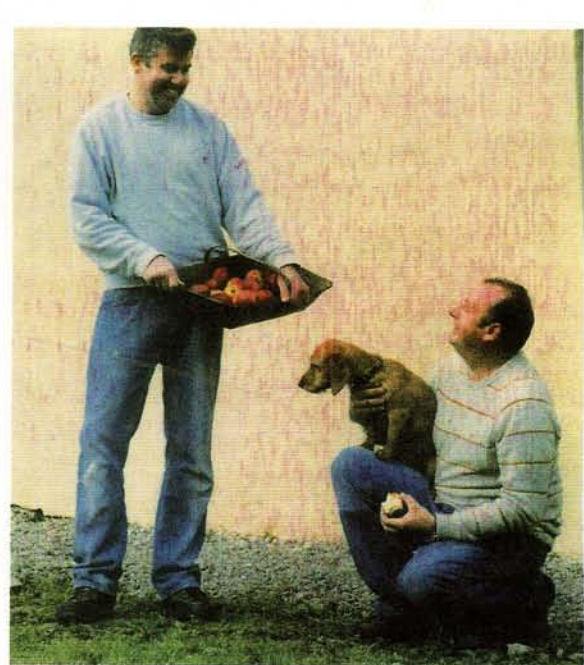
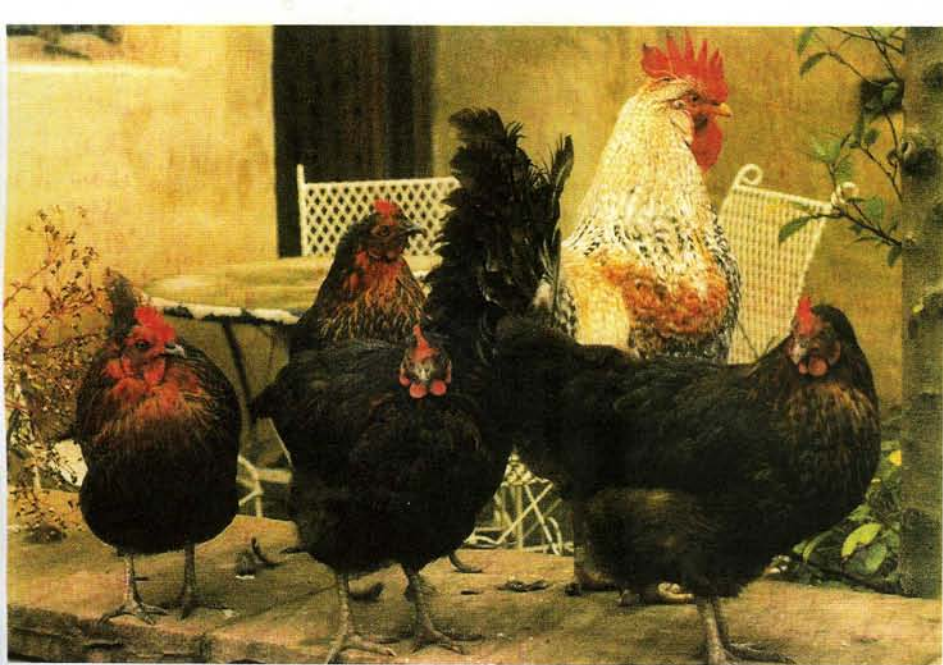


