



‘CAN DO’ is Stephen Chidgey’s mantra. When the multi-award-winning businessman from Tregonetha, near Padstow, decided that the property he had bought in 1988 as a self-catering holiday let needed a complete facelift, he wasn’t put off by the large sums of money being quoted to carry out the work he had in mind. Instead, with impressive resolve, Stephen set about teaching himself how to do the job at a fraction of the cost.

What he wanted to achieve was a modern, practical blend of old meets new. A place that had the wow factor - oozing traditional character whilst being supremely comfortable, contemporary in terms of

fittings and furnishings and economic to run. It would be a major task but one he was determined to attack with gusto.

“The building had damp, the roof was in poor shape and the windows and doors needed replacing,” he says. “Worst of all, was the energy consumption. I had an old oil-fired Aga and an oil-fired central heating system that were both proving hugely expensive and I didn’t want to go on paying those sort of bills – especially when I retired.”

Stephen’s ‘moment of madness’, as he describes it, came on the day his former partner died of cancer in a local hospice.

“It had been an awful year, so I just got



An eco TRANSFORMATION

Transforming old buildings is the first step on any environmentalist's bucket list - and rolling up your sleeves and doing it yourself - is probably pretty high up there too, writes SUE BRADBURY

stuck in," he remembers. "I'd done a lot of research by that time so getting my hands dirty and focusing on building practicalities was good, constructive therapy."

With a background in the manufacturing of television news equipment, Stephen had the advantage of technical aptitude. Born and brought up in Dorset, an interest in photography led him to early work as a sales rep with Polaroid and then promotion into the company's industrial development division. He was headhunted by Thorn EMI and later joined AVS Broadcasting Group when it was first being formed. He stayed with that very successful company for around 17 years –

travelling the world as international sales manager and ultimately becoming managing director. An illustrious career that opened Stephen's eyes to what true luxury meant in terms of accommodation, outstanding customer service and fine dining - but would that experience help transform The Old Barn?

"When I first bought the property, it was a derelict wreck with half the roof missing so I knew what it was like to roll up my sleeves and get things done," he says. "This time, though, sustainability was key, so I watched how-to videos on YouTube, read manuals and talked to people. Kensa Heat Pumps, based in Chacewater, were particularly helpful." ▶

HOMES

Although he consulted several architects, Stephen didn't choose to use one. Instead he took on the re-design himself - repairing the roof with Brazilian slate tiles, opening up the vaulted ceilings, introducing roof lights, installing a new sustainable European oak staircase, exposing original stone walls and thoroughly insulating everything. The barn's exterior was re-pointed with lime to achieve a warm, creamy tone and deter damp and local joinery D J Newman was contracted to supply bespoke doors and windows in Iroko hardwood and create new architraves and skirtings.

Effective heating was a prime consideration, but Stephen no longer wanted radiators cluttering up the wall space. The clear choice was therefore underfloor heating and a ground source heat pump that was fitted under the front garden.

"Each room is zoned on a thermostat which can be programmed remotely if required," says Stephen. "The overall effect is gentle, radiant heat throughout the building."

Rather than run the domestic hot water off the heat pump, he had solar thermal panels installed.

"It means the pump is always working at maximum efficiency because it's not having to cope with constant high demand. In winter an immersion heater switches on at night to ensure the water stays hot - even on a dull day."

Additional sustainable and cost-effective features include rainwater harvesting to collect run-off from the roof for the washing machine and toilet and Tesla and type 2 electric car charge points. There is also a





superb Landmark kitchen, a new electric Aga, a log burner, original local art and top-quality furniture that includes a grand piano.

Little wonder that Stephen's endeavours have won him gold for the second consecutive year in the self-catering property category of the 2017/18 Cornwall Tourism Awards, gold in the 2016-2017 South West Tourism Excellence and Visit England awards and similar plaudits

for sustainable tourism. He has also been presented with a Church Times accolade for work he has done in his local community.

"The local church and primary school in St Wenn were having difficulties with heating so I came up with the idea of sharing costs

by putting in a biomass boiler between the two buildings," explains Stephen. "It took a while to convince the authorities that it would

work but now they can see how much more energy efficient it all is – so much so that I've now been appointed sustainability and renewables advisor to the Diocese of Truro."

And that sums up Stephen Chidgey in a nutshell. He's innovative, determined, charming, excellent

at motivating others and a great host.

A 'can do' man in every sense. ♦

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The Old Barn, Tregonetha, provides dog-friendly, luxury eco-accommodation near Padstow. oldbarncornwall.co.uk