

LIFESTYLE

Dominic Bradbury meets Angie and Simon Lewin, who split their time between Norfolk and Scotland, and whose successful textiles and design company reflects their natural surroundings

PHOTOGRAPHS RORY CARNEGIE

As an artist who takes her inspiration from nature, Angie Lewin could hardly have chosen two more sublime landscapes for her work and home. There's the gentle, green and open countryside of Norfolk, with its broad fields and big skies, and then the more rugged hills and river valleys of Speyside in Scotland, where Angie and her husband, Simon, have a second home. The two of them now split their time between these very different rural retreats, where their lives are focused upon art, design and making the most of the natural beauty that surrounds them.

Angie's work as a printmaker, illustrator and fabrics designer is informed by the plants and seed heads she finds on her walks and in her garden. Dandelions, feathers and flower heads may translate into the fabrics that she designs for St Jude's, the textile and design company that she co-founded with Simon. Her work has a fresh warmth, but is also infused with the careful craftsmanship of the mid-century artists and textiles designers that she so admires, from Edward Bawden to Eric Ravilious, Peggy Angus to Lucienne Day.

'There is a lot of cross-referencing between the prints and my other work,' says Angie. 'There isn't really a clear line between the different mediums. But my subject matter is quite consistent and you get the essence of what a plant >



Angie Lewin stands in her Scottish studio (far left) with some of her botanical illustrations. When not in Scotland, Angie and Simon live in Norfolk (left). The bespoke shelving in their Scottish cottage (below) was designed by Dualchas

is without it being botanically accurate. When you do that, then you can develop other ideas and design patterns from it. I do incorporate new elements and my work does move on, but I never just jump from subject to subject.'

The Lewins founded their company seven years ago after moving from London to Norfolk. Angie studied printmaking at Central St Martins and Camberwell College of Arts and was working as a book illustrator and artist when she first met Simon, who was then a freelance graphic designer. They left London for a house on the north Norfolk coast, but were soon tempted inland by an eighteenth-century home made up of three small former labourers' cottages knocked into one, with a winding staircase at either end. A large garden allowed Angie room to indulge her passion for planting, with space enough left over for a modest timber studio. The house was called St Jude's, which name they gave to their new fabrics company.

'Norfolk was a natural choice for us,' says Simon. 'My brother and I spent our childhood holidays here and when we decided to leave London, Norfolk really felt right. It was a place we had fallen in love with. Originally the plan was to spend long weekends up here, but within six months we were here nearly all of the time.'