Lifestyle | Designer | Specialist

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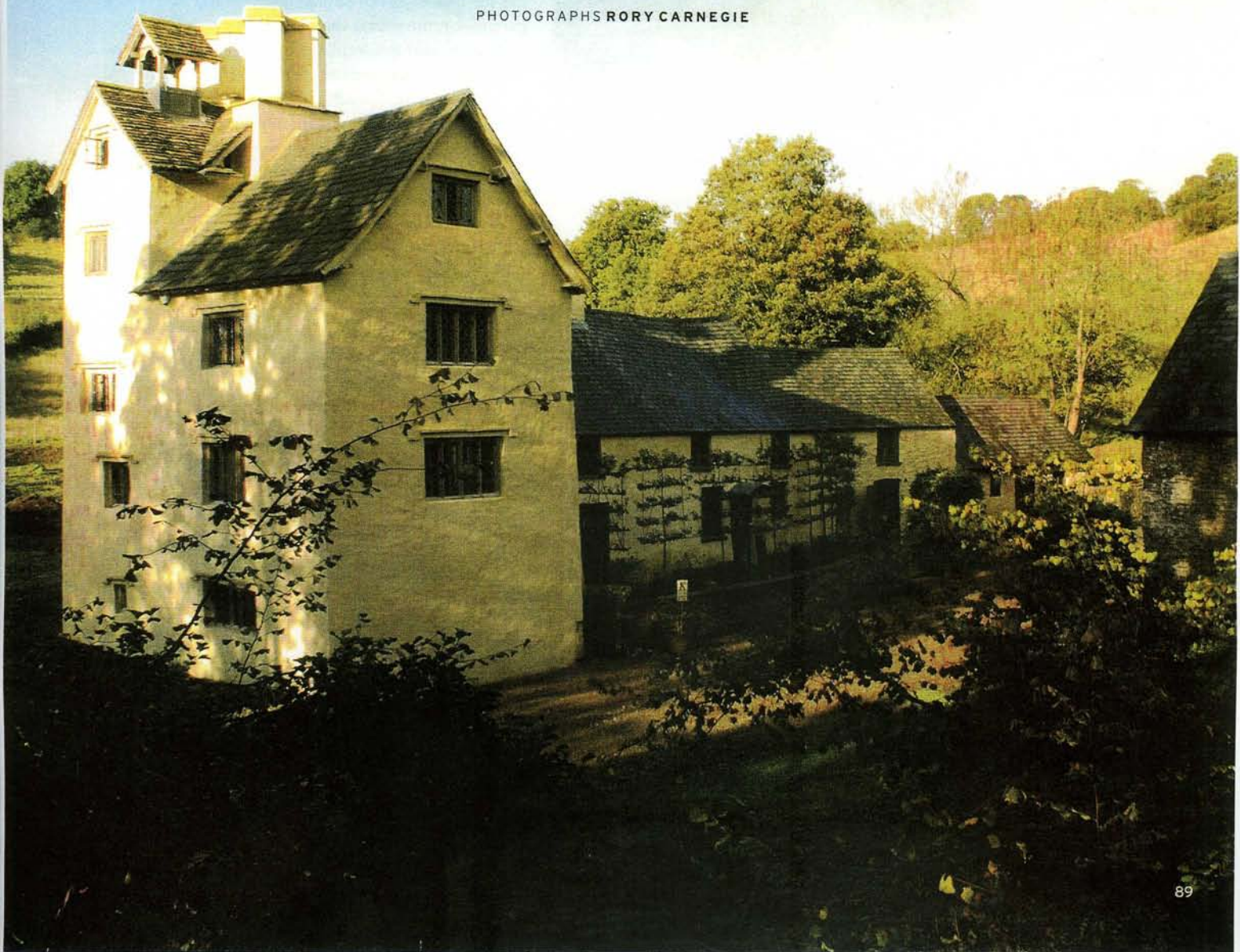
Arne Maynard picks mushrooms in the fields around his house in Monmouthshire (this page).
OPPOSITE The fifteenth-century rendered house (below) is a product of several generations of expansion - the tower was added 200 years after the original house was built. Arne is seen here with his partner, William, and Myrtle, the Basset Fauve de Bretagne (top right). They also keep Black Rock cross chickens (top left)

