



Words by Susan DeBorja, Photography by Sophie Conran and the team



# Escape to the *Country*

Step inside Temple Guiting Barn, a very special retreat designed by **Sophie Conran**



Versatile, down-to-earth, wise and warm, Sophie Conran is someone many of us would love to have on speed dial. As a cook, writer and designer, she's always hungry for new adventures and collaborates with leading brands from Portmeirion to Axminster carpets. But if you want an insight into her philosophy then Temple Guiting, a dreamy rural retreat, is the place where her talents come together with ease and subtlety.

Owned by Steven Collins, a property investor with shareholdings in Chelsea Harbour and the Royal Exchange, Temple Guiting, near Cheltenham is a Grade I listed manor house which is mentioned in the Domesday Book. "One of my friends knew Steven and heard he wanted to rejuvenate his

country house," Sophie explains. "He was thinking about including some kind of cooking activity and she told me I had to get involved. On my first visit, I fell in love, even though the place was a building site."

Steven had decided to redevelop the property, working hand in hand with architect Ptolomy Dean, who specialises in listed buildings, and Jimmy Blom, an award-winning landscape gardener.

Sophie's project was to work on a barn conversion behind the house to provide the perfect backdrop for guests to enjoy bespoke country house parties. The two buildings had previously been used for industrial and agricultural purposes so making them into a welcoming, exclusive retreat was a year-long adventure.

**PERIOD IDEAS SAYS...**  
Try using white tableware with subtle details for informal entertaining and brunches.



## REAL HOMES Barn Conversion



"It was wonderful to have a blank canvas to work from," says Sophie. "The barns formed three sides of a square with beautiful views of the countryside and even a lake to enjoy. Just seeing the ducks on the water lifts my spirits. Temple Guiting is a very special place where time seems to slow down so it is ideal for landmark occasions and important events."

Eager to reflect this remarkable atmosphere, Sophie's signature style – classic, comfortable and nurturing couldn't be bettered. Steven had built up a wonderful collection of furniture, lighting and paintings and she was keen to see how different pieces could work together. "It was really good fun. We

gathered some other bits from antique shops, fairs and markets and I loved the whole process. It was great to spend time wandering around and seeing what appealed to us. Steven is a very intuitive collector so my designs evolved around the pieces we found," she says.

### Colour therapy

Sophie's starting point was the structure itself. "My schemes have to be sensitive to the architecture. It dictates the finishes and materials used and I believe that, above all, a house has to be comfortable. I like to see bits of old stone wall and other quirks in a property:"

#### TRY THIS

Follow Steven's lead and go with your instincts. Throwing away a wishlist can lead to new discoveries.

## Sophie's Top Tips

- Remember light will affect colours and fabrics in different ways. Natural and artificial light can warm up a room or make a space appear cold.
- Get to know your home intimately so you can see how the light changes during the day and throughout the seasons. This will help you when choosing wallpaper, curtains and soft furnishings.
- If you love pattern, you should use it. It can be fantastic to mismatch patterns as long as you work carefully with colours. You should aim for a seamless harmony rather than an eye-popping clash.
- My kitchen is painted bright pink after my daughter Coco and I were inspired by some packaging, but it works because everything else in the room is black and white. You can get used to bold colours which make a statement quite quickly but choose ones which suit your home rather than being a slave to fashion.
- If you are redecorating a room for children, get them involved in the whole creative process. When I was putting together a new scheme with Coco we pulled out images from magazines and looked at fabrics together.
- Make a time line of your project. Put everything that needs to be done on it, keep reminding yourself about it and get on with it. Block out time in your diary and don't overcomplicate things.
- If in doubt keep every step simple. Remember that you are committing to improving your house and lifestyle and this can become a life-long journey so relish it.



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SOPHIE CONRAN, DESIGNER



## REAL HOMES Barn Conversion



She based her initial designs on colours that worked beautifully together. "I wanted every guest room to have a slightly different feel," she says. "There is no 'best room' here but everyone has their favourite. I've noticed how different people seem to be drawn to different rooms and my personal favourite is the pink bedroom. It has a very small bathroom and it's so girly and luxurious."

From the French-style blue bedroom to the clean lines of the African room, a common theme unites the whole. "When I was putting together rooms, I thought about how people would move around in them. I pictured where they would walk, sit and stand," says Sophie. Her logical approach is crucial, as it can be so easy to fall in love with furnishings without considering if they will actually be user-friendly. "You need to be

*Need to know*  
Daylesford is one of our favourite places in the Cotswolds for a day out and Broadway is also a gem.

very considered when working out if you should add anything to an existing scheme or not. It's all about being practical," she adds.

The shared kitchen and dining space illustrates the point perfectly, proving that there's nothing dull about ease and efficiency.

The white high-gloss island unit draws the eye to a 12-seater dining area facing floor-to-ceiling windows. Shapely white chairs, similar to the ones in Sophie's Baywater home, contrast with the huge timber table.

The whole room is light and airy, with a pale stone floor and plenty of space to move freely.

### Foodie frenzy

This is the creative hub of the building where guests gather for lovely dinners or demonstrations from Sophie's retinue of experts. "I invited friends and

colleagues to run courses here and so far the foodie options have been very popular," she says.

With chefs such as Siye Cyngell, Galton Blackinton and the Hairy Bikers available, guests can enjoy learning about everything from baking to seafood. Mixology (the art of cocktail making), chocolate making and crafts are also on offer, and if you love the great outdoors, you can go clay pigeon shooting, Nordic walking and hiking. "We unveiled a shepherd's hut complete with a hot tub this summer and also offer beauty treatments," says Sophie.

It's easy to picture the barn filled with people, congregating in the kitchen diner or in deep conversation in the drawing room. Indeed, Sophie had her own hen party here last year before she tied the knot with financier Nick Hofgren in Bermuda.

"We love having birthday parties here and also run corporate events for companies such as Coutts and Vodafone," she says. "I work with a great team from my business partners to the gardeners and housekeepers to ensure that every guest finds a calm and clean space. It's really a canvas for them to make their own and the service we provide will enhance their experience. People are astounded by how beautiful Temple Guiting is and feel that it is a very inspiring and nurturing space. We have been researching properties in Buckinghamshire and the South of France to see if we can offer similar experiences, but for the moment we're concentrating on making the Manor and the Barn as comfortable as possible."

### See for yourself

The barn sleeps up to 10 adults in five ensuite king sized bedrooms and it costs from around £2,200 for a weekend. There is also extra accommodation, sleeping up to 12 in the Cow Byre and The Manor House next door. Bespoke house parties and stays cost from £450 per person.

For more details visit [sophiecorrantg.com](http://sophiecorrantg.com), email [info@sophiecorrantg.com](mailto:info@sophiecorrantg.com) or call 020 7706 1309 to make a reservation.

