

LIFE IN YOUR

country home

Down at the dairy

JULIA BARNARD'S BEAUTIFUL BARN IS A
SHOWCASE FOR HER LOVE OF RICH TEXTILES
AND TREASURED MEMORABILIA

SOMERSET BARN CONVERSION



AT HOME WITH...

OWNER Interior designer Julia Barnard (below) lives here with her daughters, Rose, 24, Helena, 21, Margaret, 17, and Plum their Jack Russell. They moved into the house in 2004
HOUSE Victorian barn conversion
ROOMS Main open-plan space featuring living area, dining area and kitchen, hall/library, cloakroom, study, four bedrooms, two bathrooms



THIS PAGE Julia's home was originally the dairy for the nearby farmhouse. She began planting her own garden, which is almost mature after seven years' work, as soon as she bought the house.



SITTING AND DINING AREA Julia's love of textiles and colour is also apparent from her eclectic mix of furniture, fabrics and accessories. Red floral tub chair fabric, Christopher Moore. Cherry refectory table and benches, Robert Grothier. Wood burner, Woodwarm Stoves. Solid reclaimed maple floor, Walcot Reclamation. Walls, Lead I by Paint & Paper Library.

The tiny Somerset hamlet of 17-or-so properties nestling in idyllic, quintessentially English countryside, had a strong emotional pull for Julia Barnard and her three daughters, Rose, Helena and Margaret, and so they were reluctant to leave it. The problem was they needed a larger house. Julia happened to come across a barn conversion nearby that belonged to an architect from Oman. 'He was using it as a holiday home, but was rarely there and, luckily for us, he was prepared to sell.'

The barn conversion was certainly different from Julia's previous house, a turreted property with small rooms, just along the lane. By contrast, her new house, which had been the dairy to a nearby farmhouse, was the perfect family home with its vast, light, sociable, open-plan living and dining space – and Julia and the girls loved it immediately.

However, the barn conversion was, Julia admits, something of a paradox because the interior was only partially finished. It had been converted 15 years previously but curiously there were beautiful, ornate, custom-made cupboards in situ, but no plaster on the walls and concrete floors. This didn't put Julia off, however. 'The open-plan style of the house wasn't something I was looking for or had considered before,' she says. 'It was just pure chance. Although, as soon as I saw it, I thought: 'Why haven't I thought of living like this before?''

The first thing Julia did was gut the building, ripping out the old kitchen and bathroom, and plaster throughout. 'It

WHAT MAKES THIS HOUSE A HOME...

'The treasures from our travels, mementoes from friends, presents we have made and objects we've rescued and restored'

HOW TO... DESIGN AN OPEN-PLAN SPACE

- A multi-purpose area gives a home a generous, spacious feeling.
- A big open-plan kitchen with a seating area is a popular choice with families, which could help when you come to re-sell your home.
- Noise and privacy need to be addressed. Include enclosed rooms in your re-design, such as a study or TV room.
- If removing a structural wall (check with a structural engineer), you must put in a steel support (RSJ) to carry the weight of the building above.
- When planning, consider 'circulation patterns' (architect-speak for how you walk around the space) so furniture won't crowd you out.
- Less drastic measures include widening a doorway, installing sliding screens, a glass wall or a half-height partition.



WHAT WE LOVE MOST...

'There's room to be together and peaceful places to be apart'



SITTING AREA The maple cupboards were custom-made and already in situ. The sofas and chairs were bought at auction and the window seat cushion was embroidered by Margaret. The freestanding solid oak bookcase (left) was made for Julia by a cabinet maker.
KITCHEN Julia has transformed the room into a friendly, informal space for cooking and eating. She commissioned a cabinet maker to create the tall, curved oak cupboard. The beech table (above right) is painted in String by Farrow & Ball. **Pan hanger**, Dinghams. **Chair fabric**, similar from Larsen. **Curtains**, Julia Barnard. **Walls**, Lead 1 by Paint & Paper Library.

was important for me to have a blank canvas and to know that all the structural work including the plumbing and wiring had been done properly,' she says. 'I wanted to have a fresh start removing all extraneous detail and having beautiful plastering into the eaves, as well as arranging the shapes of the rooms as I wanted them – and then applying the detail.'