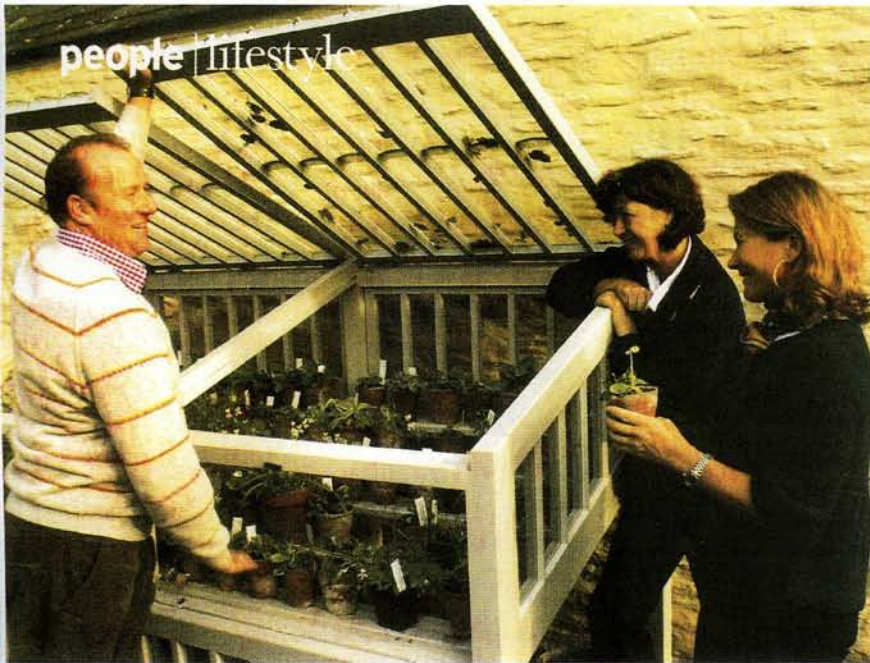


LIFESTYLE

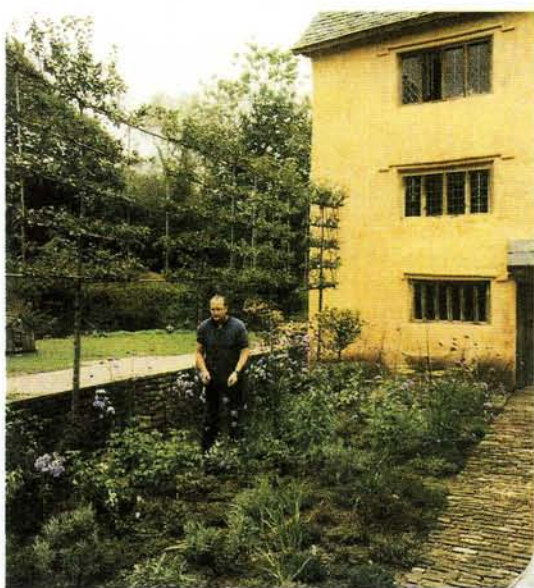
Jonny Beardsall meets garden designer Arne Maynard and his partner William Collinson at their Grade II* listed house in Monmouthshire

PHOTOGRAPHS RORY CARNEGIE





Arne holds one- and two-day gardening courses at the house. He shows students his auricula stand (above), based on a design in a nineteenth-century garden dictionary. The herb garden, at the front of the house (right), is protected from the elements by a low stone wall and pleached crab-apples. Arne gives his class tips on planting late-summer nectar plants - each course has a seasonal theme



Arne Maynard smiles as the bell in the tower at Allt-y-Bela strikes once, not twice. 'We wanted to hear a bell toll, but for a clock to strike all the hours on the hour felt too invasive,' says the eminent garden designer, who moved from Lincolnshire to Monmouthshire two years ago with his partner, William Collinson. The tower had no bell then. 'But we bought one from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry inscribed with the date we bought the house,' says William.

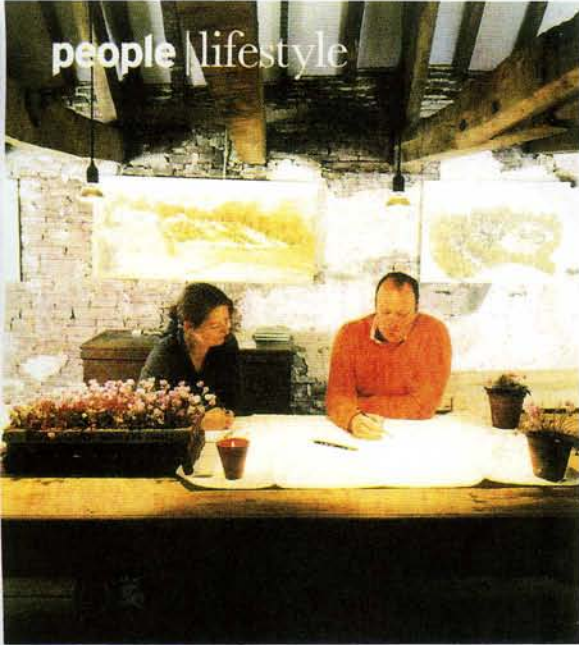
At the end of a single-track lane in a steep valley two miles from Usk, Allt-y-Bela - the hill of the wolf - is a Grade II* listed house that is well hidden in five acres, with a farmyard and old orchards. It was a hall house in the mid fifteenth century, a traditional, single-storey, cruck-frame building, to which a first floor was added a century later. In 1599, another owner attached a three-storey tower.

