

# Back *for good*

*Wendy Green has taken a rather circuitous route back to her cosy home, Fern Cottage, in Bramhall, but this time she's here to stay, writes KATE HOUGHTON*

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**Above:** Wendy's soothing sitting room

**Left:** Wendy Green outside Fern Cottage



WENDY Green is Bramhall born and bred, but left for new horizons at 18, as so many of us do, making a new life for herself in the south of England. It wasn't until she was 35, single again and with a young son, that she decided that the only place to raise a child was back in the village that held so many happy memories for her, and headed home.

'This is my 23rd house,' Wendy laughs, 'I have moved around a lot! I've never been precious about homes, never formed any kind of emotional attachment before...but I think I may stay put this time.'

The beautiful cottage she is now living in is just metres from her childhood home where her parents still live. Her arrival here however wasn't a simple process.

'As a child I always wanted this cottage; we'd walk past it all the time and I always said I'd love to live here.'

This comes as no surprise: from an adult's perspective it ticks every cottage-y box you can think of, so for a child it must have been quite magical.

***"As a child I always wanted this cottage; we'd walk past it all the time and I always said I'd love to live here"***

'When I arrived back here six years ago it was for sale, but despite my childhood dream I chose to be practical. With no garden (and a lively boy in residence) and with some work needing doing, it wasn't ideal so I chose a different property.

'Over the next few years the value of that house increased and I decided to sell. By sheer coincidence, at the same time my estate agent called and told me that Fern Cottage was for sale again. This time I decided to go for it.'

As often happens in property moves the path to happiness had a few bumps in it and Wendy's house sale fell through, meaning she would also lose Fern Cottage. This is where her ex-husband stepped in, providing the means for Wendy to make the purchase until her own home sold. That's what I call an amicable divorce.

Wendy is an important part of the Bramhall community. Not only is she the founder of website and community e-newspaper [ilovebramhall.com](http://ilovebramhall.com), but the driving force behind many of the regular community events that make this lovely village such a great place to



**Above:** A light and bright landing

**Right:** Fern Cottage is an old weavers cottage, dating back over 300 years

**Below:** The elegant dining room

live. She is also the founder of Moxie Mingle, a professional networking events company that provides opportunities for people to meet and make contacts.

‘When I moved back to Bramhall I got involved with the 2008 Bramhall Festival, mainly so that I could get to know people and really get into the community. I was invited to take on more and more – and now I commit a lot of time to this. The website, [ilovebramhall.com](http://ilovebramhall.com), is all about celebrating the residents and independent businesses of Bramhall. We share news – from new businesses to lost dogs – on the site and across social media and use it as a platform to promote all our events.’

Wendy’s most recent innovation is the Big Bramhall Tea Party, a free afternoon event for senior citizens of the community. They can enjoy tea and cake, mini-treatments and the opportunity to get out and mix with their peers and young people from across the town.

‘It’s grown rapidly since the first one,’ Wendy says. ‘We have live music, lots of local businesses donate time and services, from cakes to Pimms to flowers. We have 60 pupils from Bramhall High School who serve the guests and previously local scout groups built the marquees for us. It’s just such a good day. I shall never forget that one year a very elderly lady came and said “thank you so much” and that it had been a wonderful, unforgettable day

*‘I didn’t want a ‘twee’ cottage, but I did want to acknowledge the age of the property by keeping little things where we could’*





she had enjoyed. Not long afterwards her son got in touch. She had died the very next day. He said she'd told him all about the tea party and how happy it had made her. He wanted to thank me for that. Very sad, but lovely too.'

Wendy's focus on promoting local businesses and services is reflected in her home, which required significant renovation before she could move in, and a complete overhaul of the décor.

'The cottages here are over 300 years old. Prior to me taking it on Fern Cottage hadn't been updated in quite some time. All the window frames were rotten, there was damp and it really wasn't suitable for living in.'

'I asked Derek Watmough at 4mation Architecture in Bramhall to develop a new interior living space and chose Justin Hurst at Hurst Contracts in Bramhall as my builder, and the outside space has been absolutely transformed by Jason at Classic Paving. I decided to work with an interior designer because I knew I had to get this spot-on. It's a tiny cottage and my changes had to be sympathetic, but I needed a practical living space and plenty of storage. I work from home, so I needed a proper office too.'