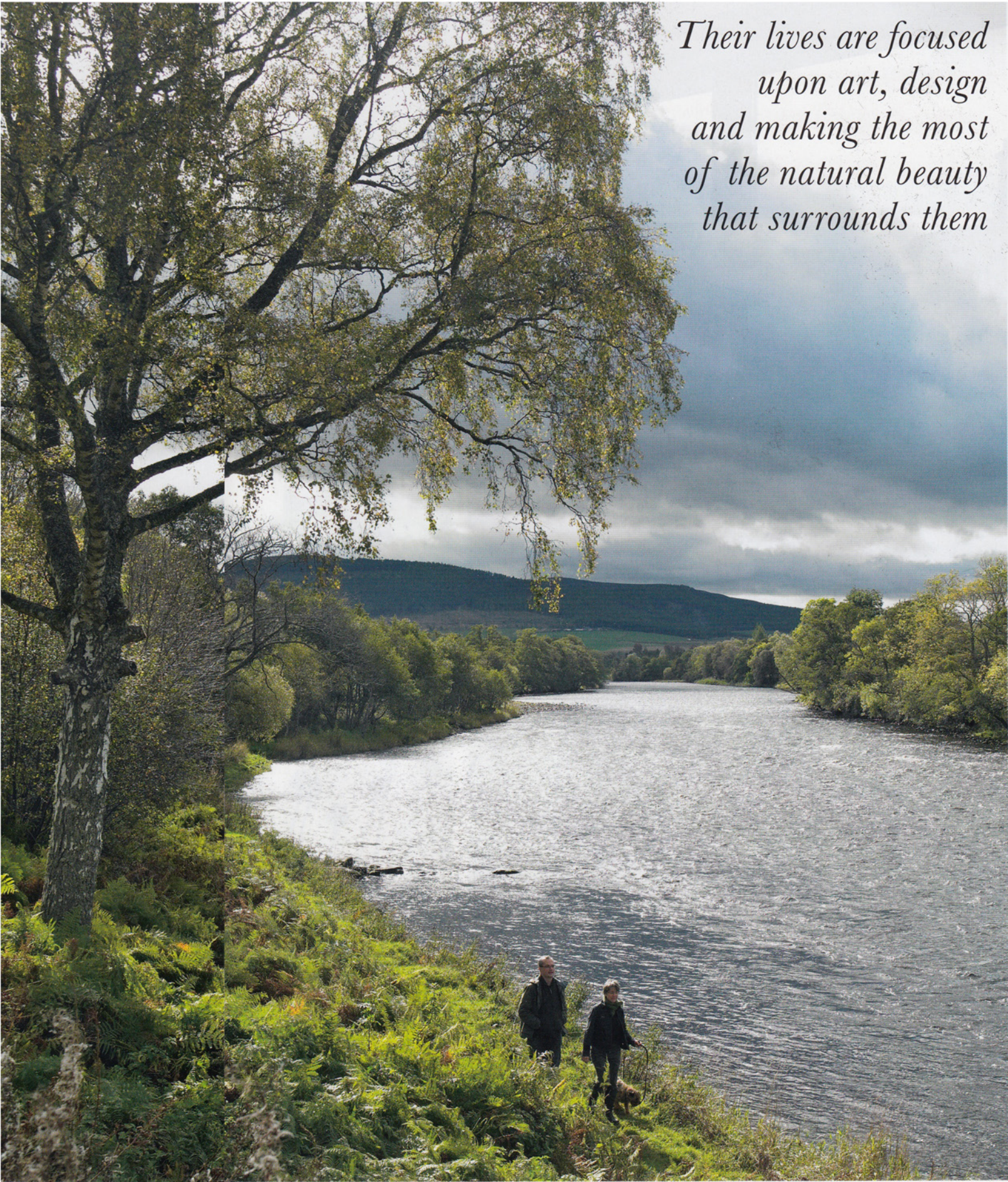
The Lewins updated the house and introduced a lively mix of mid-century pieces and artwork by Angie and



their friends, along with vintage posters by Bawden and others. There's a new kitchen made of curving plywood and space upstairs for Simon's office. They initially launched St Jude's from home, beginning with textiles created by Angie alone, but then added patterns designed by a chorus of other like-minded designers, such as Mark Hearld and Emily Sutton. There is something refreshingly old-fashioned about this friendly craft collective, which overlaps intimately with the Lewins' social world.

Their friends Will Brown and Marie Willey of clothing company Old Town, based in nearby Holt, offered advice and support when Angie and Simon started the company and contributed two patterns to the St Jude's line. The fabrics – which are stocked by Liberty and a network of retailers across the country, as well as dealers in the States – are also used for cushion covers and other occasional lines, such as tote bags, and Simon and Angie are now expanding into wallpapers as well.

'There is a definite theme and sense of connection between the designs, as the other designers we work with have similar passions and interests,' says Simon. 'But at the same time, the end product always feels very individual. Angie and I work together closely on St Jude's, but there >



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FAR LEFT CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT St Jude's, the Lewins' Norfolk home, is also the name of their design company. Angie and Simon chat outside the village shop. The Lewins' fabrics company has the atmosphere of a craft collective. The renovated kitchen has curving plywood units with Formica surfaces. In the sitting room, cushions are covered in St Jude's fabrics. LEFT The Lewins enjoy walking along the banks of the River Spey. BELOW Angie's Scottish studio is filled with the natural objects that provide inspiration for her designs





is quite a good definition to our roles. Angie acts as a designer in her own right, but also talks to the other artists about colourways and so on. I deal with more of the day-to-day running of the company with Kate, our studio manager. Both Angie and I also see ourselves as curators of the range.'