Fifty years ago a local man bought Allt-y-Bela to farm its remaining acres but left the house unoccupied; the tower was already starting to tumble down, the roof was failing and water had seeped into the stonework. It looked doomed. But in 2001, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) supported its purchase by the Spitalfields Trust. 'We're SPAB members, so when it appeared on the for-sale list we had to look,' says William. After the trust's extensive renovations, the house was irresistible.

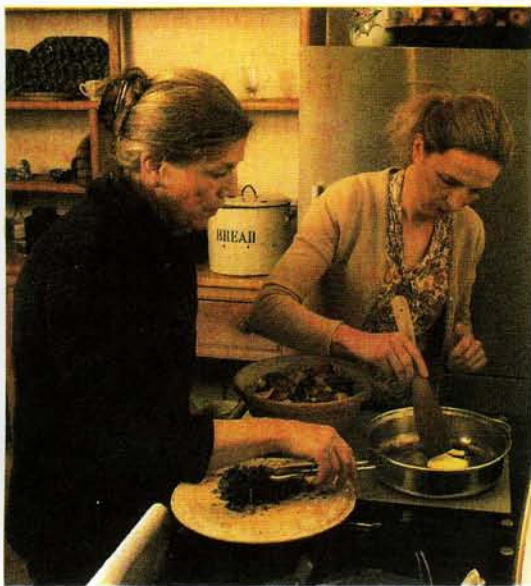
'Repair' and not 'replace' is the trust's ethos - the roof was stripped and the slates returned, all internal timbers were fixed, walls patched inside and out and the exterior re-rendered in a grain-coloured lime plaster. As a result, though it works as a modern five-bedroom house, Arne and William's home has scarcely changed in five centuries.

After decades of neglect the house is now back on its feet. A new garden is starting to emerge; the bed-and-breakfast operation comes well recommended ▷





The loft of the adjacent barn doubles as Arne's studio (above left), where he is seen with assistant Kristy Ramage, and the lecture room (above). Using local mushrooms (below), Louise and Ali Barber prepare breakfast (left)



in Alastair Sawday's *Special Places to Stay*; and places on Arne's one- and two-day gardening courses are filling fast. 'I want to inspire people, and I'm basing the courses on plans for my own garden,' Arne says. From new designs, including building earthworks, mazes and knot gardens, to cultivating kitchen gardens, topiary, perennials and woodland trees, the courses have seasonal themes and run through the year.

