

Text View

**EXTERIOR**

The pale grey water-tiled thatch is offset by the white walls. Woodwork is painted in Farrow & Ball's Hardwick White and the masonry is finished in Strong White.

FIREPLACE

Cluggle jugs given to the owner by her mum add colour and interest to the original fireplace in the snug.



OLD CHARMER

A perfect mix of antiques and mid-century pieces comes together to create something special in this Grade-II listed gem ▶

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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Sara Milner, a social worker

THE PROPERTY

A four-bedroom thatched cottage built around 1800, in Rye, East Sussex

PRICE £250,000

MONEY SPENT £25,000

WHAT IT'S WORTH NOW

£180,000

Looking like something straight out of a fairy tale, Sara Milner's pretty whitewashed cottage, with its Gothic-style windows and silvery-grey thatch, was a real find. Sara admits, however, that when she first came across the property, she was swept away by its beauty and allowed her heart to rule her head.

'I thought it was so sweet, but totally impractical,' she says, referring to the amount of maintenance the Grade-II listed house would require. 'I didn't even give a thought to the upkeep of the thatched roof or the wooded area behind the cottage.'

In 2009, Sara was dividing her time between Brighton and Hawkhurst, Kent, with her ex-partner. It was with a view to buying a weekend retreat that they drove to Rye, near the coast in East Sussex, to view the cottage. They put in an offer and, not long afterwards, the property was theirs. Circumstances then changed when the couple separated, so Sara took the decision to make the cottage her full-time home and she quickly turned her mind to renovating it. 'There were black beams and magnolia-painted walls everywhere because it had been rented out,' she recalls.

Sara moved in with friends while the cottage was damp-proofed, replastered and decorated throughout. She also had the ridge of the thatch replaced. 'I didn't know anything about thatched properties, but discovered you have to get the ridge done every 10 years and the whole roof replaced around every 30, at a cost of about £15,000. There are different types of thatch and this house has water reed with a straw ridge,' Sara explains. 'Having a thatched roof means there are specific clauses in my home insurance policy. For example, I'm not allowed log burners because the heat concentrates in the flue and can cause a fire.'

The cottage sits on the side of a steep, wooded bank – there was once a waterworks nearby, taking advantage of the natural springs in the hillside. 'I have little springs popping up every now and then around the garden. I had one appear just above the patio, so I had special drainage put in to channel the water away,' she says.

Inside, the property has a bright yet cosy feel. Sara had most of the dark beams painted white and has cleverly mixed inherited antiques with mid-century finds. 'Collecting things has always been a part of my life,' she says. 'My grandmother was an obsessive ►

HALLWAY AND SNUG

The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Pointing. Sara also had the original beams painted in the same warm white shade to give a greater sense of space in the narrow hallway. A previous owner installed the flagstone tiles, which were salvaged from a shipwreck. These are

softened by a rug in the snug to give a cosy feel. The armchair and wooden chest are from Rye Auction Galleries. Sara inherited the grandfather clock from her grandmother, who was an avid collector. An Orla Kiely cushion adds a pop of modern colour and pattern to the area