Once the work was done, Julia was able to concentrate on getting the decor right – she has a head start on most people because she learned her trade as an interior designer, working closely with the late Laura Ashley and her husband, Bernard (which Julia describes as 'an extraordinary privilege'). Her maxim is:

'if you like various items, unify the space with colour and then very different pieces will go together'.

'I think my house is a good example of that principle,' she says, 'because it's full of things that are part of my history and the history of my children. There are textiles and pieces of furniture that weren't meant to go together at all: a mix of things that we love and have meaning to us. But because we've put them against a neutral backdrop, they work as a whole.'

'Everything in the house is simple, functional and of good quality and allows me to indulge in flights of fancy like the copper bath – it's French, double-skinned copper dating from the 1870s and is very

practical. It was a present from my sister who didn't want it any more.'

Orange and red are key colours throughout the house and Julia has used them because she finds rich shades warm, welcoming and invigorating. 'They're the colours of happiness,' she says. 'When thinking about interior design, adding texture and pattern with natural sustainable materials can be important too – but, really, if you have a neutral canvas, it's all about choosing what you like.'

She believes that wildly contrasting fabrics and items of furniture can go well together if the space surrounding them is unified with different intensities of the same colour. Julia used four shades



COUNTRY CLASSIC COPPER BATH

Copper baths make a wow statement. They weigh around 45kg (compared with cast iron, which can weigh 160kg) and maintain heat wonderfully. Try William Holland.

LIBRARY Julia has created a haven of peace away from the open-plan living area. **Bookshelves**, made to Julia's design, painted in Lead I by Paint & Paper Library. **BATHROOM** A subtle backdrop emphasises the drama of this luxurious freestanding bath. French copper bath, Drummonds. **Walls**, Lead III by Paint & Paper Library.



from Paint & Paper Library to create base colours for her large open-plan space, bathrooms, corridor and library, which has the effect of 'theming' the rooms.

She finds that the main advantage of the open-plan area is that it is big enough to allow everyone to be together yet do their own thing. 'One person can watch a film, someone else can be drawing, another can be cooking,' says Julia. 'A lot of modern spaces are isolating – but this one isn't.'

The barn conversion isn't simply one big open area, however. There are more intimate rooms, such as the impressive vaulted spaces of Julia's library and bedroom, which change the feel and pace of the house.

'I love the interaction between the spaces,' she says, 'and it is wonderful to have room to assess, change and constantly refine. I enjoy this house every day.'

📞 **For further information about Julia's interior design, call 01749 813506, juliabarnard.com.**

FEATURE TONY GREENWAY PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMY PHILLIPS

On our doorstep...

SOMERSET, WILTSHIRE & HAMPSHIRE

Julia Barnard recommends her favourite local haunts

VISIT... 'Eighteenth-century landscape garden Stourhead (01747 841152, nationaltrust.org.uk) near Mere, Wiltshire. You can also buy pelargoniums propagated from its historic collection'

SHOP AT... 'The Hambledon (01962 890055, thehambledon.com), in Winchester, Hampshire. This beautiful space is filled with lovely homewares, furniture and vintage pieces and is well worth a visit'

GO FOR A MEAL AT... 'At the Chapel (01749 814070, atthechapel.co.uk) in Bruton, Somerset. It's a bakery, wine store, florist, bar, café and restaurant all in one glorious space'



BEDROOM Julia's bed was custom-made by a cabinet maker from local oak and the curtains were printed by Julia's grandmother when she was at art school. **Bed linen**, Toast. **Quilt**, Julia Barnard. **Solid maple flooring**, similar from Hardwood Floor Store.