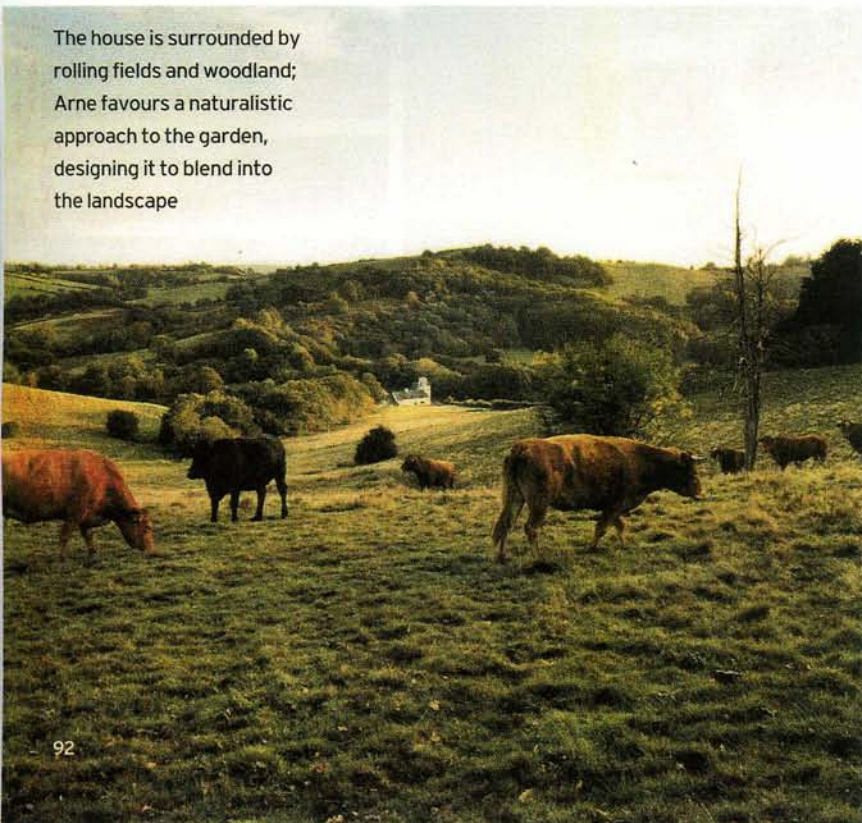
Kristy Ramage – Arne's project manager for a decade – has relocated permanently from London to organise the courses, while sisters Louise and Ali Barber, Arne and William's only near neighbours, work in the house and garden; they painted all the interior walls using the limewash round which they are building a business. The kitchen is also well looked after. Rebecca Spring, a freelance cook, arrives regularly laden with local ingredients, and conjures up mouth-watering lunches and dinners for the paying guests, students, and for the pair's own dinner parties.

Three days a week, Arne and William work in London. When they return, Arne works on designs for gardens at home and abroad in the loft of a barn, which could, he believes, 'have been the kitchen to the house in Elizabethan times'. There is no glass in its wooden window frames – there never has been – so if you are coming on a course when it is cold, wrap up well as it doubles as a lecture room. 'I like the connection with outside,' he says. 'But the pot-bellied stove keeps it cosy.'

'I want the garden to melt into the landscape so that it roots into its setting,' says Arne, explaining his naturalistic approach. With just half an acre of fallow ground at the rear, a boundary fence will blur with modern earthworks so that the garden disappears into the pastoral amphitheatre behind it. The planting must be robust: 'I don't want a garden that's too precious,' he says, noticing that some cattle have been in. 'It's about connecting the landscape with the garden – it will appear completely seamless but will get very intense around the house with a mad jumble of topiary.'

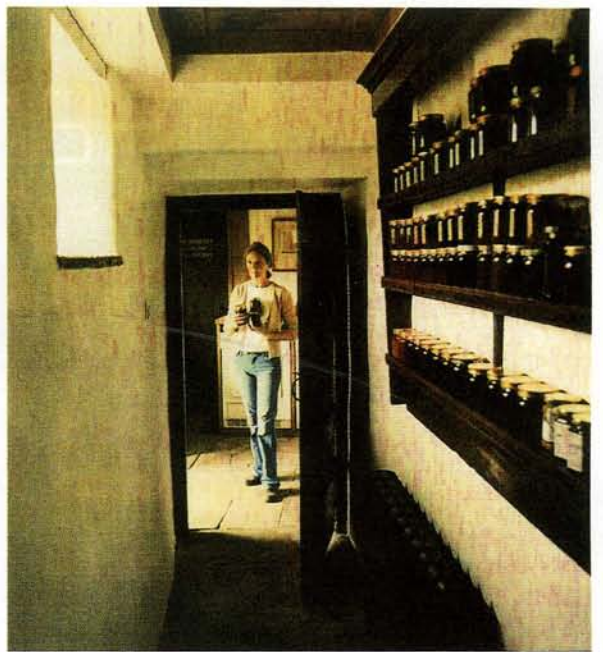
At the front of the house, a low wall and a screen of pleached crab-apples offer a degree of protection to Arne's herbs, a dark crimson rose – 'Cardinal de Richelieu' – and a sea of asters. His 'little babies' >

