



Horse sense: Totty Lowther and friend demonstrate some of her exquisite wallpaper designs at Whitbysteads farm

Idle home

Peak practice

Georgina Williams is delighted by a lakeland farm-cum-bed-and-breakfast, run by a couple with an eye for enchantment



TRAVELLING north beyond Lancashire and the Yorkshire Dales you encounter the Howgill Fells, a small mountain range that is the first real taste of Cumbria and a prelude to the dramatic landscape that lies beyond. Once through the Lune Gorge, the land opens out, quite wild at first, but eventually the windswept moorland evolves into a softer landscape and the lush, fertile pastures of the Eden Valley.

Here, just south of the historic market town of Penrith, is the village of Askham, home to Tom and Totty Lowther and their two children. Part of the Lowther family, who have lived here and managed the surrounding land for more than 800 years, they are veritably hewn from these hills – and it is hard to imagine living in a more spectacular setting. Their farm, Whitbysteads, sits sheltered at the base of Askham Fell, surrounded by Lakeland peaks to the west and the soaring panorama of the great Pennine chain to the east. In the foreground are the supremely romantic Gothic ruins of Lowther Castle.

The farmhouse, built from local stone in the mid-17th century, is a traditional Westmorland longhouse, whitewashed and solid, with adjoining barns and an open yard. Tom's parents began farming here in 1956, building up a prized herd of Galloway cattle and flock of 600

sheep. When Tom and Totty moved here, just over 20 years ago, they were hit, almost immediately, by the terrible blight of foot-and-mouth disease. It was a difficult start to their tenure, but it prompted Tom to rethink the old ways of farming and he has been clear-sighted in his aim of returning health to his livestock and the landscape ever since. In line with current thinking and very much in tune with the *Idler* ethos, he believes that less is more and has gradually built up a small herd of beautiful Blue Grey and Galloway cattle which roam the surrounding pasture and commons and produce exceptional meat. He is passionate about this small-scale specialist farming and hopes that, with minimal intervention, it will help to improve the biodiversity of this precious landscape.

Totty is equally energetic and enterprising and has recently launched a range of stunning wallpaper from her farmhouse HQ. This venture is a natural progression of a life steeped in creativity; from studying textiles at St Martin's School of Art in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to a career as a set decorator and stylist, to more recently launching her eponymous interior service and shop.

Her untrammelled creativity, love of colour and skill as a decorator is



Deck the hall: vivid colours, contrasting textures and interesting prints make a welcome entrance to the farmhouse

evident as soon as you arrive at Whitbysteads. The hall is painted a Cerulean blue and hung with an array of paintings and prints. A pair of antlers, festooned with all manner of hats, hangs above an baroque sofa, its opulence

tempered by kilim rugs and embroidered Indian silk cushions. An acid yellow lampshade hangs from the ceiling and takes the eye through to a scarlet baize door studded with brass tacks, which leads to the kitchen.

Here an Aga murmurs away gently as shaggy roan cattle meander past the window. The kitchen table is covered in a fabulous green floral fabric that Totty picked up at a local mill; the colour looks great against the walls which are painted a warm Carmine

red. At the other end of the kitchen is a supremely comfortable sitting room where a capacious sofa, covered in a eye-popping shag carpet, sits next to mirrored side tables, a 1970s lamp and large woven ottoman.

This eclectic mix is a hallmark



Prickly customers: a coven of cacti nestle in floral print tablecloth splendor in the kitchen

of Totty's design aesthetic. In the colourful snug next door, a table is laden with samples she is gathering for a forthcoming project; florals sit with stripes and geometrics, gilt with wood, glass with cotton

fringing, antique with contemporary – a juxtaposition of styles, colours and textures which fit seamlessly together under her unerring eye.

The Drawing Room, a 1970s



Baroque'n'roll: an eye-popping mixture of colours and styles make the Drawing Room perfect for parties



Animal magic: plush cushions, print rugs and original hessian wallpaper from the 1970s, all artfully arranged

addition to the house, is a vast and versatile space and the most perfect party room. Filled with a wonderful array of furniture and paintings, and flooded with natural light, it is hard to know where to look, until your eyes rest on the real scene stealer,

the jaw-dropping view across to the Pennines. The original hessian wallpaper hung here by Tom's mother in the 1970s has inspired Totty to use texture in her own wallpaper collection. She is not a slave to fashion and, concerned

about sustainability, has created just two patterns in a small range of colours which can be digitally printed to order not far away in Preston. Her first design, Pomegranate, originated from an original 18th century Indienne block print that she found at a

textile dealers and magnified to create a distinctive, original design. She has papered the downstairs loo in the Original Blue grasscloth version and it looks splendid, setting off the reclaimed surgical sink and glossy woodwork perfectly.

Upstairs are comfortable,



No wallflower: Totty's Pomegranate wallpaper, inspired by an 18th century Indienne block print, makes the downstairs loo look lavish

light-filled bedrooms all with wonderful views. The Castle Room, perhaps my favourite, has a sumptuous en-suite bathroom with riotous toile wallpaper, a deep shagpile rug and cosy armchair. In the bedroom, a large ottoman upholstered with a purple rug is another one of Totty's brilliant finds. With such a collector's eye – and plenty of local auctions – it's helpful to have her shop just a short drive away in Penrith. There, at the Brunswick Yard salvage and antique centre, Totty has transformed a shipping container into an ever-changing diorama to display and

sell her latest finds. When I visited, it was decorated as an elegant sitting room with a fabulous velvet sofa, some covetable lamps, botanical prints and a lacquer longcase clock.

Back home at Whitbysteads, Tom was working on an application for the Endangered Landscape Project and tending to the farm, while Totty was juggling her design work with home commitments. They are a dynamic duo, forging new paths from their hill farm, a true Idle Home, rooted in the past but with an eye to the future and unmistakably in the present. 📍

Tub-thumping: the en suite in the Castle Room has riotous toile wallpaper



Buy George

Wallpaper

For more information, samples and enquiries on Totty's wallpaper, contact: tottylowther.co.uk

The Fabric Collective in Langton Street stocks a range of carefully curated fabrics and wallpapers from artisan designers, including Totty thefabriccollective.com

Furniture, lighting and paintings

Totty Lowther Shop is located in a shipping container at the Brunswick Yard in Penrith.

brunswickyard.com or follow Totty on Instagram [@tottylowthershop](https://www.instagram.com/tottylowthershop) to discover recent finds

General enquiries for B&B, locations and meat sales

As well as providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation, Whitbysteads can be hired as a photographic location. Further details on rental or general information regarding the farm and meat sales at whitbysteads.org

Upholstery and curtain fabrics

Totty visits the Stead McAlpin Fabric Mill Shop in Carlisle for designer seconds: steadmcipin.co.uk. For similar, try the-millshop-online.co.uk Based in Northampton, this online shop sells designer fabric roll ends and seconds with nationwide delivery.

Reconditioned Agas

Agas have always been an important part of a farmhouse kitchen. Many old ranges can now be converted to electricity and are available with a timing device making them more environmentally friendly. morelandcookers.co.uk