

# The secret garden house

This old cottage only tells half the story of one family's new home in Perthshire. Through the wall is the rest of it: a sleek, modern masterpiece

Words Nik Hunter Photography David Barbour/Grand Designs magazine

## DETAILS

**What** A restored and extended cottage

**Where** Kinross

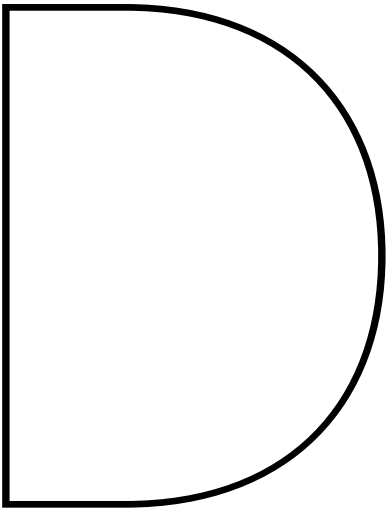
**Architects** Staran Architects

**SIPs kit supplier** JML SIPs





[Above] Replacement doors and windows were made by local carpenter Billy Johnman and the walls were repointed by Sheed Stonemasonry. The doors (painted in Farrow & Ball's Calke Green) lead through to the guest suite. [Right] The couple wanted to retain the original tiles in the boot room for their rustic look and connection to the building's past. They were lifted, scrubbed, pressure-washed and finally relaid once the floor had been insulated. The fireplace is also original



on't be fooled by the unassuming name: this house might be called Gardener's Bothy, but it has been saved, revived and expanded to create a modern family home that's fit for the 21st century. Built for the workers of a grand estate in Kinross-shire, the tumbledown cottage was being used as a storeroom when Iain and Jenny Shillady came across it. They promptly fell in love with its quirky charm and glorious setting. The idea of converting it into a home for themselves and their two young children greatly appealed, but there were several obstacles in the way, not least of which was the fact that the B-listed property is built into the wall of the estate's walled garden.

The previous owners had applied for planning permission to turn it into a small residential dwelling but Iain, who runs Edinburgh-based Staran Architects, and Jenny, who's head of marketing at Dollar Academy, had grander plans. "We were confident we could make a larger family home out of it, something that would be suitable for modern living, but without losing its character," says Iain.

He set to work on the design and was able to apply for planning permission before the lengthy sales process was completed. "I drew up the initial layouts myself and asked ►







**[Left]** An unobtrusive new front door was installed where the gate to the walled garden once was. **[Right]** A view from the guest bedroom. The Designers Guild curtain fabric was sourced by Joelle Reid Interiors. **[Opposite]** The guest bedroom with its loft en-suite. The original beams have been exposed and lime-waxed

colleagues in the office for advice on some of the details. Planning permission was granted in 2019 before we fully exchanged.”

Although the bothy was in a semi-ruinous state, the planners had insisted that the exterior must look as it did when it was built. Iain’s proposal was to retain the original footprint and much of the internal layout while adding a generous extension which would run alongside the existing building and sink into the mature landscape of the walled garden.

“On most new-build projects you’re starting with a blank slate,” he says. “This project probably falls into the new-build/extension category. It’s unusual to have an existing derelict structure and a really established garden to consider too. And, as it would be sharing a wall with the garden, any new element had to be kept below the top of the wall so that it isn’t visible when you come up the drive.”

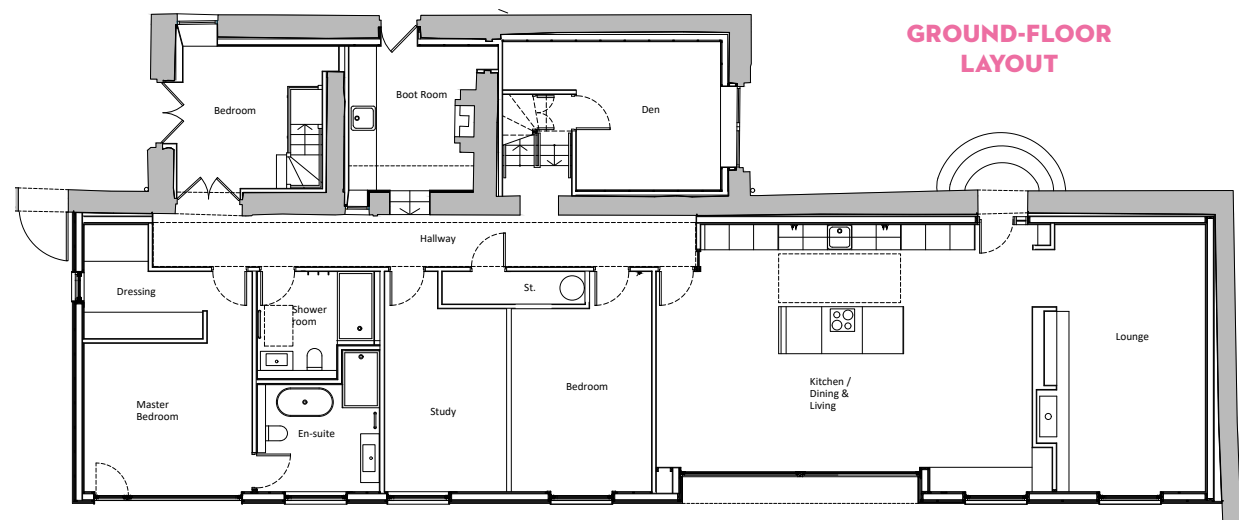
As far as he knows, the bothy had never previously been inhabited. “It was lovely and had loads of charm, but it was not liveable,” says Iain. “The estate gardeners would come in here ▶