The house is surrounded by rolling fields and woodland; Arne favours a naturalistic approach to the garden, designing it to blend into the landscape





THIS PAGE Many items in the house came from Baileys, a homewares shop near Ross-on-Wye; Arne is seen there (above left) with Mark and Sally Bailey. The kitchen's stone flags, Aga and freestanding furniture underpin its traditional farmhouse charm (right). William's jam store lines the shelves of an oak plate rack in a corridor (above right); Ali collects a few pots for breakfast. Arne chats to Kristy in the kitchen (below)



– auriculas – are also safe in an auricula theatre, a glazed, grey-painted wooden frame based on a nineteenth-century description in *Johnson's Gardeners' Dictionary*; they will flower in April.

Chickens come and go from a hut, the hatch operated by a light-sensitive device that opens at dawn and closes at sunset. Across the stream, an old drovers' track cuts through steep woods – pannage (woodland common land) grazed by cattle and sheep on the way to Usk. Brambles have been cleared to reveal a carpet of moss where many thousands of wild daffodils, snowdrops and cyclamen were planted last autumn.

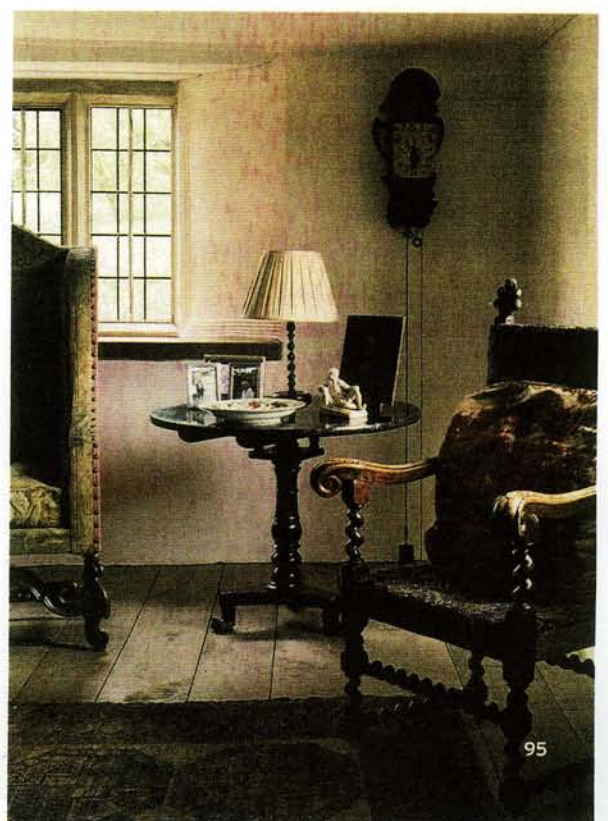
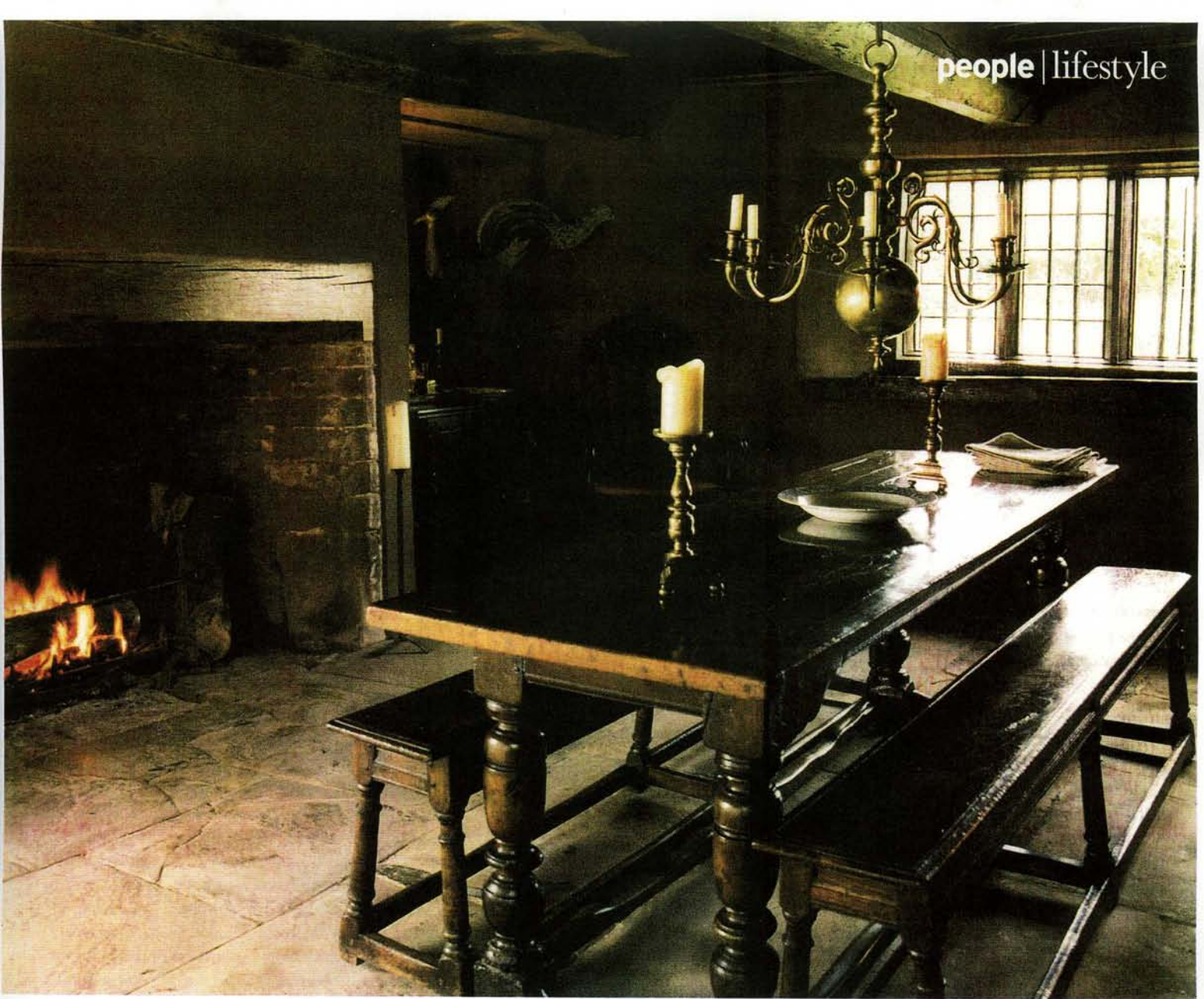
While the garden is very much in hand, friends who knew Arne and William's Lincolnshire home find this house confusingly familiar. The buildings are of a similar age, size and layout and many of the contents therefore fit in the 'same' places.