For some years the Lewins also ran a gallery in Norfolk, but then they decided to focus on building the fabrics business through expanding their sales online and through shops such as Tinsmiths in Ledbury and Clement Joscelyne in Norwich. Angie and Simon have recently opened a studio office in Norwich and have enjoyed spending more time in the city.

'There is definitely more going on in Norwich than ever before,' says Simon. 'We go to events at Norwich Arts Centre or exhibitions at the Sainsbury Centre. It's also a starting point for business trips to London and then friends will come up from London on the train and see us at weekends.'

Over the last few months, they have found that not having the commitment of running their own gallery has also given them more freedom and time to spend at their Scottish home. This is a small cottage with a converted barn – or steading – alongside. They bought the derelict farmstead back in 2003 and began by rescuing the cottage, which had been taken over by the local farmer's sheep.



But they always hoped to do something with the barn, and after getting in touch with architect Mary Arnold-Forster, of Dualchas, they began work on converting the L-shape stone building into a new studio for Angie, with room enough for a kitchen, a dining room and a bedroom. They were surprised at how spacious the barn became when the old partition walls were removed and centuries of dirt were dug out of the floors. Large windows were discreetly added to one side with dramatic views over the hills.

'I liked the idea of keeping all the openings as they were in terms of size on the side of the barn that faces the road, so that when you see the house from the road or the



A derelict barn at the Lewins' Scottish home was turned into a studio (above and below left). Angie's designs are inspired by the natural world (above right). Seed heads are a commonly used motif in St Jude's fabrics (below right)



Mary Arnold-Forster of Dualchas helped the Lewins to restore the L-shape barn that formed part of their steadings in Speyside (top). Vintage Ercol chairs and a reclaimed wood table from Retrouvius create an informal yet stylish dining area (left). Angie and Baxter the Border terrier enjoy the view of the Scottish landscape from the large windows of the converted barn (below)



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driveway, you don't immediately realise that it has changed at all,' says Angie. 'It's only on the opposite side that we have really altered it and put in those big windows, which bring in so much light.'

There is also a room put aside for music, populated by Simon's drum kit and a double bass. As well as early jobs at an advertising agency and as a freelance print consultant, Simon was a drummer in a band for a couple of years and then set up a record label called Fused & Bruised. Music still draws him in when he's not at work.

'I mainly practise my drumming in Scotland, as the lack of near neighbours means I can make a fair amount of noise,' says Simon. 'I'd like to think that Angie is reasonably impressed with my drumming, although not while she is wood engraving. When I was 40, I took up the double bass again, having played it at school. And I told myself I'd play it in public before I was 50. I thought that seemed entirely reasonable, but two years in, I'm already panicking.'

The Lewins spend almost half of their time in Scotland, now that Angie has a studio established there, and both are able to carry on with their work just as well as when they are in Norfolk. They enjoy their walks on the hills and by the River Spey as much as their outings along the beach at Morston in north Norfolk. Angie has also designed a textile pattern for the nearby Knockando Woolmill, which has just undergone a £3.5 million restoration project.

'When we first started coming up to Scotland, it was more for spells of time that we treated as holidays, although we usually have a problem separating holidays and work,' says Simon. 'And now we do tend to come up for bigger chunks of time...'

'The landscape in Scotland has become a powerful inspiration for my work, as did Norfolk,' adds Angie. 'I had a brief period as a garden designer, which I really enjoyed, and that led to more of an interest in plant forms and the landscape. The subject matter is right for me and has recognisable colours and themes. I like to focus on what I enjoy' □

St Judes: 01603-662951; www.stjudefabrics.co.uk
Angie Lewin: www.angielewin.co.uk | Knockando Woolmill: www.knockandowoolmill.org.uk | Dualchas: 01471-833300; www.dualchas.com | 'St Jude's in the City', an exhibition of prints, paintings and collages by Angie Lewin, Emily Sutton and Mark Hearld, May 23–June 2 at The Coningsby Gallery, 30 Tottenham Street, W1