



Jules Hudson

COUNTRY ESCAPE

Whether it's a quaint cottage or a rustic farmhouse, you'll know what makes your ideal home. Jules ponders what 'perfect' means when it comes to property

It's six am, a bright and beautiful day is dawning, and the early morning light is flooding my room. Through the windows I can see hills outlined on the horizon as the sunshine gradually lifts the curtain of darkness. The landscape is incomparably beautiful, laced with miles of dry stone walls and ancient farmsteads. Today, I'm in the Yorkshire Dales, ready to head out with a pair of eager house buyers determined to find their perfect home in which to 'escape to the country'. But what's the perfect home really like?

If I asked you to describe *your* perfect home what would you say? Would it be a farmhouse, a cottage, a barn or a bungalow? Would it be some timber-framed beauty whose builder's king was a man named Henry, or something a little more Victorian or Georgian? Might you grab all that the modern world can offer and start again with a 21st century grand design? We can all imagine our own version or pick it out from a picture in a magazine, but what is it that we strive for when we endow our homely ambitions with the title 'perfect'?

It's a tough one, there's no doubt. For many of us, it can come down to the detail and the finish. The crisp lines of a newly renovated property imbue a place with a sense of rebirth, a new chapter in the life of a building that may be hundreds of years old. For others it's the setting and the aspect, whilst for a few more it's the chance to recognise the potential in a place that needs the sort of TLC and loving restoration that only you can provide.

In truth, of course, most of us would agree that really it's a combination of all these things. Looking back to when I started out on my own journey into property 20 years ago, I can see that it was driven by a sense of character and setting, two factors that have always been top of my list. To me a building has to feel like it belongs where it is, and it has to have a personality that can embrace you, that can reach out to both persuade and reassure you that you're the person it's been waiting for.

For the best part of two decades I poured my heart and soul into renovating a lovely stone cottage in the heart of the Cambrian Mountains, and developing the acre or so of garden that surrounded it. It became an obsession, a genuine labour of

love, and up until the point when I sold it to move to the Welsh Borders, I spent every waking hour tweaking and caring for it. So much so that a certain OCD took over. Everything had to be as perfect as I thought I could make it.

But what I've discovered since moving and taking on a much bigger project, is that striving for some sort of material perfection is to miss the point.

Our new home isn't perfect in that it isn't finished, but it's perfect because to us it is exactly what we

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wanted. Its setting, its age, and all of its quirks and foibles caused us to fall in love with it and want to care for it. The scale of what needs doing means that the OCD of fretting about this or that has been swept away with a more philosophical and patient sense of timescale, and a determination to enjoy the whole process rather than rush it through just to get it done. I've learnt there's a real danger in renovating towards an ideal, because we can so easily iron out and lose forever all those lumps and bumps and imperfections that give a building its character. They are its footnotes and fingerprints that help remind us of its story. Once lost, they are lost forever.

So, back to today, and it's time to get back on the road, devouring a fantastic landscape as we head out for some more house hunting. Our buyers are excited and willing, and keen to start a whole new chapter, in a new home that they hope will be perfect. Let's hope it is...

JULES HUDSON was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the *Countryfile* team, but is best-known as the leading face of *Escape To The Country*. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

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