



A change for the better?

Writer Elizabeth Carlson and her partner Abel were tired, life in the city didn't quite fit them any more. They decided on a drastic remedy – swapping life in the heart of London for a simpler existence in a farmhouse in rural France. Neighbours are scarce, modern life's fast-fixes even scarcer. 'But years of living on top of others can be exhausting, we thought here we could find space to breathe.' Elizabeth reflects on just what they did find

I'm not a hippy, I'm not good with heights and I'm not so crazy about being sporty in the great outdoors. So maybe it's odd that three years ago I gave up my city life and chose to settle in a place where hippies escaped in the 1960s to raise goats, and live in a house on a high hilltop that's reached by a very narrow, windy road. And as far as the eye can see there are only forests and wild rivers where adrenaline junkies canoe and kayak.

The decision that led me here was as simple as realising that after 10 years in the heart of London, my partner Abel and I needed a change of scenery. Moving to a completely new country could be seen as extreme but Abel and I don't do things by half!

We love to travel and didn't feel an emotional draw to one particular place – we thought about Italy but chose the Ardeche without ever having been to the region! Initially practical things, like being two hours from an airport and having a fast internet connection so we could continue to work, coloured our choice. And the first time I saw this place it didn't quite compute – ramshackle, remote, dark inside. But something felt right, I could see myself living here.

The move was a shock – our (distant) neighbours are farmers, retirees and young eco souls. But some shocks re-energise you and it's what we were looking for: a project, a place to make our own. It's hard to explain but this place makes us feel good.

LIGHT MY FIRE
A real fire looks cosy and rustic, but can it be a truly eco-conscious choice? It can be if you choose a wood-burning stove and find a supplier which uses wood from sustainable sources, or even better, waste from saw mills or forestry centres. ● **IKEA 365+ BRASA** floor lamp white [901-487-66] Cxx **FELICIA** curtain w tie-back 145x300 purple 2pac [301-075-61] Cxx



‘I don’t throw food away – ever! Old fruit lying around? Smoothie. Leftover scraps of meat and vegetables? Soup. Living half an hour from the nearest shop means we take notice of what we’ve got in the fridge – and makes us use it!’

PHOTOGRAPHY JAKE CURTIS

Our kitchen is crushed raspberry flavour.

We wanted to do something a little daring in here and the pink wall reminds me of the colour of crushed raspberries. The colour changes with the seasons and in different lights. It’s free and flexible. There aren’t any straight even walls in the house so choosing freestanding kitchen units made sense. I chose a light and classic wood and tile look and put in a breakfast bar for casual snacking.

Dinner is usually on our laps in front of the TV – it sounds awful but I’m afraid it’s the truth! I love cooking and try to use up everything. Food scraps get worked into new dishes. We buy food from the local markets which in summer are full of wonderful

fruit and vegetables grown right here in the Ardeche. We get our cheese from a local organic goat farm, and the local hunt have been known to drop by with a fresh piece of wild boar! Being an adventurous cook, living here has opened up all sorts of new possibilities. This year I’m planning to try making jam using cherries from the tree in our garden.

We’d love to have our own wind turbine but that’s still very much a dream project.

Find freestanding kitchen units at www.IKEA.xx/xxxx

WASTE LESS FOOD

Elizabeth and Abel live half an hour from the nearest shop, ‘So we have got used to making our supplies last.’ Good storage makes all the difference: clear jars and airtight tubs, labelled with dates, make it easy to store food safely and to keep track of how much food is in your fridge and cupboards. ● **FAKTUM/STÅT** units (painted off-white) **VÄRDE** bar units **NUMERÄR** work surface **DOMSJÖ** double sink



‘I love the look of rough stone. Rather than plastering the wall in our office area we painted it white and made a feature of its texture, hanging an old landscape painting inherited from Abel’s grandparents on it and illuminating it with spotlights’