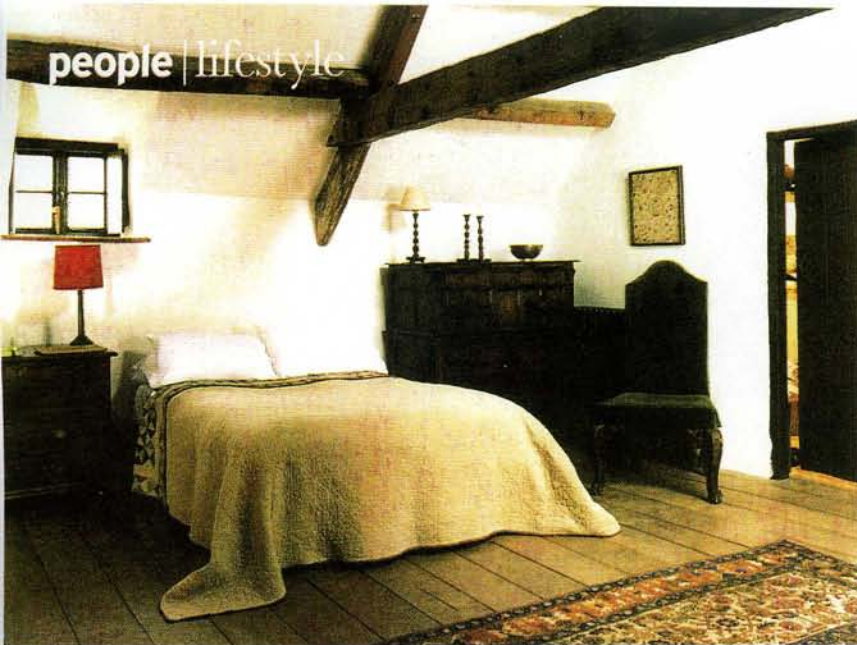
This is a narrow house with shuttered windows. At the eastern end, the only Victorian addition – a cow byre and stable – is now a ground-floor bathroom with a balconied mezzanine above. A corridor leads to the stone-flagged kitchen, where nothing is fitted: 'I hate things in cupboards, I need to be able to see them,' says Arne, running a hand along the iroko draining board where Louise is preparing a tray of granola for tomorrow's breakfast.

