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COTTAGE INDUSTRY

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Smiley happy people

Life is sweet for those in the Knowes, writes **Fiona Reid**

After years of living in a modern house, Margaret Dunning was ready for a change of style when she first spotted Smiley Knowes Cottage at 69b Dirleton Avenue in North Berwick 25 years ago. The woodland location alone was an attraction as the property sits on an elevated site with southerly and westerly aspects. Margaret and her late husband Mike had raised their family in their previous house, but Smiley Knowes offered them the opportunity to have their home exactly as they wanted it, particularly as the cottage was in need of a complete overhaul at the time.

The original cottage was quite compact with two main rooms and a long, narrow kitchen downstairs, and two bedrooms and a shower room upstairs. The Dunnings' first task was to add the conservatory to the front of the house and refit the existing kitchen. There was also the potential to extend the cottage on the western elevation, which they did, creating an additional room on the ground level with a garage to the rear, and a new master bedroom and en suite above.

It was a few years before the couple realised that this extension allowed for an

even better arrangement by moving the kitchen from its position at the front of the property to this much larger space, with French doors opening out into the garden. "The kitchen just wasn't right where it was; I was always anxious to get things done and get out again, whereas now this is the happiest space I've ever had in a house," says Dunning. "I love just sitting by the fireplace looking out at the birds being fed."

And this kitchen isn't the only highlight: the bay-windowed sitting room has an original beamed ceiling, which adds to the character, and the couple decided to follow the theme with the beams upstairs in the master bedroom. The ground floor also has a dining room (or fourth bedroom) and a bathroom, while the two original double bedrooms upstairs share a bathroom.

When it came to creating the extensive garden, the Dunnings were careful not to make it too feel too "manicured". "We tried to keep it quite wild as there's such a lot of wildlife," says Dunning, relating how she was having coffee a few months ago while watching deer grazing. And there's an abundance of

birdlife that the Dunnings nurtured over the years with feeding stations dotted around the garden.

The pond was formed – or at least the hole for the pond was formed – when the lane was created. "At first it was just concrete with a dribble of water and lots of frustrated toads," says Dunning, but the pond has been rebuilt over the years to create today's feature.

This isn't a high-maintenance garden, yet at the same time there's plenty here for the more horticulturally-inclined to get stuck into.

And there's still scope to extend the house. "I'm always changing houses in my dreams. I'm a thwarted architect, always planning and dreaming," says Dunning, who is only moving now to be nearer her family.

Smiley Knowes Cottage would make a great family home, particularly considering the quality of life – great beach, yachting, golfing and so on, as well as well-regarded local schools – afforded by North Berwick itself.

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The hall and stairway, above; the exterior of Smiley Knowes Cottage, left.