'I chose Lisa Keates, an interior designer I had met at one of my networking events. I knew of Lisa's skill and experience with renovating period properties, though usually considerably larger than this one. Even before I moved out of

**Above:** A raised roofline, new windows and bi-fold doors have created a bright, airy kitchen

**Below:** Wendy relaxes with her dog

my last house she came round and measured all the furniture, detailing the room plans for the new house and what items I would be taking with me and what I had to lose, as it's a much smaller space.

'I didn't want a "twee" cottage, but I did want to acknowledge the age of the property by keeping little things where we could. The beam over the fireplace came from the downstairs loo, for example.'

'I don't like a lot of clutter and I wanted it calm and soothing – and she's really nailed it. ▶





Family bathroom with Wendy's 'mad' sink purchase

'Her greatest challenge perhaps was that with spending so much money on the renovation project my interior design budget was tiny. She sent me options for each thing I needed to buy – high end, medium and low cost, allowing me to achieve the look I wanted at the budget I had available. I only once went against all opinion, when I saw and fell in love with a sink, which I insisted I wanted for my main bathroom, despite everybody telling me I was mad!'

The changes made to this old cottage have created a modern living space with no dilution of its ancient charm. Previously a four bedroom home, it was decided to sacrifice the smallest



Balancing traditional and modern perfectly

and use it to create an en-suite for Wendy. By taking up part of the central landing too, a generously proportioned bathroom has been created, ticking a vital box on the contemporary lifestyle list.

Downstairs, the garage was converted to an office for Wendy, the wall between the kitchen and sitting room was removed and in the kitchen the end wall was raised a little (you still have to duck to exit to the back) and bi-fold doors replaced the previous solid wall. This allows light to pour through and on warm days Wendy can open them up and double the size of the space.

Lisa Keates, Wendy's interior designer, tells me: 'By maintaining a continuity of palette and materials throughout the home you get much more of a flow so the whole property seems bigger. The lighting plan is detail specific to the placing of the furniture and multiple lighting circuits are in place to suit varied activities, from spring cleaning to chilling out. All this was drawn up and agreed when the architect's plans were approved, so that it formed part of the builder's plans before first fix.'

As Wendy would advocate, networking can be a wonderful thing and as her beautiful cottage is the hub of a rapidly expanding Bramhall community and business network, it could be said that the proof of the pudding truly is in the tasting. ♦

[ilovebramhall.com](http://ilovebramhall.com)

[keates-interiors.co.uk](http://keates-interiors.co.uk)

[4mation-architecture.com](http://4mation-architecture.com)



Neutral shades with pops of colour create a feeling of space and tranquillity



**Limited palette**

Lisa Keates explains that by using a limited colour scheme throughout Wendy's cottage, each room flows and gives the impression of a larger space. Soft neutrals provide a backdrop, with splashes of mustard, teal and pink to add interest and capture the eye.

*Clockwise: Fishbone cushion, £25.95 black-by-design.co.uk  
Frieda pink pom pom cushion, £38 brissi.com  
Zig Zag Birds cushion, £95 sweetpeaandwillow.com*



**Natural beauty**  
Wendy has chosen natural materials for her flooring, from stone and wood to wool and leather.  
*Gacho stripe leather rug, £309 www.therugseller.co.uk*

# Get the look

*Wendy Green, with help from interior designer Lisa Keates, has created a restful place to live and work at her little cottage in Bramhall. Here's how to get the look*



**Now and then**

From current to vintage, Wendy and Lisa have selected furniture that fits into this old cottage with a young heart.

*Victorian oak hall table, £245 theoldcinema.co.uk*



**Warm up**

Wendy chose to invest in vintage style radiators throughout her home, and they look stunning.

*Grace 4-column cast iron radiator, from £468 castrads.com*



**Stay calm**

A busy lifestyle requires calm and comfort when off duty. This super-soft sofa can be lifted using throws and cushions from your chosen colour scheme.

*Harlow beige fabric corner sofa, £899.99 furniturechoice.co.uk*