The raised lawn and black cladding (from Russwood) have helped the house to bed into the garden. Much of the stone on the site was reused to build the walls. New gravel was laid after being matched as closely as possible to the original. The patio area was already in situ and has been renewed.



and light a fire to warm up and have a cup of tea. You entered into the boot room and there was another door to your left that took you into what is now the den. A rotten staircase led you up to a storage area and there was another room for drying seeds and flowers.”

To meet modern building regulations, the fabric of the bothy had to be upgraded. “We dug down, excavated and built a timber kit within the original stone walls so insulation could be fitted. A few rotten timbers and the hip end rafters were replaced but the majority of the beams inside were in good condition and we retained and exposed them to maintain the bothy’s character.”

He also looked into keeping and reusing the original roof slates but the advice he got from several building surveyors and roofers was to strip it off. There was no membrane below it and even if he was lucky, they told him, only about a third of the slate was in good enough condition to reuse. In the end, he decided to go with Cupa’s natural slate from Spain, which he had experience

of using on previous projects involving listed buildings.

“There were no particularly onerous demands from the planners,” says Iain. “We matched the original paint colour, and the windows and doors were replaced like for like with slimline double glazing. It was a tight space and we have tried to make the most of it. I think to get a boot room, den, two bedrooms and an en-suite out of 55 square metres is pretty good.”

Of course, that’s not the full extent of this generously proportioned family home: transitioning from the low, dark boot room, you emerge into a long, naturally lit hallway that leads to much more contemporary living areas. “The long plan of the design dictated the need for the elongated hallway, but we have made it a feature, adding the roof light along the length of it and exposing the stone wall of the garden,” explains the architect. The wall, which was repointed, falls within the insulated part of the bothy and then a SIPs kit was built around that.

A second entrance (formed from the original gate to the ►



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[Opposite] Kitchens International supplied the white and matt black kitchen with its Silestone work surfaces and splashback. The timber flooring throughout is from Russwood. An air-source heat pump fuels the underfloor heating and hot water. [Above] The black-clad recess around the glazing is both striking and practical, offering shelter on wet or blustery days. [Below] The new part of the house is triple glazed with windows from Scotia Architectural. All the rooms on the south side have garden views like this one from the main bedroom







[Left] Archie and Emily love how spacious their new home is and spent their first evening here doing laps around the kitchen island. [Below] An original fireplace adds a rustic finish alongside contemporary bathroom fixtures from Lusso in the guest room en-suite

walled garden) leads into the kitchen, carrying the view through a square picture window right up the garden path to the ‘gin neuk’. “The views out really dictated the design. The sitting room, open-plan kitchen, our son’s bedroom, the study, master bedroom and en-suite are all south-facing to the garden. North of the wall, within the original bothy, is the guest suite, our daughter’s bedroom, the boot room and the den.”

Iain admits he intentionally oversized the open-plan kitchen area. “We love having friends and family over, so we needed a large, flexible room. We have an abundance of floor space in front of the island, but it is used all the time – the kids bring toys through, we have kitchen discos, we play with the dog, and, when you have the doors fully open to the garden, it’s lovely. Having the recess in front of the sliding doors works really well too. From a design point of view, it breaks the façade as it’s a long building, and when you have a warm summer’s day but there’s rain in the air, you can still have the doors open.”

Creating this part of their home meant sacrificing some of the walled garden, as Iain explains: “The area we’ve built on was a kitchen garden with raised beds and a few broken cold-frames. What is now the lawn was used as a nursery for the main estate

and was filled with more raised beds and pots sitting on bark chippings. When we eventually exchanged, the pots had been taken away and it was pretty sparse. We relocated some rose bushes, and we didn’t really lose too much of the mature part of the garden.”

Although the views outwards were incredibly important to the family, the views inwards towards the house matter just as much. “You will never make something this size disappear, but you can soften it. The black cladding helps the house to blend in somewhat and it makes the colours of the garden pop.” They also raised the lawn level, created new flower beds in front of the windows and built the stone wall, so the house sits in the garden rather than on it. From the end of the garden, you get a glimpse of the slate roof of the bothy behind, but none of this is visible from the driveway at the front, of course.

“We are really happy with the result and with the connections to the garden in particular. The bothy still looks like the old, charming building we fell in love with but now it has creature comforts like underfloor heating and insulation. Its original features and the garden views ensure we are always connected to our surroundings and the history of this place.” ■