



SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

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THAMES TOWN, SHANGHAI

A little piece of England in China

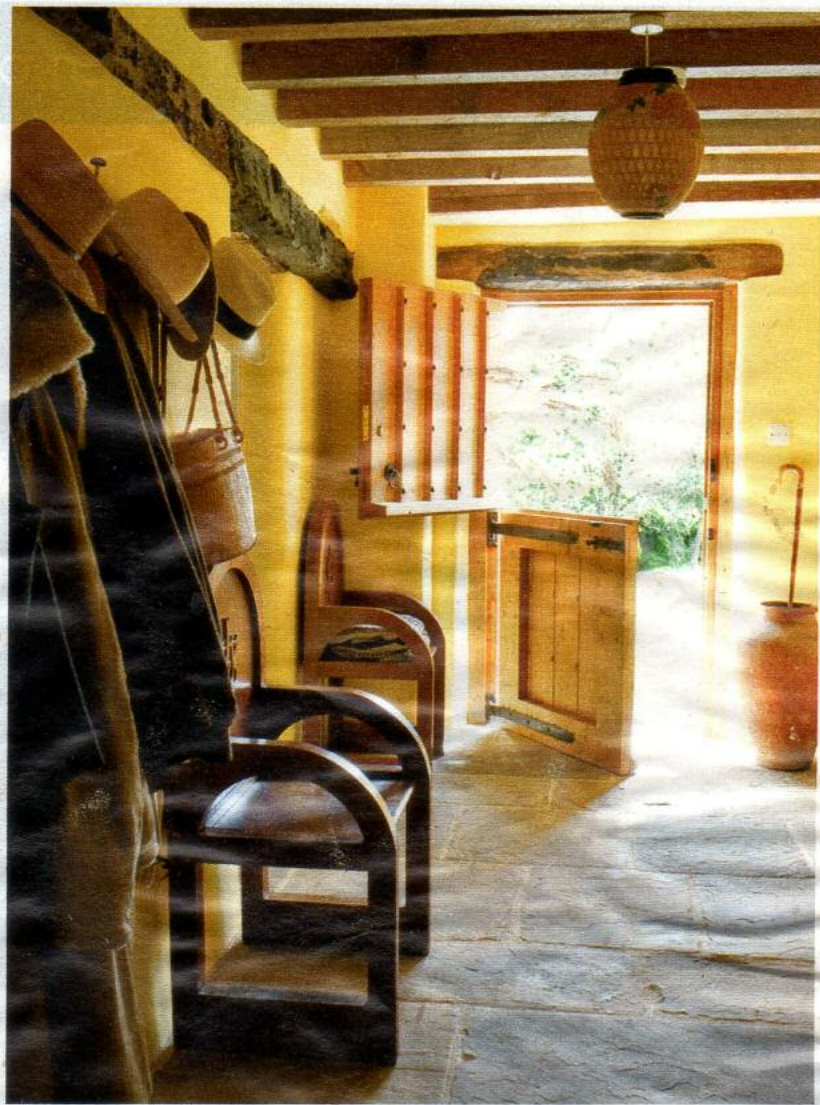
HAPPY HERB

Recipes using virtuous venison

Sweet smell of success

The blooming of Michael McIntyre





It is easy to lose your bearings on the way to Carina Cooper's home. It may be near Totnes in south Devon, but a short drive through the narrow, twisting country lanes and it feels a world away. 'I call it the Devon matrix,' says Cooper, a food writer whose third cookbook, *Ulpotha*, based on traditional recipes from a village in Sri Lanka, is out next month. 'When I bought the house three years ago, the first few times I tried to find it I got lost.'

Cooper had moved out of her previous house, in Notting Hill, west London, and had spent a year in Sri Lanka before settling in Devon

Take one Devon longhouse...

...gut the interior, stir up the rooms and garnish with vibrant textiles. **Emma Love** samples a cookery writer's country spread. Photographs by **Tim Beddow**

