

Patron Saints

The Norfolk surroundings of the design duo St Jude's play a starring role in their printed textiles with a classic Fifties graphic style

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The county of Norfolk has always been a good place to make for if you are an artist. It may not be the easiest part of the country to get to, but for photographers, writers and artists, the wide-open landscape has a powerful effect. That's certainly true of print-maker Angie Lewin who, after moving to north Norfolk eight years ago with her husband Simon, found her artwork taking a fresh direction, inspired by nature and the landscape. More recently, she has successfully translated her work into fabric designs, featuring abstract seed pods, curling plants and countryside vistas, sold under the St Jude's label. This husband and wife business has rapidly expanded, as they have opened a new gallery shop in the Norfolk market town of Aylsham.

'Being in Norfolk meant that I ended up with work which had a really consistent theme to it, very much inspired by nature,' says Angie, who also worked as a garden designer just before moving up from London.

'It seemed a natural progression to begin designing textiles because as a print-maker I understood the whole printing process a lot more than I would if I was a painter. And some of the themes I was looking at in my work applied well to these fabrics, which have quite a Fifties crafted feel.'

Angie, who trained at Central St Martin's and then Camberwell School of Art, originally worked as an illustrator for magazines, packaging and cookery books, while continuing her own print-making. Simon worked as a freelance graphic designer, although there was also a spell as a drummer and running his own record label. Website design has been a big part of his work, having designed an award-winning site for Intravel and many others. St Jude's offered the perfect opportunity to combine Angie's artistry and ideas with Simon's experience in design and marketing.

'It was a great opportunity to work together, with Angie working on the

opposite Simon and Angie Lewin in front of one of Angie's prints; cushions and curtains from the St Jude's label furnish their Norfolk home



Upfront Grand Master St Jude's

who Angie and Simon Lewin

lives North Norfolk

background After graduating in print-making from Central St Martin's and then Camberwell School of Art, Angie worked as an illustrator while making her own art prints. Simon worked as a graphic and web designer, and for a time ran his own record label. The couple launched their interior textile label, St Jude's, last autumn, and opened a shop in Norfolk in January

famous for Reviving traditional British printed textiles that are inspired by nature with a graphic Fifties style



The shop certainly has the same flavour as Angie and Simon's own house – an amalgamation of three estate workers' cottages that is also called St Jude's

textile designs and then me going off and working out how to sell and promote them,' says Simon. 'At first we just went for designs and colourways we liked ourselves, because we thought that if the worst came to the worst, we would be using this fabric around the house for years. But thankfully the fabrics sold quickly and it became very exciting. The same is true of when we started using the fabric for our own products: seeing the first set of curtains and cushion covers was inspiring for both of us.'

St Jude's first fabric collection launched last autumn, with three of Angie's ranges – Dandelion One and Two and Seedheads. The launch generated so much interest that the couple soon realised that they would need more space for the business, as they were both working from their country cottage, complete with Angie's studio in the back garden. They started looking for a workshop, but came across a double-fronted Victorian shop in Aylsham with a showroom at the front and work space at the back. They fell for it, and at once the idea of opening their own shop was added to their business plan.

The St Jude's shop and gallery opened last January, selling not just the fabrics but also mid-century furniture, contemporary ceramics and other pieces for the home, most of them sourced by Simon. It has the feel of a stylish front room, as if an extension of the couple's home. Yet it is also a gallery, selling a range of prints by contemporary artists alongside pre- and post-war artists and designers including Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious. Angie's own prints, meanwhile, are sold by a small network of other galleries, including the Bircham Gallery in nearby Holt.

The shop certainly has the same flavour as Angie and Simon's own house – an amalgamation of three estate workers' cottages that is also called St Jude's. 'He's also the patron saint of lost causes,' says Angie, 'so we thought it would be a good



idea to have him on side.' Parts of the house date back to the 1700s, although it has been much added to and adapted over the centuries.

Simon and Angie moved to St Jude's about six years ago. They had known and loved Norfolk for a long time, after many weekend trips up from Hackney in London, where they lived for many years, and Simon held fond memories of family holidays in the area. They first lived in a cottage at Weybourne, closer to the coast, but eventually decided they would like to be further inland, away from the summer rush on the coast road, and a little closer to Norwich. They also wanted a larger garden and more space for home working.

above St Jude's curtains, cushions and lampshades add splashes of pattern to the living area
above left These cushion covers in Seedheads fabric are made from Angie's screen-printed textiles
far left Parts of the house can be dated back to the 18th-century
opposite The interiors are Fifties-influenced; bespoke furniture was made by specialist maker, Anthony George [01263 588 040]





above Angie and Simon were determined to preserve the character of the house with its old fireplaces, curving plasterwork and various nooks and niches opposite Brickwork and exposed wooden beams are set against birch ply and formica on a marmoleum floor

Simon spotted the house in the local paper twice, a few months apart. 'As we settled into Norfolk after London, the holidaymaker mode finally disappeared and the area became our home,' says Simon. 'And then this place came up and something kept telling us to go and have a look. We came to see the house and that was it.'

Thankfully there wasn't much major structural work to do on the house, but the couple had to dig up all the floors and redo the damp proofing. 'We also had to start from scratch with the plumbing and the electricity,' says Simon. 'We stayed on in the old house for six months while we did the work and built Angie's studio. We felt it was worth putting in the extra investment to get things right because we were planning to be here a long time and wanted to make sure everything was right.'

