



COUNTRY · HOUSE
OF · THE · MONTH

SPEYE PARK

The Jacobean mansion was demolished; the Victorian stately home burnt down. Now the stable block has been converted into the Spicers' unusual family home

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This is the story of the Spicers of Spye Park, and if they sound like characters from an eerie film, there certainly has been plenty of attention paid to the sets.

Spye Park – so-called because of its unique vantage point over the village of Lacock in Wiltshire – was originally a Jacobean house lived in by a Mr Baynton, who gambled it away.

Major John Spicer, great-grandfather of the present owner, then moved in, demolished Mr Baynton's des res and built a Victorian stately home on the site. This in its turn was largely destroyed by fire in 1974, and what remained turned out to be riddled with dry rot. So the Spicers decided to move 200 yards – to live in the stables. 'Stables are much more manageable than half a house – which is all that was left of our

old one,' reckons Rosamund Spicer with sturdy realism.

A long drive leads up to the converted stable that is now Spye Park, home for the Spicers and their children – Edward, 17 and Louisa, 19 (John, 23, lives in a lodge on the estate). The façade and yard were virtually untouched during the conversion, though three new windows were added. The rich Cotswold stone has a lovely weathered quality that contrasts pleasingly with the clean white shuttering.

The interior, however, needed more attention, given the fact that the library was a loose box and the main bedroom a hayloft. Deathwatch beetle and structural weaknesses had to be attacked, too, and the odd wall moved a bit.

'We tried not to convert it too much,' says Mrs Spicer. Yet the overall ▷

'We tried not to convert it too much,' says Mrs Spicer – but the effect is more stately home than stable'



Left: The enormous drawing room is the former coach house; the original brick floor has been kept, complete with stone runners for the carriage wheels. The furniture is mostly late eighteenth century. Above: In the flagstoned hall, Hepplewhite chairs and a seventeenth century blanket chest. Right: Rosamund and Simon Spicer in the cobbled yard with one of their dogs, Bonnet. Unlike the inside of the building, the outside of the stable block, with its 1717 clock and weather vane, looks very much as it did when the horses were still in residence



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◁ effect – despite a profusion of horse prints – is more stately home than stable. As for the furnishings, fixtures and fittings, 'That's a short story,' says Mrs Spicer. 'We just tried to bring everything we had.' 'Everything' included fireplaces, doors and the family coach. A few things, designed for a vast Victorian house, proved too large; luckily, many fitted.

One coup was the placing of the magnificent carved double doors from the old drawing room. These were put in front of the carriage washing area, now the entrance hall. The doors open on to a flagstoned hall and bare stone walls. Their raw quality is juxtaposed with Hepplewhite chairs, a seventeenth century blanket chest and delicate paintings. This is indeed a house of contrasts.

The drawing room houses many more

heirlooms. It was originally a coach house, and the brick floor has been kept. Panelling was brought from the house to create a superb gallery, used as another sitting room.

The gallery is wide – 'We didn't want it to seem like the top of a double decker bus' – and has its own set of windows. This creates a light and spacious feeling emphasised by the pink walls and the white ceiling with its massive beams. Photos and pictures abound, with the family in sepia on one side of the fire and watercolours and prints of the house on the other. The grandeur of scale is softened by lots of cushions and inviting sofas.

In the library next door is a marble fireplace and arched French windows that lead on to the terrace. The main feature of this room is the exposed ▷



Above: In the downstairs loo is a miscellaneous assortment of suitcases, riding whips, ivory brushes and hunting prints. Below: The Spicers' own little museum, formerly the tackroom, still contains lots of tack – plus Corinthian columned candlesticks, statuettes and coasters. Right: The kitchen was once the forge, and its formerly blackened interior has been cleaned to reveal the wood, limestone, bricks and flagstones. The smith's stacked furnace is still there, though there's an Aga as a concession to easy cooking. The fine row of servants' bells is no longer in use



A house of contrasts: four posters in the hayloft and fine antique chairs on the brick floors'

vertical timber of the old stabling, which gives a warm glow, heightened by dark furniture and drapes in golds and yellows. By contrast the atmosphere in the dining room is rich and splendid, with a claret coloured carpet, burgundy wall hangings and plum covered chairs, embroidered with the family crest ('A hand throwing a petrol bomb,' says Mr Spicer). Embroidered Victorian hangings are covered with horse pictures. Mrs Spicer explains, 'When we came to the house, every picture had a horse in it.'

After this, the kitchen, romantic and rustic, comes as a complete surprise. It is the converted blacksmith's forge, complete with original stacked furnace (though an Aga has been added). 'When we first saw it, the room was black,' recalls Mrs Spicer. 'We put in skylights and exposed all the original surfaces.'

There are five bedrooms. In the main bedroom, a massive canopied bed, made by Mr Spicer's grandfather, has been built in. 'And the drapes are old curtains that came from the house—next winter I might actually get round to finishing them,' adds Mrs Spicer. The magnificent ochre canopy perfectly complements the heavy beams, and the room is prettified with delicate furniture and floral curtains. All the bedrooms are attractive and rural, and each has a canopied or four poster bed. In Edward's room Mrs Spicer confides, 'The insurance people say this bed is Tudor so I've hammered it securely to the wall to hold it up.'

Like so many of the other intriguing features in the house, that is just the sort of down-to-earth touch one might expect, when people move from a stately home to a stable. □



Above: The wide gallery ('We didn't want it to look like the upper deck of a bus') around the drawing room is hung with priceless Victorian tapestry fabric, and serves as an extra sitting room. The panelling is from the old house, and is decorated with Spicer family crests. Left: In the guest room, sky blue watered taffeta puts colour into a creamy room. Right: Daughter Louisa has a Victorian bed, and although the trappings look authentic, Mrs Spicer made up the drapes from some old curtains. The scalloped basin is new and was bought from Harrods