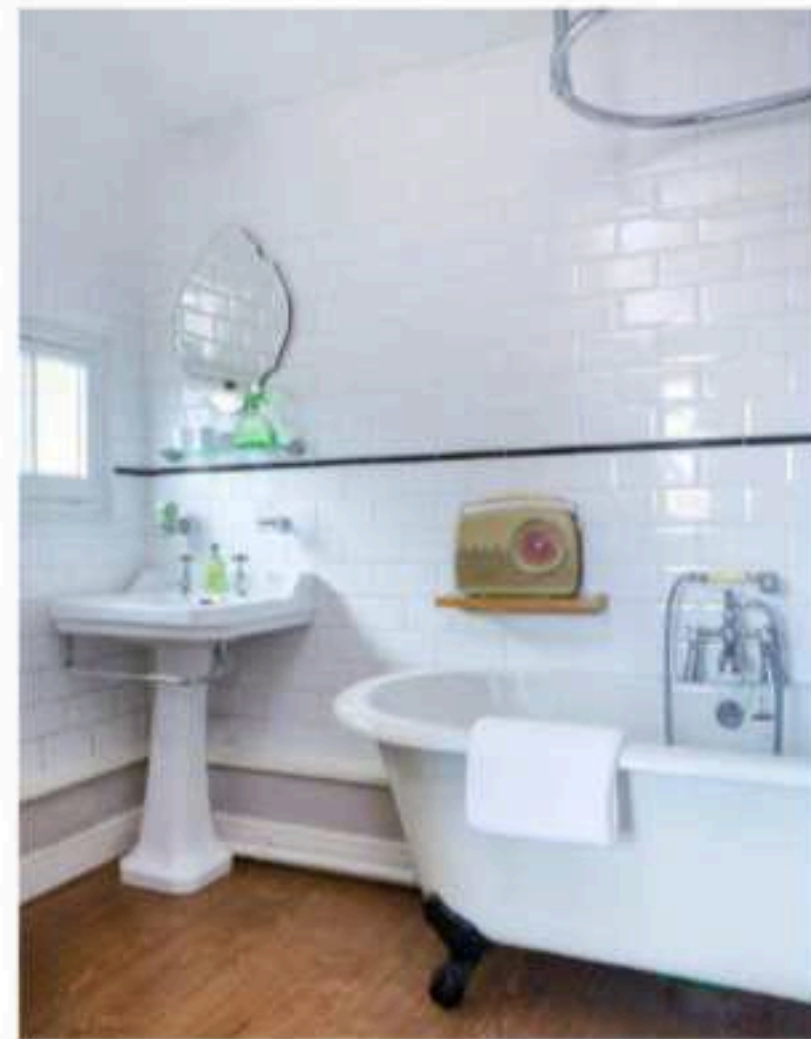


DINING ROOM
The original Gothic-design windows are one of Sara's favourite features in the cottage. Above the table hang industrial-style pendant lights from Blue-Sky Lighting
GARDEN
Sara likes to relax with a drink in the summerhouse after work. She sourced the pew and crate at a local auction
LIVING ROOM
Mid-century-style furniture, including the Habitat sofa and glass-topped coffee table, add character to the space. The large oil painting is by her friend and local artist Nick Archer ▶





'Collecting things has always been a part of my life. My grandmother was an obsessive collector'



collector – she had 40 grandfather clocks in her house. They never used to be set to exactly the same time, so for about 10 minutes every hour there would be a chorus of chimes. You can imagine what it was like at night!

To one side of the compact kitchen lies a little snug and hallway with a quarry stone floor. This is Sara's favourite spot to sit during winter, when she has a fire burning in the hearth. The quarry tiles were put in by a previous owner who was a member of the local historical society. They had been salvaged just off the coast from a sunken ship that had been carrying a cargo of French tiles,' she reveals.

The bright sitting room, with its taupe walls and splashes of red and orange, has a retro feel. 'I've always liked mid-century pieces,' Sara says. 'I originally studied product and furniture design, and was fascinated by many of the British and European designers of that era before they became trendy in recent years.'

Next door is the dining room, the only area where Sara has left the beams in their original dark colour, which lends a more formal air. Two bedrooms, including the main, and a bathroom, with its rolltop bath, complete the downstairs layout. Upstairs lie two further bedrooms and a small under-eaves space.

Outside, the house is painted white, with a pale sage shade used on the window frames and front door. The Gothic-style windows and tiny quatrefoil in the roof apex are a real focal point – 'I love them,' says Sara. A summerhouse sits at the foot of the garden.

After overhauling the house, Sara set about immersing herself in the local scene. 'For a while, I wasn't sure whether I'd stay in Rye or return to Brighton, but now I'm actively involved in the local sailing and tennis clubs, and have made a lot of friends,' she says. The only downside to living in Rye is that Sara's office is in Surrey, which means a three- or four-hour round-trip. 'It feels manageable because I'm able to work from home a couple of days a week,' she says. 'It also feels worth it as I love my house and the location, especially now that I've adjusted to a rural way of life. Rye is full of quirky shops, galleries and restaurants, plus it has such an arty vibe.'

As for the future, Sara has one more renovation project. 'I'm planning to put in an extra bathroom upstairs,' she says. Overall, however, the cottage is exactly the way she wants it. 'When I bought the house, there was permission to extend the snug and corridor, but I've now grown to like how cosy and quirky it is.' ☺

GUEST BEDROOM
This enchanting space is tucked up in the eaves and has a lovely quatrefoil window. The frame and wardrobe doors are painted in Farrow & Ball's Mizzle and the floor in Ammorite. Sara's grandmother gave her the rocking chair when she was just five. The

sand dune cushion on the bed is from the Purdie Gallery in Rye
BATHROOM
White Metro wall tiles, taken all the way up to the ceiling, help the space feel larger. The mirror is from Graham & Green and Sara found the vintage radio in a junk shop