In the snug, works by Paul Ryan are much in evidence. 'He's a friend of ours,' says Arne, and his evocative compositions in oil and plaster are hung in several rooms. A low, weathered Lutyens table with three leaves and a triangular centre had been in a garden for years but now lives inside. Favourite things have a past and the pair see 'beauty in decay'. Many of their pieces have a 'history ▷

OPPOSITE A refectory table in the dining room (above) is lit by candles and a log fire. The parlour (below right) – so-called in the local archive – is used for entertaining. The snug (below left) is less formal, with felt-covered

sofas and a mixture of antique and modern furniture. Part of a terracotta frieze by James Bubb, originally in the Italian Opera House, Haymarket (destroyed by fire in 1789), hangs to the left of the wood-burning stove





The spare bedroom (above) is in the medieval part of the house. It is reached by a winding oak staircase (above right); a chest filled with logs is on hand to feed the open fire. A tableau of stone objects on a table, including architectural fragments and a Roman bust, stands below a flat-screen television and is flanked by a pair of seventeenth-century, caned side chairs (right). Myrtle sits on the steps of the studio (below)



of falling over', but they are soon glued back together. The dining room, with a polished refectory table, is lit by candles. 'When everyone is sitting down, only faces catch the light, like a Vermeer painting,' says Arne. Lady Christina Bruce looks on disapprovingly from a wall. 'She's a Scottish hag,' he whispers. Is she a relation? 'No, we bought our ancestors,' Arne laughs, pausing to adjust a blue-grey Lambeth delftware bowl.

In the tower, a beautiful winding staircase survives: two arrow-straight pine-tree trunks form the newel and are set with heavy oak treads. 'It was the work of ship builders, or so a friend has us believe,' says Arne. 'After the defeat of the Armada, many would have been looking for work... it's quite a nice theory.' The staircase leads up to a room described as a parlour in the local archives, which Arne and William still use if they have guests. Around its handsome oak window frames, original plaster mouldings have been copied and reinstated.

Above it, the main bedroom has an open fire, which, when they are here in winter, is always lit. On the bed, where Myrtle, a Basset Fauve de Bretagne, also sleeps, two French flour sacks from Baileys – Mark and Sally Bailey's home emporium near Ross-on-Wye – make unusual pillow covers, and two resin lamps with book-cloth shades, from Marianna Kennedy in Spitalfields, light the bedsides.

That they 'never want to move again' is not a surprise. In time, Arne hopes to move his entire office here, if he can persuade his team to relocate. You would imagine that they could hardly wait □

- Useful addresses:**
 For courses at Allt-y-Bela, contact: Arne Maynard Garden Design (tel: 020-7689 8100; www.arne-maynard.com)
 Bed and breakfast at Allt-y-Bela (e-mail: bb@alltybela.co.uk)
 Baileys (tel: 01989-561931; www.baileyshome.com)
 Buffys – specialist decorators Louise and Ali Barber (tel: 01291-671223; www.buffys-fernwood.com)
 Marianna Kennedy (tel: 020-7375 2757; www.mariannakennedy.com)
 The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (tel: 020-7377 1644; www.spab.org.uk)
 Spitalfields Trust (tel: 020-7247 0971)