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machinery. The floor was pretty rotten, part of a tree was growing through the window, and the grooms’ quarters hadn’t been lived in since the turn of the century.

“But I always loved the building. It had all these amazing original wooden beams and the granite shell was fine.

“It seemed well worth saving what was here.”

Liz and her husband Richard enlisted the services of buildings surveyor Matthew Bridge from Newton Stewart and designer and builder Wacek Barc.

They came up with plans to convert the upper floor into accommodation, incorporating three double en suite bedrooms and an open-plan living space with kitchen/dining room, and a vast studio space where up to eight artists can work comfortably.

With help from LEADER Dumfries & Galloway funding to promote arts and culture, work started in March 2017 and Liz was delighted with how quickly and efficiently her vision was realised: “It was completed in time for Spring Fling earlier this year and to be here with everything finished to this standard is really astonishing.

“Wacek’s team worked six days a week and all hours of daylight. We would have saved the building somehow anyway, but it’s great to give it a purpose.”

Liz describes the interior as having a “modern feel but in keeping with the old building”. Some of its modern luxuries include a wood-burning stove, a solid wood fitted kitchen, fabrics and soft furnishings in ochres and slate blues, which reflect the stone and earth tones of the surrounding countryside, and stunning blown glass and industrial-style feature lighting. ▶



Liz in her studio on Rusko Estate near Gatehouse of Fleet

A new inspiration

Having created ‘the perfect artist’s studio’ from a Victorian granite stable block she saved from collapse, painter Liz Gilbey has not only given the building a new lease of life but is also giving people a new passion, sharing her love of art and the landscape

WORDS CAROL HOGARTH PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID MOSES

When Elizabeth Gilbey and her family relocated from London to Rusko Estate near Gatehouse of Fleet two years ago, it wasn’t just renovating their new home which became a priority.

An artist and keen horsewoman, Elizabeth, known as Liz, was captivated by the estate’s old granite stable block which she pictured as the perfect artist’s studio.

In just over 12 months the imposing Victorian building, which had incorporated a coach house and grooms’ accom-

modation, as well as stabling, has been transformed into a stylish, modern three-bedroom holiday apartment leading into a spacious, atmospheric studio.

Liz has been using it to run workshops in traditional drawing and painting techniques in oils, charcoal and pastel, and is now in the process of launching a programme of painting holidays and courses for 2019.

“The building was on its last legs. There were parts where the roof had tumbled in. We had about a year before it completely collapsed.

“It was full of debris from pheasant rearing, general junk and old farm



Liz trained and worked as a journalist before moving into corporate PR, but always loved art and carried a sketch book everywhere she went.

On returning to London after a spell in the Far East when she was first married, she decided to become an art student while bringing up her young family, enrolling at the Lavender Hill Studios, now London Fine Art Studios, in 2005.

“I was very much guided by professional artists from the word go. The studios’ founder Ann Witheridge is amazing, and you progress very much at your own pace. I wanted to learn to draw and paint as well as I could.”

Trained in the classical style, Liz now passes on to her students her belief that anyone can be taught to draw and paint if they can “drive through” the inevitable moments of self-doubt.

She constantly refers students back to “the process”, thinking about the subject’s shapes, light and dark shades and the edges where two areas meet.

“Once you’ve got that, then you can start to capture the mood of the landscape, start getting the emotional elements.

“That’s when you get individual style. It happens naturally when you filter reality through different people’s brains. We all see things differently.”

Specialising in landscape, still life and portrait, Liz paints and teaches in a naturalistic way, creating a representational image: “What I’m about is

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teaching people the ability to get pictures down on canvas that they are happy with. If they like something different from me, that’s fine.”

Inspired by the beauty of Rusko Estate and its surroundings, landscape

painting, often in the open air, is Liz’s main preoccupation at the moment.

The 3,500-acre estate north west of Gatehouse was bought by Liz’s father-in-law Anthony Gilbey, Lord Vaux of Harrowden, in the late 1960s. He had his wife Beverley and family settled there in the 1980s.

Anthony died suddenly in 2014 and Liz’s husband, Richard, who inherited his father’s title, took on the estate.

“I love the vividness of the greens around here,” says Liz. “The countryside



is so lush (with the exception of earlier this summer, perhaps) and there are so many shades of green piled on top of each other.”

A vast painting terrace at the back of the building allows Liz to take students outside with field easels to paint the beautiful view up the Fleet valley to the distinctive Laghead hill on the horizon.

They will, at times, also venture into the landscape in off-road vehicles to take inspiration from elsewhere around the estate and further afield.

Liz ran her first oil painting workshop in conjunction with Spring Fling in May and has been hosting weekly classes for local people during the summer.

In her first year taking part in the open studios event, she welcomed about 70 people to see the studio each day and sold several paintings.

For next year she is planning a still-life course from March 9 to 16, another course from May 4 to 11, and a high-summer landscape holiday from July 6 to July 13. Although self-catering stays, students will be invited to an evening dinner in Liz’s own home and will also enjoy barbecues on the painting terrace.

Liz hopes to invite fellow artists, including some from London Fine Art Studios, to do guest-tutor slots.

At other times the apartment will be a straightforward holiday let with guests able to use the studio on request.

Although Liz is continuously painting for her own pleasure, or fulfilling commissions - and, she says, she is always learning - teaching has become her true passion: “I have had some lovely feedback. People say I’m encouraging and patient, and I just love teaching what I love doing myself.

“People are often slightly nervous, and I love to see them gain confidence and enthusiasm. Most of those I’ve taught so far have said they have a new inspiration and are desperate to keep painting. That’s so rewarding for me.”

www.ruskostudio.co.uk

