



Action station

Lizanne and David Southworth have transformed a run-down railway station near York into a fabulous family home. **Tony Greenway** steams in for a visit

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SAM ATKINS



Lizanne Southworth relaxes on her very own station platform



The Southworths followed the advice of York train enthusiasts and painted their home yellow and green

Most people have a patio outside their French windows. But Lizanne Southworth has a railway platform. 'This,' she says, pointing at her wooden decking, 'is where the old steam trains used to pull in. It's quite amazing when you think about it.'

It's certainly a bit surreal, especially when the family's pet peacock struts by and heads off towards two beautifully restored train carriages which sit at the side of the house.

Lizanne, her engineer husband David and their two children, Victoria, 16, and Alastair, 13, have an unusual home: a restored railway station on the now defunct Derwent Valley Light Railway, which ran between Layerthorpe in York and Cliffe Common, near Selby. Called Skipwith Station, the Southworths' property was once the penultimate stop on the line.

'Our entrance hall used to be the ladies' waiting room,' explains Lizanne, 'and our lounge was a ticket master's office. And over there,' she says, pointing in the general direction of her sofa, 'was the main door leading into the general waiting room and a little window where you would buy your ticket.'

The short-lived Derwent Valley Light Railway is all but forgotten now. Just 16 miles long, it opened in 1912, but passenger services stopped in 1926. While the line was busy during the Second World War serving government depots, it finally closed in 1985.

When David and Lizanne first saw the house in 2004, it had already been converted into what looked like a 1970s bungalow rather than an architectural marvel from the golden age of steam. Inside, the distinctive tongue-and-groove panelling had been covered up with plasterboard, and the exterior was hidden under concrete.



Skipwith Station has been given a new lease of life as a family home and **above right:** The surrounding landscape was one of the reasons the Southworths were drawn to their station home

'Previous owners couldn't get a mortgage on a wooden house,' explains Lizanne, a garden designer by trade, 'so it was breeze-blocked and rendered.'

'When we first saw it, there were some clues that gave away its origins. It was a long, thin building with a granny flat extension and it was raised above the ground. Plus it had big gables with finials on the end, so we got the impression that there was a fine, historical building underneath.'

David and Lizanne don't have a particular passion for railways, but they do like a project to keep them busy. 'David is good with his hands,' says Lizanne. 'He has built a plane in the past and rebuilt classic cars. So this was a project we could get our teeth into. We also loved the surrounding countryside, so it was too good a chance to miss.'

Lizanne and David bought the station and its three acres of land for £350,000 in 2005. They began work on the interior immediately.

'We gutted the place,' says Lizanne. 'We knocked out

walls, replastered, installed underfloor heating, moved the kitchen – it was endless and very dusty.'

They also put on a new roof, chipped away the rendering and ripped off the breeze blocks to reveal the station's beautiful wooden exterior. Then, inspired by a group of York train enthusiasts who had restored an old station further down the line at Murton's Yorkshire Museum of Farming, the Southworths painted the outside of their new home green and yellow. Just as it would have been in 1912.

There was more work to come. A friend of David's mentioned that a Doncaster coachworks was closing down, and had they thought about buying a couple of carriages and renting them out as self-catering holiday lets?

'It all started with a quite innocent comment from a friend,' laughs Lizanne, 'but it took on a life of its own. We bought two carriages for £1,000 each, hired a crane, hoisted them over the station roof and put them in position. Our village had never seen anything like it!



Holidaymakers can now stay in two revamped railway carriages at Skipwith Station, the Derwent Flyer and Derwent Mail

'I really enjoy living in a place with such character and history. I also feel we've rescued something that was on the verge of disappearing.'

'It's funny: sometimes it takes other people to see the worth of an idea. We couldn't because we were too close to the renovation work on the station.'

The carriages, the Derwent Flyer and Derwent Mail, are the icing on the cake at Skipwith, and both have a lounge, bedrooms, shower room, kitchen and dining area. Do-it-yourself livery is also available at the station for horse-lovers.

'I love it here,' says Lizanne. 'I really enjoy living in a place with such character and history. I also feel we've rescued something that was on the verge of disappearing. The local historical society think the work we've done is fabulous, as do the York train enthusiasts whose station inspired us.'

'Plus, locals want to stay in our carriages for long weekends and we've had interest from older people who remember the station as it was back in the day. We've had guests with children who have really enjoyed the experience of staying in a train at an old railway station. It's different and it's fun.'



Old railway carriages have been transformed into holiday homes

For more information, click on www.skipwithstation.co.uk.