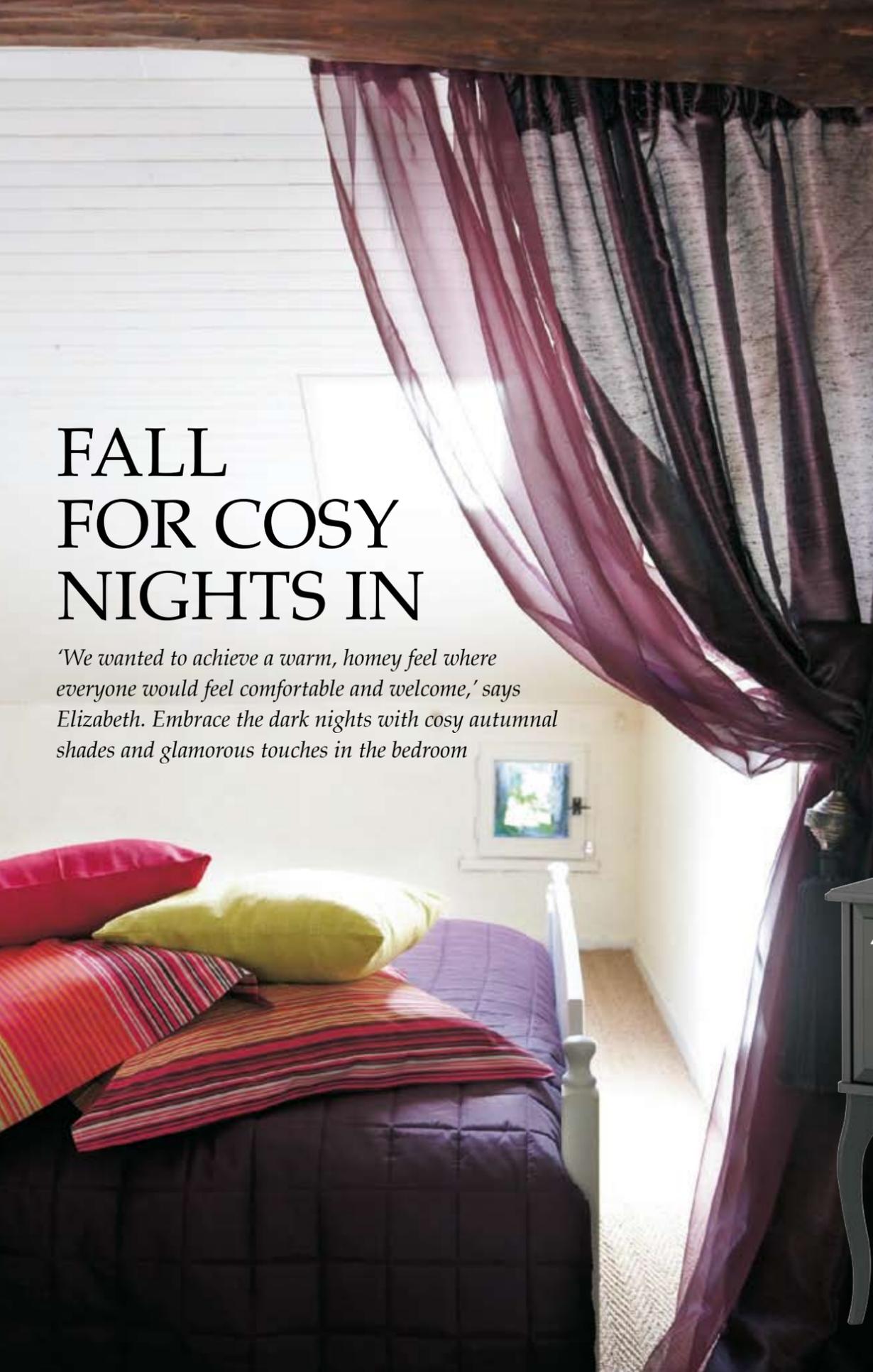
Abel is a city boy but out here, when he needs a break from work, he enjoys getting out in the mountains, biking or jogging. I grew up in the countryside but still find it impossible to get used to certain things, like the creepy crawlies – I fight them every day. And I prefer taking my breaks in the garden hammock with a drink! Abel and I work separately but from home. We’re lucky enough to have an office each. Mine is a spare room in the eaves, Abel’s is created from space on the upstairs hallway. Why did I get the room? Abel’s a gentleman! We may have moved away from family and friends but we try to make sure our home is welcoming enough to ensure plenty of visitors. We have paid

as much attention to our three spare rooms as to our own bedroom. I make them inviting with fresh flowers, two pillows for extra comfort, magazines to read and soft toys so friends’ kids feel at home. We have people to stay most weekends and after a relaxed meal, we usually end up sat round the fire playing ‘guess that 80s song’! When guests are gone, we have our Friends and Family Hall Of Fame to remember them. It’s a gallery of our favourite people. We didn’t want to have photos all over the house so I collected frames in lots of colours and styles, and we started taking pictures of people when they visited us. It’s a personal touch that spices up the stairwell’s wonky wall.

BE EVER GREEN! Think people who live in the countryside are greener than city folk? Not necessarily! Old properties may have thick walls but heat can be lost through leaky windows and poorly insulated roofs. So lag those pipes, insulate the loft and draught-proof doors and windows! ● SALONG N vase 20 cm red [001-153-98] €xx SÖRUM bedside table 42x38 cm black [801-298-53] €xx KILAN bedspread 260x280 purple dark lilac [501-088-52] €xx

FALL FOR COSY NIGHTS IN

'We wanted to achieve a warm, homey feel where everyone would feel comfortable and welcome,' says Elizabeth. Embrace the dark nights with cosy autumnal shades and glamorous touches in the bedroom



Forty years ago John Lennon and Yoko Ono spent their honeymoon week in bed protesting for world peace. What cause would keep you in bed?

Show a little tenderness....

You spend almost six years dreaming. That's 2,100 days spent in another world. Make your journey there easy with gentle colours and lighting.

1. EDLAND bds table 40x40cm grey [901-628-56] Cxx 2. PERSIKA vase 17cm pink [501-565-22] Cxx 3.

LÅSBY rug 70x115cm pink [301-499-43] Cxx 4. LEVANGER mirror 155x140cm gold-colour [998-626-60] Cxx 5. EDLAND chest/2 drw 116x83cm grey [501-628-58] Cxx 6. SOCKERÄRT vase 16cm white [101-484-64] Cxx 7. JONSBO EGBY table lamp clear glass/beige [401-531-47] Cxx 8. IKEA PS VERANDA bed frm

w mattress 212x132x201cm grey/black [098-626-69] Cxx 9. ALVINE VACKER qc/pwc 150x200/50x60cm [001-596-55] Cxx 10. EKTORP ach Svanby grey [198-643-14] Cxx 11. ALVINE LÖV cushion 50x60cm grey/green [601-599-83] Cxx



GO IN STORE! xxx more bedroom ideas to fall head over heels for