



THIS PICTURE AND OPPOSITE Blue-grey woodwork helps to highlight the architectural beauty of the Gothic windows and arched doorway

*Were you looking for a chapel?*

No – in fact, I was trying to buy a foundry in Ramsgate. I'd just lost out on that when my brother-in-law heard about this place. It wasn't being advertised (quite a few people have since told me they'd have bought it if they'd known it was for sale) and he heard about it by word of mouth. I fell head over heels in love with the place, got it for £90,000 – and ignored the thought of how much more it might cost to renovate.

I had the woodwork checked out before I bought it – so I knew the floor needed replacing – but that was pretty much all I did in terms of a survey. The only real obstacle was changing the building's status to a domestic dwelling, but the council conservation officer at Sittingbourne was very sympathetic and liked the idea of the chapel being inhabited by some kind of artist. He allowed me the initial use of a 'section' of the building – which has expanded over time. The rest of the space is considered empty because it's full of pieces of furniture I'm adapting for my projects, and therefore not habitable – but it doesn't count as commercial premises because I do most of my work building kitchens and bathrooms on site.

*What do you know of its history?*

It was originally a Church of England building, serving a town that owed its living to the expansion of the railways and the gunpowder business. It was paid for by the community and bought flat-packed from a catalogue (William Cooper, in London's Old Kent Road) – hundreds of these places were put up during the late 1800s. You could pay extra for features like porches, steeples and stained glass, depending on how elaborate you wanted it to be. Mine still has its original wrought-iron finials along the ridge of the roof, decorative bargeboards with patterns cut into the cedar and Alpha and Omega designs worked into the glass of the altar window. The building also used to have a bell in the tower, but when the chapel was deconsecrated in 1962, it was given to another church. In the late 1920s the lady chapel was removed and replaced with a community hall (which is the bit I live in now). Since it was deconsecrated it had been used for all sorts of things, including a scout hut and, most recently, a joinery.

*How did you make it habitable?*

It was still full of timber and old joinery machinery when I bought it, so that had ▷

