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At home with...
Nigel Morter and
Claire Nugent

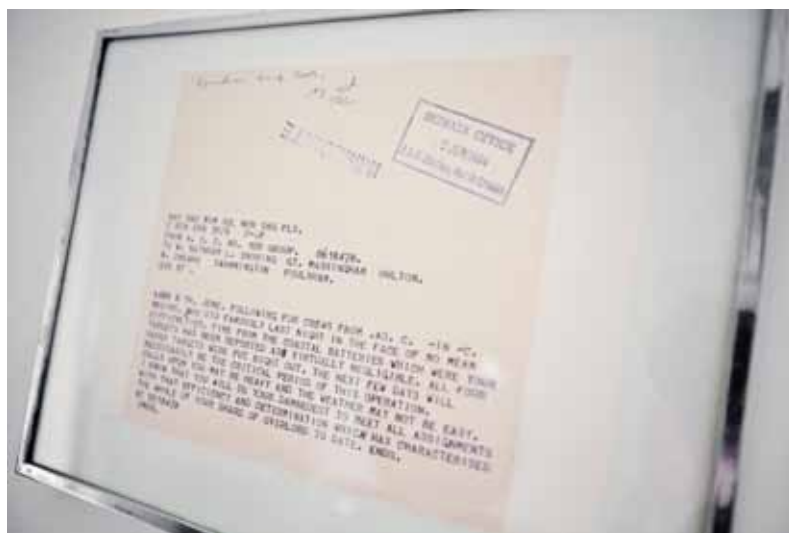


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Probably one of the most ambitious transformations in north Norfolk to date, the Control Tower at Egmere combines modernism, history and escape. *Emma Harrowing* talks to the owners Nigel Morter and Claire Nugent.

Photography **CAMROVISION PHOTOGRAPHY**

A Second World War airfield may not be everyone’s idea of the perfect location for a home, but for Nigel Morter and his partner Claire Nugent, the almost brutal, modernist architecture was their grand design.

“Ever since I was a child I’ve obsessed by, what I would’ve then called ‘old things,’” says Nigel. “This expressed itself in the way I dressed, books I read and the cars I bought. When Claire and I got together we both had an interest in deco and modernist design and so we inspired

each other. Our house in Welwyn Garden City was full of 1930s/1940s furniture and so the control tower is the ultimate expression of this – it was not really a decision to buy and renovate the building, it was just an extension of what we’d always done.

“We started seeking a Second World War airfield building almost 10 years ago having seen a derelict airfield operations block in a field in Cambridgeshire. Being unsuccessful in the purchase of that and three other operations blocks in East Anglia, a particularly bad day at work



found me typing ‘control towers for sale’ in to an internet search engine and up popped our control tower.”

Situated three miles inland from Wells, the renovated control tower oozes 1940s charm and has been made into a stylish bed and breakfast, as well as a home. It is also the base from where Nigel and Claire run their wedding car business – Wedding Wheels – which includes a fleet of cars such as a Hillman Super Minx convertible Nigel bought when he was 18 and two other Rootes classics.

The exterior and interior is as sentimental as 1940s style dictates, when after the war people referred back to the traditions of family home comforts, mixed with modern post-war design. Rich reds and greens, favoured for the interior of the home in this era, can be found here, along with bright floral textiles and wallpapers, gingham prints and apparel. Colonial style furniture looks stylish against this vintage backdrop, and again fits with the period.

Old also mixes with reproduction. Formica work tops in the kitchen, the coloured tiles on the walls and metal windows by Met Therm, which have all the style of the original Crittalls and all the warm of a modern window, give a liveable feel to this home from home.

“The quarry tiles, parquet and wood-strip flooring are all reclaimed,” says Nigel. “Trawling auctions, both online and in attendance, reclamation yards and skips has been a joy!

“As far as possible we tried to source genuine period items. All the en suites (with the exception of the shower cubicle) are original art deco. Choosing period furniture to design schemes for the B&B rooms and dressing them has been a lot of fun. We want the rooms to have a 40s feel but not cluttered – I think we have achieved that look.

Renovation work took two years to complete, well, complete enough for it to open as a B&B, as Nigel says: “We’re not complete and I don’t imagine we ever will

be – that’s not the nature of a project like this as they’ll always be something to do. Having said that the interior and exterior are ready for guests and very much looking as we wanted them to.”

As with any renovation project, escalating costs was the major challenge – it’s always said that you should plan your budget and timescale and then double both, but even when you do that you seem a long way out!

“The building threw things at us that we weren’t expecting,” says Nigel. “Most were reasonably straightforward to get around with thought. However, it was the sheer strength of the building that really surprised us – the plumbers named it ‘the tool-eater’ as they’d never known anything so hard that it destroyed drill bits and, on some occasions, the drills themselves with alarming regularity.”

Throughout the work Nigel and Claire lived in the control tower, braving the lack of hot water, living in chaos and running

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LUXE LIVING

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out of buckets, saucepans and towels to catch the rain water as torrential rain hit just as the roof was removed.

“It’s the dust and disorder I remember most – it felt like I didn’t know where anything was for two years,” says Nigel.

“Now order is emerging you can walk around in bare feet and the music and books (mostly) are back on shelves. Most of the time we can’t quite believe we live here, especially when we haven’t any guests and we sit in the guest sitting room with a good Norfolk cheese and a bottle of Port in front of the fire.

“The best part – and it is difficult to choose just one – is taking a trip to the roof to look out to Sheringham Shoal wind farm or a vivid sunset. Or, perhaps, sitting on a bench in the wildflower meadow with a glass of ale and looking back towards the building. It’s then that you realise it was all worth it.”



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❖ The Control Tower, Bunkers Hill, Egmore, Walsingham, www.controltowerstays.com