage in the woods. It was on the edge of a hillside and we could hear the river rushing along the valley below towards a weir, and we just looked at each other and said, "This is it!"' 'We bought it on the spot,' John admits. 'We didn't even quibble over the price tag.' Only afterwards did he and Deborah face the fact they might not get planning permission to extend it and would be living in more of a holiday home than a permanent residence.

Undaunted, though, they called in local architect, Stuart Bayley of Living Space, to draw up plans. 'The cottage was just a two-up, two-down,' explains Stuart, 'and the Garners wanted to more than double the area. The existing sitting room would remain, but the kitchen on the other side of the front door would become a small dining room. Then a whole new kitchen, utility room and cloakroom would be created in an extension, with two further double bedrooms – including the master – upstairs.' Wasn't there a risk of losing the historic appeal of the house amid such vast alterations? 'Yes indeed,' says >

**ABOVE LEFT** John and Deborah like to have afternoon tea on their sun deck, and are often joined by their hens Helga and Yvette  
**ABOVE** A trio of antique jugs stands on a carved wooden table, which dates from the days of the Raj – it was a gift from Deborah's grandfather