



**SIR TIM SMIT'S  
OTHER EDEN:**

*'Why we have a chance to  
build something special'*



**TOP CHEF MICHAEL  
WIGNALL EXCLUSIVE:**

*'We're ushering in a new era  
for Gidleigh Park'*



**THE CORONER STAR  
CLAIRE GOOSE:**

*'Devon was a delightful  
location to film in'*

# DEVON LIFE

January 2016 | [devonlife.co.uk](http://devonlife.co.uk)

**FREE INSIDE**

## 2016 Devon Year Planner

All the major county events  
for this year in a handy guide

## MARVELLOUS MID DEVON:

Wonderful Worlys  
Growing organic  
Master craftsmen



Do you  
cook Devon's  
best scone?

Enter our fabulous  
competition

### PLUS

- » It's great going green in your home
- » Wonderful winter garden Rosemoor
- » 24 Hours in Okehampton

# Experience Exmouth

» Out with the lifeboats » A wildlife haven » WIN a coastal holiday!

£3.99



9 771368 631120

# Putting a seale on it

*The phrase 'labour of love' was invented for a Dartmoor couple's stunning home.*

*CHRISSEY HARRIS visits them to see why all the hard work and heartache was worthwhile*

---





#### STUDIO SPACE

Mat converted part of the farmstead into his studio, where he runs his custom-designed furniture and lighting business, Rust and the Wolf.

He sells and makes original vintage signs, furniture, decorative items and custom artwork to style homes, bars, restaurants and shops.

"I source a lot of the parts from the States," he says. "I'm mainly influenced by military items and vintage Americana."



The family love their home: I-r Mat, Connor (or Coco) Siobhan and Fizzy (Finnian)

THERE must be something about living on magical, mystical Dartmoor that helps a person withstand anything life throws at them: flash floods, fire and ceiling collapse, for example.

Siobhan and Mat Hayles have been through the lot and are still smiling.

They bought their longed-for Dartmoor farmstead back in 2011 and set about transforming the crumbling, oddly laid-out buildings into a stunning family home.

It was nothing they hadn't done before, they thought. The couple ran a successful holiday lettings business in Cornwall for eight years and have renovated more than ten properties in their time.

But Seale Stoke Farm, near Holne, Ashburton, has been a very different beast.

I sit there open-mouthed as Siobhan and Mat tell hair-raising tales of electrical burn-outs, chimney fires, no water, no heating, floods, freezing pipes and piles of dead sheep.

"Oh yes! There was a massive pile of dead sheep in the yard when we moved in," says Siobhan, 35. "I'd forgotten about that."

"Whatever was left in the barn had been scraped out at the end of the year and left there," adds Mat, 40, who says the pair picked through all the bones and used what was left to fertilise some of the 40-acres of land that came with their home.

And then there was the time the couple and their children, Connor (or Coco) seven, and Fizzy (Finnian) five, were poisoned by the water system.

"Every morning Mat would have to get up before anyone else and go and unblock the leat, otherwise there would be no water," says Siobhan.

"We didn't realise there was one tap in the kitchen that wasn't being filtered," says Mat. "When it rains, everything from the moor washes down, so we all ended up with these horrible stomach bugs. It wiped us out for a week and a half."

We all laugh but these must have been dark times. Siobhan and Mat say, rather stoically,

As well as the whole of Dartmoor to explore outside, there is so much space inside



‘I feel really proud of what we did and feel very lucky to have been able to do it. We are so much stronger for it. That sounds clichéd but it’s true’

that everything happened over the course of about a year and half, so at least the hardships were spread out.

To escape (and allow the work to be done) the family moved out at the end of 2012 to another house they had bought in Ashburton - but it was far from the sanctuary they’d hoped.

That property also needed a lot of work and at one point the family was left sitting in a derelict kitchen, surrounded by boxes with a toaster on a shelf.

“It was quite stressful,” says Siobhan. “We are generally quite used to that because we’ve done it so much over the years, but having children is the thing that changed it.

“It’s changed us and made us think we don’t want to keep putting them through this.”

Well, hopefully they won’t have to. After years of hard work, Seale Stoke Farm is now the sort of family home every kid dreams about.

As well as the whole of Dartmoor to explore outside, there is just so much space inside. From the beautifully designed kitchen to the dining room and then downstairs to the boys’ bedrooms, through an ‘enchanted forest’ and into the big TV room - everything flows together.

It’s something Mat, furniture designer, drummer, landscape gardener and all-round hands-on project manager was keen to ensure.

He’s helped to turn this place from a series of separate buildings into a home that makes you want to run from one end to the other and back again. Twice.

“I wanted to do the work myself,” says Mat, who has done the bulk of the hard labour here, as well as running a successful business and helping to look after two young kids.

“I don’t mind,” he says, casually. “I’m just



Interior designer Siobhan and furniture designer Mat have expertly transformed Seale Stoke Farm



The dark and colourful downstairs is down to Siobhan’s clever use of colour and light

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT AUSTIN



#### THE “SMOKING ROOM”

Outside, Mat helped to clear away around 100 trees (“it was like a dark forest”) and opened up the garden.

He also turned some dilapidated old sheds into an outside kitchen, or smoking room.

Everything he used was ‘upcycled’ from the house. “The windows were from the bathroom downstairs,” says Siobhan. “He also used the old front door and some of the flooring for the walls. There’s also a smoker in there.”



"It's better than we ever hoped for," says Siobhan

one of those people; I just get stuck in and do it. You know it's a means to an end – the more work I do, the quicker it's going to get done."

Seale Stoke Farm is exactly what you would expect from two people who work hard and have exceptionally good taste.

Examples of Mat's work can be seen throughout the house and the Scandinavian-style upstairs and dark and colourful downstairs is down to Siobhan's clever use of colour and light (she now works as an interior designer at Woodford Architecture and Interiors in Ashburton. The practice helped with the couple's initial design ideas and secured planning permission for the

three holiday cottages). Then of course there's that view: miles of bleak and beautiful Dartmoor from nearly every window.

"It's better than we ever hoped for," say Siobhan as we gaze out, yet again.

"I feel really proud of what we did and feel very lucky to have been able to do it. We are so much stronger for it. That sounds clichéd but it's true."

"And we've got warmth and running water!" she adds.

"It's the simple things in life - you just can't put a price on them." ♦

See [woodfordarchitecture.com](http://woodfordarchitecture.com) and [rustandthewolf.co.uk](http://rustandthewolf.co.uk)



#### PEACOCK BLUE SUITS

Not only have Siobhan and Mat created their dream home, they've also converted one of their barns into a successful holiday let, called Peacock Blue, and have planning permission for two more.

"We might do that in a few years' time when the kids have grown up and they're not haring round the place!" says Siobhan.

See [uniquehomestays.com/unique/details.asp?id=4542](http://uniquehomestays.com/unique/details.asp?id=4542)

## BRIGHT IDEAS

Examples of Mat's work can be seen throughout the house

