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plummeting. Then the recession really hit and I began to worry whether I could afford to renovate it."

As with *The Chestnuts*, Chris used local craftspeople wherever possible to restore windows, doors and the dry stone walling at *The Culls*.

The quarter-of-an-acre garden was overgrown and 40 diseased trees were removed.

"There is a well and even an old pig sty. I am going to put the slate back on the roof, install lighting and keep it as a folly."

The Culls, which is Grade II listed, was built in 1670 and has original mullioned windows and an inglenook fireplace with a woodburning stove.

"The original fireplace had been covered up by a horrible 1950s one which we ripped out," Chris said.

"The fire surround we replaced it with was an old rusty one that Terry found for £75 and polished up."

There are two bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs.

A clever idea was to convert a walk-in larder into a wet room so that someone sleeping in the downstairs bedroom does not need to go upstairs to use a

bathroom. Where the sparkling contemporary kitchen is was once a bathroom with an unsightly pink suite.

When the builders took the false ceiling out, they discovered the original beams behind. They also raised one of the windows above the level of the worktops.

"You can mix contemporary with old — but there are some rules. We were not allowed to paint the beams in this cottage white because it is listed but we have stripped and restored the wood," explained Chris.

"I used white on the walls and kitchen units because it reflects light and I always go for brushed rather than shiny steel.

"Anything natural such as stone, glass, wood and simple lines work well."

Chris has an eye for a bargain as she revealed: "I wanted a particular wash basin for *The Culls* which should have cost £800, but I spotted it in a sale for just £300. The taps were £800, so cost more than the basin!"

The bathroom upstairs is unashamedly luxurious with heated towel rails, a travertine basin set on a limestone washstand, original artwork and scented candles.

"We want people to bring a gin and tonic and read in the bath," Chris

explained. "Whenever I buy anything for either cottage, it has to be beautiful in its own right."

Both cottages are always equipped with essentials such as a spare toothbrush, hot water bottle, spare razor and hairdryer.

"We don't charge for extras such as linen, fuel, toiletries, wireless Internet and telephone," Chris added.

Being on the other side of the world, Chris employs two housekeepers to manage the properties on her behalf. Linda Yates at *The Chestnuts* and Louise Strong at *The Culls*.

Firmly pitched at the luxury end of the market, *The Chestnuts* and *The Culls* both now command almost £2,000 a week in high season.

But Chris is adamant that you do not need to be wealthy to be a property developer.

"I haven't got lots of money and have no money in the bank, but I am actively looking for my third property. My advice is to make sure you spend your money wisely."

■ For more information, or to book *The Chestnuts* or *The Culls*, visit www.thechestnuts.net