



THE MIDDLE WAY

Refurbishing the interior of a gutted Norfolk cottage as a homage to Mid-century Modern British design inspired Angie Lewin and her husband Simon to open a shop devoted to the same period. By Daisy Bridgewater. Photographs by Bill Batten

If you can find the Norfolk cottage of the print-maker Angie Lewin and her husband, Simon, consider yourself blessed. It stands in a hamlet so small you don't know you're there till you have left, with no signposts to make you any the wiser. Set back from the road, the former row of crofters' cottages – now a single dwelling – is reached across a gloriously unkempt meadow garden. However, the cottage's name, St Jude's, painted architectural grey on a small sign in lower case, is a discreet invitation to leave any preconceptions of cosy rural living at the door;

Inside the thick wattle-and-daub walls the couple have created a quiet and unexpected homage to Mid-century Modern British design. No flea-bitten armchairs, no squashy sofas, no

standard lamps, but a pure and coherent design sensibility uncommon in this part of Norfolk.

The couple never meant it to be this way. Having moved from Hackney in east London to the Norfolk coast at Weybourne seven years ago, they were busy carving out professional lives for themselves away from the capital. Angie, who had studied fine art printmaking at St Martins, found herself inspired by skeletal plant forms and seed-heads set against the bleak East Anglian skies, and began producing linocuts and wood engravings. Simon, a graphic designer, was building up his web design client base. Neither had thought about moving again. 'I spotted the cottage advertised in the *East Anglian Daily Press* and it just kept niggling at me,' Simon explains. 'Then it reappeared

a couple of months later, so we decided to visit.' It was summer 2003 and the front garden was carpeted in poppies. Despite its being a mere shell (the previous owner had gutted the interior for development), the Lewins were smitten.

It is hard to imagine now that three years ago the subtly decorated interior was nothing more than garden slabs and a dirt floor, but the closer one looks at the cottage's detailing, the clearer it becomes that it was all specified by the same exacting minds. 'The initial phase was very time-consuming,' Simon says. 'It needed digging out, damp-proofing, plumbing and wiring. From there we had to source everything from the doors to the light switches.'

The view from my plywood stool at the Formica

In the kitchen, cupboards and drawer fronts have all been left natural ply, their edges rounded and fixtures hidden

Clockwise from bottom left the traditional red brick of St Jude's belies its Modernist interior; a 1950s-inspired contemporary wicker chair from the Pier (pier.co.uk) with a cushion covered in Dandelion One (designed by Angie Lewin for St Jude's, £30 per metre) in the living area; bent plywood stools by Corin Mellor and a Formica table by Anthony George add to the plywood kitchen by Stuart MacCallum (07884-314549)





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kitchen table is one of pure cohesion. The corners of the ply kitchen unit (Formica-topped), which divides the cooking and seating areas, are gently curved, as are the edges of an immaculate wall-mounted shelving unit which houses a collection of Ravilious Coronation mugs. Cupboards and drawer fronts have all been left natural ply, their edges rounded and fixtures hidden. Colours are muted, corresponding, objects kept to a minimum. 'We worked off a Barbara Hepworth painting for the colour scheme,' Angie admits, 'and had a friend, Stuart MacCallum, design the 1950s-inspired kitchen cabinetry.'

Next door in the dining-room and living area, the vision continues. An unembellished table and Ercol chairs, some of which belonged to Angie's parents, dominate the oak floor, over which now presides one of Angie's most popular prints, *The 1937 Coronation Mug*, a linocut that depicts a Ravilious mug filled with seedheads and feathers. As if in dialogue with the print, a large ale jar of seedheads sits in a recess beside the fireplace.



Top a wing sofa by Ernest Race is accessorised with London Underground fabric cushions in the living area. **Above** Angie and Simon Lewin on a 1970s Danish leather sofa from Two Columbia Road (twocolumbiaroad.co.uk)

On the facing wall hangs a large and imposing screenprint, *Brantree Cattle Market*, by Edward Bawden, a particular hero of the Lewins whose work they have collected for many years. Other pieces – most notably propaganda-style advertising posters from the 1950s and 60s – are stacked against the wall, evidence that the couple's passion for collecting is outgrowing their wall space.

It was during the refurbishment of the cottage that friends and fellow Mid-century Modern enthusiasts Will Brown and Marie Willey, from the traditional workwear outfitters Old Town in nearby Holt, suggested Angie's prints might translate well on to fabrics. 'I thought I would give it a try and produce a couple of designs in some short runs,' Angie says of *Dandelion One* and *Two*, quirky prints reminiscent of Lucienne Day textiles (on satisfyingly thick mustard, khaki and beige base cloths) which were launched last October. 'Marie introduced us to the printers, but the whole thing is one enormous learning curve. I had to go on gut instinct most of the time, as



Clockwise from above 'Woodpigeon' wallpaper by Edward Bawden is framed above a collection of ceramics by Daniel Reynolds and cat sculpture by Paul Arney from *Four Impressions*, Summertown, Oxford (01865-516566); a wardrobe by Matthew Lewin dominates the bedroom, a pair of Jason chairs by Frank Guille stand inside and out, and the painting on the landing is by Elizabeth Merriman; cushions made from *Dandelion Two* (£30 per metre) on the wing sofa; a linocut in progress in Angie's studio in the garden; the dining area, with Anthony George table and Ercol chairs, is hung with Angie's coronation mug print and a painting by Margaret McLennan



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choosing base cloths is very much like choosing paper – it has a great effect on the overall finish.'

Last November, while looking for storage premises and office space, Simon saw a small double-fronted shop for sale in the local market town, Aylsham, and realised he had stumbled across an opportunity not to be missed. 'We had always secretly dreamt of opening a shop and suddenly there it was,' he says, his enthusiasm palpable. After a remarkably quick refurbishment, St Jude's the shop officially opened this week with an exhibition of paintings by Elizabeth Merriman. It sells Ercol furniture upholstered in St Jude's fabric, 1950s-inspired contemporary furniture by Simon's brother, Matthew, a mix of contemporary

ceramics by Tanya Gomez and Daniel Reynolds and vintage Hornsey and Rye pottery, books on Mid-century Modern design, art and photography, and of course roll upon roll of fabric. 'We will basically be selling everything we like, and we want people to be able to see things in context, like walking into a house,' Simon explains.

Situated on the main street in a former bicycle shop, the store is slightly easier to find than the cottage, but it may be some time before the Lewins' aesthetic becomes normal for Norfolk. *St Jude's*, 35 Red Lion Street, Aylsham (01263-735777; st-judes.co.uk). *Prints by Angie Lewin: Bircham Gallery*, 14 Market Place, Holt (01263-713312; birchamgallery.co.uk)

Sources for the Angie Lewin look

20th-century textiles, posters, furniture, and prints Rennie's Seaside Modern, Folkestone, Kent (rennart.co.uk)
Bedroom chairs, other Mid-century furniture and lighting Home Spun Vintage (020-8541 3762; homespunvintagedesign.co.uk)
Cast-iron Morso wood burner Heatcraft (01263-733322; stonecraft-aylsham.co.uk)
Bent plywood stools Corin Mellor (01433-650220; davidmellordesign.com)