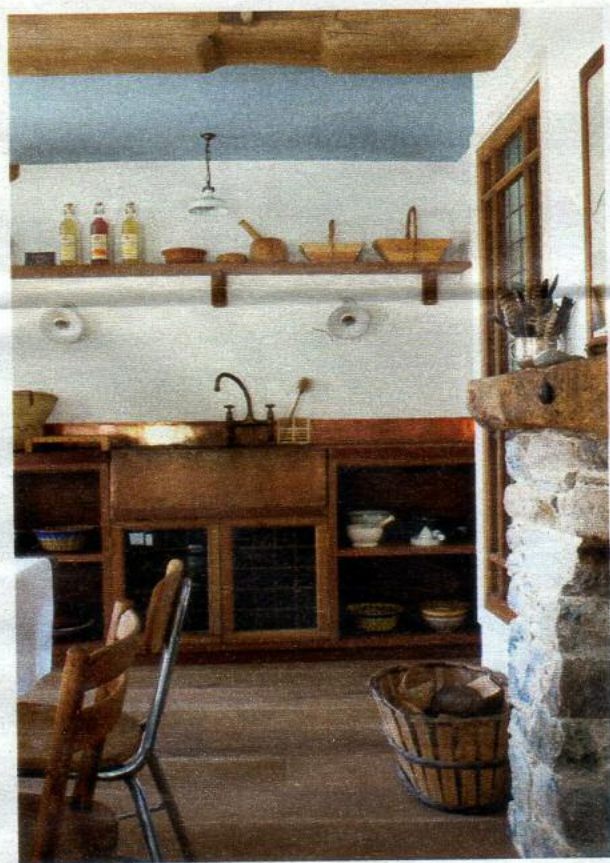
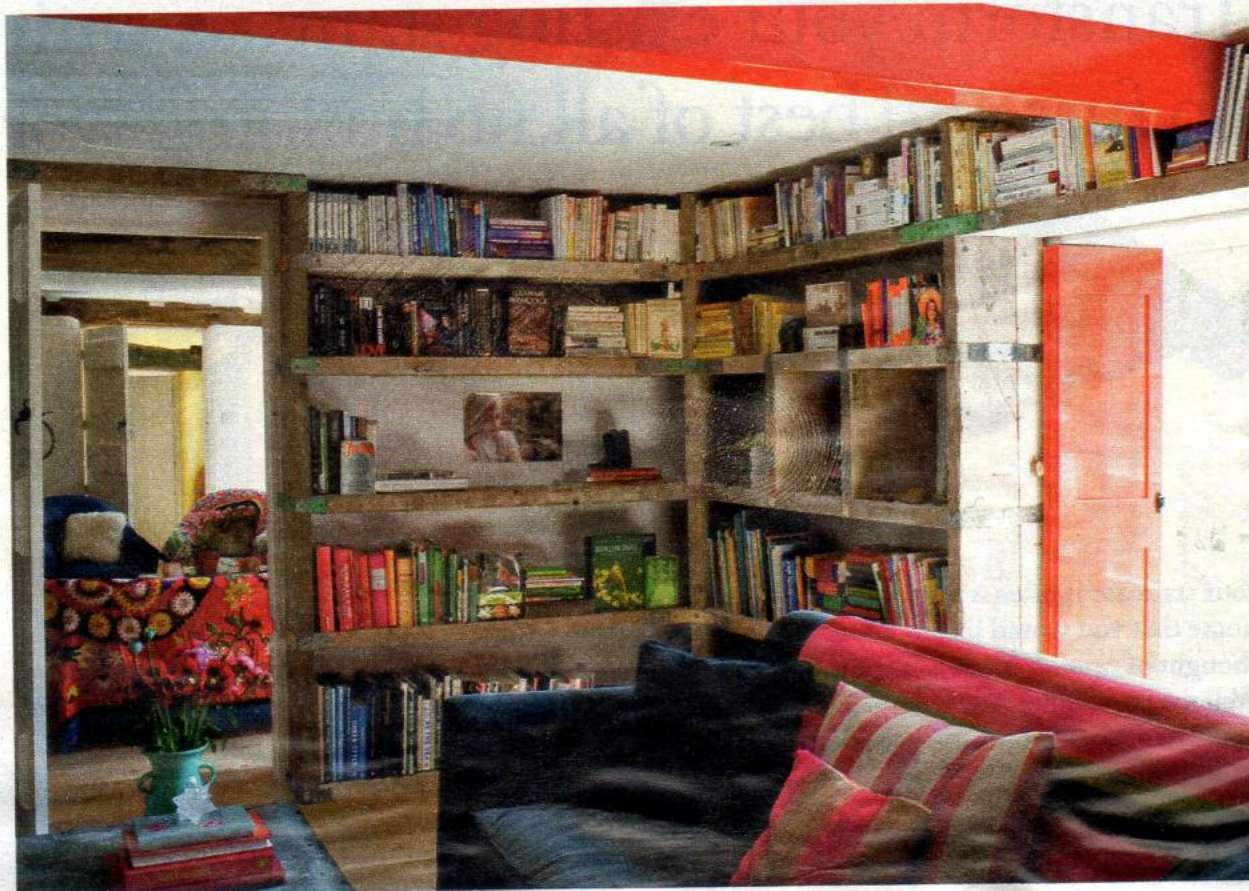
The house is a traditional Devon longhouse surrounded by 11 acres of land. When Carina Cooper bought it, there was a glass porch on the front. She removed it and found the original stone steps underneath. To the right of the house is the walled kitchen garden where she grows fruit, herbs and vegetables.

The hallway, which separates the kitchen and sitting-room, is painted in Sun Yellow from Francesca's Paints (francescaspaint.com). Cooper added wooden beams to the ceiling so it's in keeping with the rest of the house. Her front door is a stable door. 'It's really nice to be able to half-close it. You feel safe but not trapped and you can let the sun come in,' she says. The floor is York stone from Kenmart (kenmartlimited.co.uk), and the second-hand chairs are from The Ark Angel in Tetbury (01666-505820).

to be near a school she liked for her two youngest daughters, Sidonie, 16, and Zazou, 12. 'I grew up in the country and I felt it was important for the kids to experience that too,' she says.