Simon and Angie were determined to preserve the character of the house, with its

old fireplaces, curving plasterwork and nooks and niches. But they also wanted to stamp their own mark upon the interiors, creating a sympathetic blend of old and new. As with Angie's work and the ethos of their company, the interiors of the house have a strong Fifties influence. Prints by Angie hang alongside others by Bawden, Ravilious and Tom Eckersley, all against gull white walls. Period pieces like the Ernest Race sofa and Fifties Kandya wooden chairs mix with cushions and curtains in St Jude's fabrics.

The kitchen is bespoke, made by Norfolk carpenter and designer Stuart MacCullum, who also worked with the Lewins on their Aylsham shop. Here, the crafted curving lines in birch ply and Formica surfaces contrast well with the rustic brickwork of the walls. The floor is marmoleum, although much of the house has oak floor boards – a bargain from Travis Perkins.

'We decided a long time ago that we would have no carpets downstairs, as we have a dog and we're always in and out of the garden,' says Simon. 'We are really pleased with how it all turned out. As much as we like the idea of a clean, modern interior, it would have felt wrong to take away the randomness of the walls and plaster. We both decided not to impose too much upon it. We didn't want people to come in and think that the interiors really clashed with the fabric of the house itself. But at the same time it was great to really plan a house from scratch, right down to where the light switches should go.'

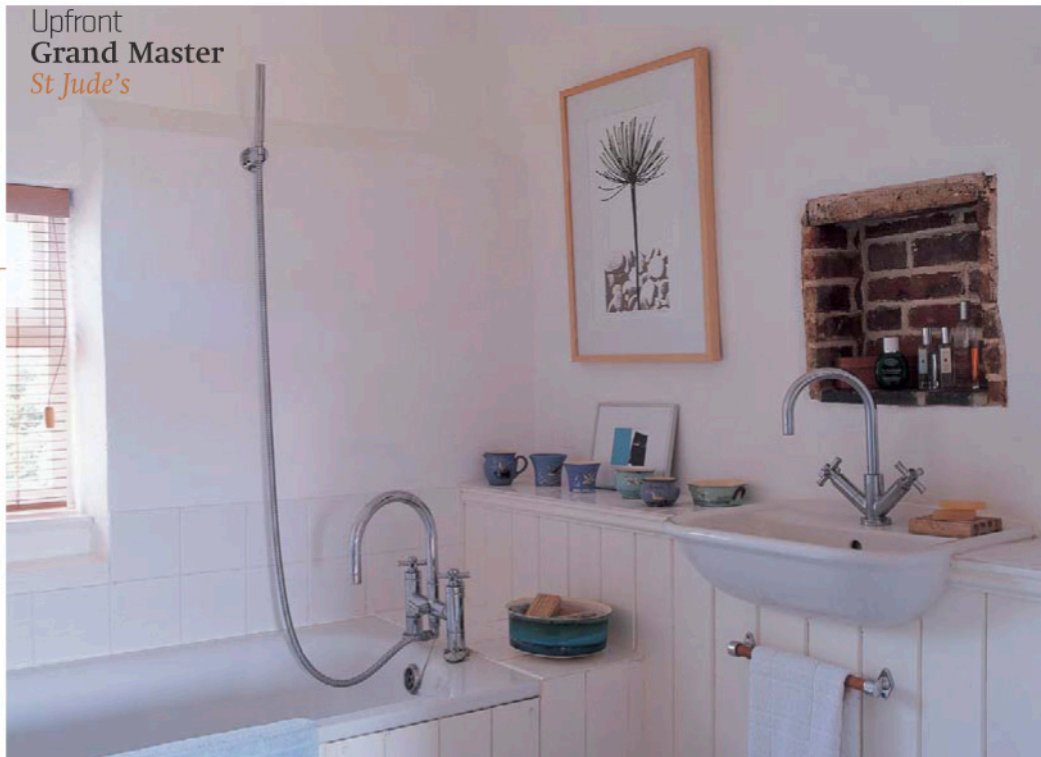
Simon has an office upstairs, where the long landing running through the back of the house also doubles as work space, library and an emergency second guest bedroom, complete with fold down sofa. Now Simon also has space to work at the shop, freeing up some of the pressure on the home.

There is a lot to think about. The Lewins are working on expanding the fabric range with more of Angie's designs and looking

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Upfront
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at expanding sales by working with a small network of independent interiors shops around the country. At the same time, they are also starting to collaborate with other artists and designers on new fabric ranges. They are developing a design with Will Brown of clothing maker and workwear company Old Town, based locally in Holt. Will Brown and his partner Marie Willey are old friends of Angie and Simon, and they played a big part in helping to get St Jude's textiles off the ground. Then there's another new line, Doveflight, designed with artist and print-maker Mark Hearld.

'The idea is to work with other designers and artists who haven't usually handled textiles before, and bring them into a different medium,' says Angie. 'That's what really gives an interest to it. We're

hoping to evolve this mix of my designs, which will be perhaps three-quarters of the collection, and a small family of other designers, like Will and Mark. I really like working on the designs and can give it a continuity but it's also great to collaborate with other artists.'

Unusually, St Jude's will be paying royalties to their other designers while always trying to keep a tight control over every aspect of the business with a big emphasis on craftsmanship and its British roots.

'It's about buying something that isn't in every department store across the country,' says Angie. 'And it's about doing it ourselves rather than just selling ideas to big textile companies. St Jude's will always be close-knit.' ★

St Jude's [01263 735 777; stjudes.co.uk]

top The bathroom retains a period feel with wood panels and exposed brick offsetting another of Angie's screenprints
left Cushions from the new range, Doveflight, that St Jude's has developed in collaboration with the artist and print-maker Mark Hearld