THIS PAGE In the sitting room, an antique sofa from Claire Langley Antiques, in Irish linen from The Cloth Shop, sits opposite two armchairs, one bought in France and reupholstered in Andrew Martin fabric, the other a second-hand find, re-covered in jute from The Cloth House. The woodburner is from Charnwood.

OPPOSITE There was already a window seat in this recess in the sitting room and the couple's carpenter created the back panel. A bench from The Fig Store is covered with a throw from Portuguese company Burel Factory. The small pendant light is from Agapanthus Interiors.



PURE & SIMPLE

Organic materials paired with a calming palette bring a sense of understated elegance to this early-18th-century stone house in Rutland

FEATURE CHARLOTTE DUNFORD PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH





'I do believe a house has a life of its own, and she felt neglected, but now she glows'

Jane Clark and her husband Mark Copping have quite the catalogue of houses to their names. The couple's journey began with their first home together in the southwest of France. 'It started as a kind of hobby. We'd buy a house and then go, "I think we can improve on this",' Jane recalls. A second French house followed, before the couple set their sights on London. They worked their magic on two mews houses, a listed flat in Harley Street and a four-storey house near Regent's Park before branching out to the country. 'For the first 20 years, we did it just for ourselves, but then people asked us to help them because they liked what we did, so now we are helping friends too.'

Jane explains that she is 'a complete sucker for a house that needs some love', and it was this charming yet neglected stone house in Rutland with an intriguing history that piqued her interest. The 18th-century, Grade II listed property had once been the village post office. 'I was hoping we would find all sorts of things hidden, but we didn't. Somebody did a good job of ripping everything out,' she says. The only clues to its former life were a screen between the living space and kitchen, which would have operated as the counter, and remnants of an old post box 'gummed up really badly' in the wall.

As it was a listed building, the couple were limited when it came to structural alterations. While building regulations deterred them from changing the staircase – which would have required creating a completely new corridor – they did install a shower room on the third floor. 'The conservation officers don't like you to tamper with the integrity or historic structure of the building. We designed the shower room so that it could be taken out in the future and you would never know it had been there,' explains Jane.

While the structural constraints were a minor setback, there was a bigger issue to face. The house features a Collyweston slate roof, a style peculiar to the area. 'The slate is from the village of Collyweston, but they don't mine it very much anymore, so it's

ABOVE LEFT Jane and Mark stand in front of their 'well-built' old stone house, which they have helped bring back to life. The front door is painted in Farrow & Ball's Down Pipe.

LEFT 'When you look at the front of the house it looks quite small, but actually it's a bit like a tardis,' laughs Jane. 'You'd think it's only on two floors but actually it's on three, because at some point in the last 100 years they went up into the roof.'



The former counter area allows natural light to flow throughout the open-plan ground floor. The curved rattan chair was sourced second-hand and the intricate wooden Tibetan cabinet was purchased in Australia.

Cabinetry by British Standard in Farrow & Ball's Down Pipe – the same shade as the window frame – provides lower storage in the kitchen, while upper cabinets have been replaced by an open shelf to create an airier feel. The couple sourced the vintage wall lights from Vinterior and the pendant lights from Agapanthus Interiors. A Rangemaster sink is paired with a mixer tap from Perrin & Rowe.

'I think the sunbaked tiles on the floor bring a really lovely energy into the house'





difficult to come by. The roof can last up to 150 years, so it's really unlucky if you're the generation that has to replace it,' laughs Jane. With only a handful of roofers skilled in the distinct style, all of whom get booked up far in advance, Jane and Mark faced long delays. Having bought the house in February 2022, they were not able to replace the roof until the following February. 'We had to plan the renovation around that, knowing we would literally have to take the roof completely off, so we couldn't do anything on the top floor,' she adds.

Approaching the project with a deep respect for the building's heritage, Jane and Mark worked on helping the house to shine once again. 'Mark sodablasted all of the beams on the first floor and they came out beautifully. Sandblasting damages the surface, whereas sodablasting is much softer, but it's a horrible job,' explains Jane. 'He also cleaned up all of the stone windows, which were a nightmare as they were all black when we bought the house.'

The couple let the property and its charming character lead them when it came to the redecoration. 'I was inspired by the old lime plaster on the walls – some of which has been left exposed – and also, because of the rules and regulations surrounding the building, I decided I wanted everything to be breathable and as natural as possible,' says Jane. Synthetic materials have been largely avoided and organic choices championed, from larger features down to the tiniest details. 'The light switches we chose were ceramic. They were an absolute pain to install but they're amazing,' she adds.

Many of the materials Jane and Mark chose help to build on the sense of history throughout the home. Laid across the open-plan ground floor, terracotta floor tiles, sourced from Eastern Europe via a company in London, are in fact reclaimed roof tiles. 'I really liked the idea of having sunbaked tiles on the floor. I thought it would bring a really lovely energy into the house,' explains Jane. When the couple uncovered the

ABOVE LEFT
The table and chairs on the terrace were vintage finds at a market and the plant pots came from Mark's parents.

ABOVE RIGHT
Jane's knitting room is located on the first floor. The desk was rescued from a skip and the grey cupboard was bought at a market in France.







The principal bedroom sits at the top of the house and is filled with treasured pieces, including a throw belonging to Jane's grandmother, handed down to Jane's mother and now Jane, which covers the headboard. The artwork on the wall was bought from Uppingham Antiques Centre.

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chimney breast, they hoped they would unearth a charming inglenook, 'but we just found a pile of mud and something that needed reconstructing. I sourced the bricks and they cost a fortune but they're around 200 years old,' she adds. Against the muted palette of the interiors, these fascinating materials truly sing.

Just as they are attracted to houses with good bones, Jane and Mark also have a love of well-crafted pieces. After selling the majority of their belongings when they moved on from their previous house, they focused on sourcing antique furniture and furnishings alongside pieces by local makers to fill their new home. 'There's a really lovely shop in Uppingham called The Fig Store and various bits and pieces are from there,' says Jane. 'Another is Claire Langley. She's based in Stamford and has the most amazing antique furniture, a lot of which she buys and then renovates. I probably wouldn't go anywhere else to buy furniture now.'

With their painstaking attention to detail and determination to respect the house's heritage, Jane and Mark have given this home a new lease of life. 'It really was a labour of love, but when you've put so much love into it, you can feel it when you're sitting in the house, it seems to reward you. I do believe a house has a life of its own, and she felt neglected, but now she just glows,' smiles Jane. ■

ABOVE LEFT All the walls in the house have been painted in Marbles Claypaint by Earthborn.
ABOVE RIGHT In the new shower room, a decorative mirror sourced in France hangs above a Burlington pedestal basin. Mandarin Stone's Di Scacchi Marble tiles add a touch of pattern.