After looking at about 20 houses, she found a four-bedroom stone longhouse of the sort that have been built in the area since the Middle Ages. It had 11 acres of land, an overgrown walled kitchen garden, an unmodernised barn and a chicken shed, which became their temporary home for nearly a year. 'We were supposed to live in the chicken shed for only four months while the builders were working on the house,' Cooper says. 'But things didn't quite go to plan.' She went on holiday for two weeks and arrived back to find that, having started to gut the house, her builders had gone bankrupt.

Jan Panther Guest, the stonemason who was restoring the fireplaces, recommended some individual craftsmen and they picked up the project. Between them, they re-did the plumbing and wiring, plastered the walls, widened doors and altered the layout of the house. A small extension was added to the back for a pantry and lavatory. 'I project-managed, we went slowly and it took about 10 months,' Cooper says. 'In the winter it was



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The kitchen was originally at the other end of the house (this room was a sitting-room with a staircase, which has been removed) but Cooper moved it so that she could have easy access to the kitchen garden. The walls have been re-plastered with lime plaster and the ceiling is painted with Haveli Sky from Francesca's Paints (as before) to remind Cooper of the sky. She designed the copper sink unit and splashback. 'I'm quite minimal in my kitchen; I don't like gadgets. I think you only need a wooden board, a good range and saucepans,' she says.

The book room The bookshelves running the length of the walls are made from old scaffolding found at Tobys Reclamation near Dawlish (tobysreclamation.com). The zinc table was bought from the late interior designer David Champion, who used to have a shop in Notting Hill, and the sofa is from Liberty (liberty.co.uk). 'I wanted one sitting-room for chatting and hanging out

and then this one, which is really cosy. I added colour to stoke one's brain up a bit,' Cooper says. The walls are painted Milk Buti from Francesca's Paints (as before).

The sitting-room, which is connected to the book room, was inspired by a Russian folk house. There are bright Afghan throws on the sofas and several paintings by Russian artists on the walls, including the cloud painting by Elena Gorokhova, which was bought from the Lacy Gallery in Westbourne Grove (lacygallery.co.uk). The low, 1940s French oak coffee table was a present from a friend. Cooper admits to being obsessed by geraniums, so she has created a display with some she bought from Hill House Nursery (hillhousenursery.com). The stone fireplace was already there but needs cleaning up. In the winter it's lit all the time. 'It was important to have a fireplace in every downstairs room because they really keep you going in winter.'

so cold in the chicken shed that we'd wake up with ice on the inside of the windows. We had a metal bucket for a fridge outside our door, a woodburning stove, and a yurt that we used as our sitting-room. It's made me appreciate living simply.'

Country life certainly seems to suit Cooper. In between testing out new recipes there is wood to be brought in for the fire and her kitchen garden to tend to – she grows everything from squashes and potatoes to raspberries and beetroot.

Inside, the house is a mix of reclamation yard and junk shop finds, treasured pieces of furniture and printed textiles collected on her travels over the years. There are flashes of colour too: a sky-blue ceiling in the kitchen, a yellow hallway, pillar-box red lacquer shutters in the book room, and bright and folky Afghan throws in the sitting-room. It's a theme that ties the downstairs rooms together. 'What I love about this house is that all the rooms are interconnected,' Cooper says. 'You can be at one end, open all the doors and see right through to the other side. I remember coming here thinking, I may be alone here but I won't feel lonely.'

'Ulpotha' (East Pole Foundation Ltd, £20) is published on December 1



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The en suite bathroom has several pops of colour: the curtains are Moroccan sheets, which Cooper dyed pink and cut up; the painting above the bath is from Totnes market. The sink is from CP Hart (cphart.co.uk) and the bath is from Antique Baths of Ivybridge (antiquebaths.com). The wooden floors in the bathroom and the main bedroom are from Winkleigh Timber (winkleighpinefurniture.co.uk). 'I asked for wood with as many holes and knots in as possible, otherwise it ends up looking too Ikea,' Cooper says. For an authentic look, she has deliberately put random lengths and widths of wood together.

The main bedroom had a flat ceiling when Cooper bought the house. She returned it to its original shape. The curtains throughout the house are made from shawls, saris and, here, from flax with a lace border. The bedspread is embellished with 18th-century

Turkish towels. The bedspread and all the curtains were made by Wilke Wing, a local seamstress (insidestory@btinternet.com). The 18th-century sofa from an antiques market in west London was one of Cooper's early purchases and bought originally for her first flat when she was 19.

The chicken shed Cooper, pictured with her whippet lurchers Echo and Dash, lived here with her two youngest daughters for nearly a year while building work was being carried out on the house. Now, Cooper has decorated the inside and it has become a place for friends to stay.