

Oldies but goodies

This Wiltshire B&B would make a perfect home, if only the grandparents came with it

BEYOND THE BROCHURE

ELEANOR MILLS



Every so often a bit of “research” tips up that makes me start hollering at the radio or ripping the newspaper in fury. The latest one was an Age UK survey trumpeting that a third of grandparents over 65 see their grandchildren once a month or less. The charity, which is launching a fundraising effort to link up the elderly with youthful volunteers, saw this as evidence of an epidemic of lonely oldies, abandoned by their families. Me? I’m not so sure.

Perhaps it’s just my mates, but the tales I hear aren’t of grandparents who are desperate to see the nippers being thwarted by their unfeeling offspring, but of thirty- and fortysomething working parents frantically trying to persuade their silver-surfer, baby-boomer mums and dads to lend a hand in raising the next generation. They might even — perish the thought — want the grandparents to help out with a bit of childcare during domestic emergencies. You know the sort of thing: sick child, big meeting, one parent on a plane, the other in a tizzy... the sort of time when granny really can ride to the rescue.

At this point, I am going to salute any oldies who are really and truly there for their kids and grandkids. I’m talking about the kind of grannies and grandpas who cheerfully pitch up bearing casseroles, saying: “Now, darling, where shall I start? Just sit down and relax, we’ll take the kids off your hands for the afternoon.” Or, even better: “Why don’t you and hubbie go away for the weekend? We’ll take the kids.” I’ve heard such paragons exist.

Among my girlfriends, the normal response to a gentle inquiry about whether granny might be able to come and help is a cynical laugh and eyes raised to the heavens. Said oldie, we agree, is far too busy working at something high-powered, jetting off for winter sun, busy with her new boyfriend or just so booked up with jaunts and jollies that you’d need to ask a year in advance.

Don’t just take my word for it. Their prophetess is Hilary Boyd, whose best-selling book *Thursdays in the Park*, about a groovy gran who divorces her husband and finds a new chap, is becoming a life handbook for this demographic. Does Granny, in her natty new Zara jacket, have time to shovel gloop into a wailing infant’s gullet? Not likely.



The drawing room in the rambling Georgian pad has high ceilings and a mega fireplace



The White House, Wilts, £699,950

What is it? A three-bedroom Georgian home, run as a B&B, in the pretty village of Little Bedwyn. The M4 is six miles away
Who is selling? Chesterton Humberts; 01672 519222, chestertonhumberts.com



Wiltshire village of Little Bedwyn, which they run as a B&B, so they can be closer to their family and fulfil more grandparental duties. Give them a medal, I say.

What about the property? The White House has three large double bedrooms with newly fitted ensuite bathrooms that are in great demand — they charge £110 a night and are booked for months. This is not only because they and their house are charming, but because Little Bedwyn is more than just a pretty village. It is home to a Michelin-starred restaurant, the Harrow, where top chefs go when they get a night off. The Nicholls are within staggering distance, and the Harrow recommends them, so their B&B clientele is assured.

Other than the bedrooms, the best space in the house is a 20ft by 16ft drawing room with high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling sash windows and a mega fireplace. The kitchen — Aga, walk-in larder, beams — is also newly done and attractive, and the breakfast room in the conservatory is sunny. It

So I was particularly delighted to meet Annie and Christopher Nicholl, a truly saintly pair of grandparents who had just had their grandchildren — aged one and three — to stay for a whole eight days. (The parents had nipped off to the Caribbean.) They are even selling their rambling Georgian pad in the gorgeous

has a glory hole for laundry (I lust after one of those), a grand dining hall, a family room and a small study. And if three bedrooms isn’t enough, the huge attic is begging to be converted.

When she’s not winning granny of the year, Annie is a garden designer, and it shows. The property has pretty beds with shrubs, a lawn, a patio and a grand gravel drive. For £699,950, reduced from £750,000, it’s good value for the village — a small cottage across the canal has just been sold for £1m.

I loved Little Bedwyn. There’s no through traffic, and the Norman flint church is a not only a gem, but a community hub. There are fabulous walks from the doorstep along the canal, and footpaths to Savernake forest, home to ancient oaks. There’s an annual street market and great shopping at Marlborough and Hungerford, each less than 10 miles away. The local schools are excellent — there’s a good state primary in Great Bedwyn and a range of others nearby, including Kate Middleton’s alma mater, Marlborough College. The village is well connected, too.

The day I went, there were two viewings, and the agent reports lots of interest. Bad things happen to good people, so I hope this house sells soon and well. Groovy grandparents, you have been warned.

✦ If you would like Eleanor to cast her critical eye over a property you are selling, email btb@sunday-times.co.uk

ASK THE EXPERTS

The solicitor

My son recently bought a house in Nottingham, but on the final inspection with the agent, he noticed damp in two of the rooms. It appeared that the flat roof was leaking. The agent said this was a design fault, and we should take it up with the designer. What should he do?

Chelliah Nirmalendra, by email

It sounds as though the house is newly built or newly converted, so it will probably be protected by a guarantee. If your son has completed the purchase, he should contact the guarantee provider (usually the National House Building Council; nhbc.co.uk) to see if the defect is covered.

If completion has not yet taken place, your son should talk to his lawyer. He or she will be able to confirm what can be done, which might include repair works or an allowance on the price.

If the house is not newly built or newly converted, but the roof works were carried out recently, they may still be covered by a guarantee. If not, whether your son can pursue a claim against the developer will depend largely on the contract and the information available to him at the time of purchase — for example, any building survey. The overriding principle when buying or selling property is “buyer beware”, which means you take a property as you find it and the seller is generally not liable.

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The heating expert

We have a new Megaflo unvented tank and energy-efficient boiler in our bungalow. Since December, I have had to let water into the system every day, as the pressure drops to almost zero, leaving us with cold radiators. I can’t find any leaks in the pipes, and the installer has been less than helpful. Is there an obvious cause?

Jim Pittman, by email

Pressure drops in a central-heating system are normally down to one of two things: either there is a leak, or the pressure relief valve (PRV) on the boiler is “letting by” (allowing water through). You could ask a local plumber to add leak-sealing chemicals to the system, but if the PRV is letting by, you’ll need to get the expansion vessel on the boiler looked at and maybe replace the valve. Check the blowout pipework on the wall behind the boiler to see if it is dripping.

✦ PJ Luard is director of WPJ Heating; wpjheating.co.uk

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