



This page **Jan and Peter's 18th-century chateau is at the end of a tree-lined avenue** Facing page, clockwise from top **A misty morning in the unspoilt Normandy countryside; the house is surrounded by fields; fresh produce doesn't get any more local than this; the beautiful front garden boasts huge camellia and hydrangea bushes; Jan picks perfectly ripe blackberries for her autumn recipes**



Once in a lifetime

Eight years ago, Jan and Peter Rhodenbaugh-Gibson moved from London to Normandy, where they turned an 18th-century chateau into a beautiful B&B

PHOTOGRAPHS CAROLINE ARBER FEATURE GABI TUBBS







Facing page **Jan and Peter** have designed a functional kitchen in this room, which still contains its original fireplace and beams This page, clockwise from above **Jan** loves cooking, entertaining and running cookery classes from her farmhouse-style kitchen; the farmhouse table and ladder-back chairs were all bought locally; silver cooking utensils and stainless steel splashbacks hint at the fact that the room was designed by a serious foodie; Jan makes delicious jam and apple and blackberry crumbles

Jan and Peter Rhodenbaugh-Gibson's closest friends have a lot to answer for. Eight years ago, they invited Jan and Peter – who were living in Notting Hill – to view their new summerhouse on the west coast of Normandy. 'We were immediately seduced by our friends' new lifestyle,' explains Jan. 'Moreover, it happened to be a gorgeous, sunny weekend, which is not always the case in northern France!'

In gung-ho fashion, the couple found themselves checking out properties in local estate agents and, back in London, the idea of moving became even more attractive. Both were in professions that could accommodate a move abroad – Peter is an architect and town planner while Jan is a Prue Leith trained chef – so it wasn't long before they hatched a plan to buy a home that they could also run as a B&B. After visiting a handful of properties they stumbled upon the perfect place. 'The day we were shown our 18th-century chateau we jumped up and down with joy,' Jan remembers. 'At the end of a rather grand, tree-lined drive we found a beautifully proportioned home with wonderful high ceilings.'

To their delight, the previous owners had looked after the chateau extremely well and, aside from fitting a new kitchen, renewing some of the



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plumbing and rewiring the electrics, the interior merely needed updating.

Cheap and chic

As a chef, it's no surprise that Jan was keen to create a bespoke kitchen in the chateau. She decided to combine dark wood furniture and stainless steel splashbacks and worktops with the existing 18th-century fireplace, oak beams and terracotta tiles. 'It's the hub of the house,' says Jan. 'The room also doubles as an informal dining room – it's perfect for serving guests breakfast, especially when Peter lays a good fire!' For ease and lightness, Jan painted the walls throughout in a shade of white, which beautifully complements the original flooring: small hexagonal 'tomettes' in the reception rooms, encaustic clay tiles in the hall and white marble in the sitting room.

As the critical work cost more than originally expected, the couple had to furnish the home on a shoestring. Dark wood furniture contrasted with white walls creates a 1920s feel in the sitting room while upstairs, antique wooden and iron beds are dressed with crisp linen and vintage American patchwork quilts. 'Peter left the frippery to me,' says Jan. 'I spent every weekend visiting)



Facing page, clockwise from top Jan found the 1930s writing desk and mirror in the sitting room from local brocantes; a collection of small trinkets are displayed on the mantelpiece; the armchair was found at Camden Look and the lithograph is by Bernard Buffet
 This page Apart from the white Ikea sofas, all the furniture in the sitting room was bought from antiques shops or at auction



local brocantes, auctions and *vide-greniers* (house clearances), painstakingly sifting through the junk.'

And are the couple happy with how the chateau looks now? 'We want to remove the dark wood panelling from the formal dining room,' says Jan. 'But, aside from that, we love it. We could never afford this kind of lifestyle in England and it's such a joy to cook here. There are incredible food markets and plenty of fresh local produce, we can even pick blackberries from the country lane close to the house – perfect for making blackberry and apple cobbles!' H&A

For details of the B&B accomodation at Chateau Le Conterie, call 0033 233 496926 or visit laconterie.net





Facing page, clockwise from top left **A 19th-century chest; voile curtains; French antiques have been combined with contemporary pieces** This page, clockwise from top left **This patchwork bedspread was made from old suiting tweeds; a vintage clock sits on a pile of blankets; the bathroom uses a simple monochrome palette**



GET THE LOOK



- 1** 'Crespo' chair, £975 and 'Crespo' ottoman, £475, Barker and Stonehouse. 0844 420 4220; barkerandstonehouse.co.uk
- 2** 'Bloom' centrepiece, £180, John Lewis. 08456 049049; johnlewis.com
- 3** Mauviel M'Heritage copper dish, £142.99, Cookware by CSN. 0800 917 7655; cookwarebycsn.co.uk
- 4** 'Ambra' cushion, £35, Habitat. 0844 499 4686; habitat.co.uk
- 5** 'Duppeon' silk cushion, £25, Heal's. 0870 0240 780; heals.co.uk
- 6** Table lamp, £240, Original BTC. 020 7351 2130; originalbtc.com
- 7** 'Elysee Noir' dressing table, £497, Graham & Green. 0845 130 6622; grahamandgreen.co.uk
- 8** 'Renaissance Gold' espresso cup, £24, Wedgwood. 01782 404045; wedgwood.com