

# Take Me To Church

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In a new book, *Renovate Innovate*, Antonia Edwards explores reclaimed and upcycled homes – including this County Durham Chapel

Architect Stefan Camenzind is the founder of Evolution Design, an award-winning architecture and design studio based in Zurich. It was while exploring Teesdale, a walking district in the beautiful North Pennines, that Camenzind and his brother in law came across the Ebenezer Methodist Chapel. Built in 1880, it served the local community for 107 years before closing in 1987. The chapel was found boarded up, vacant and in a poor state of disrepair. Captivated by the raw beauty of the landscape and the open horizon, they decided to take on the derelict

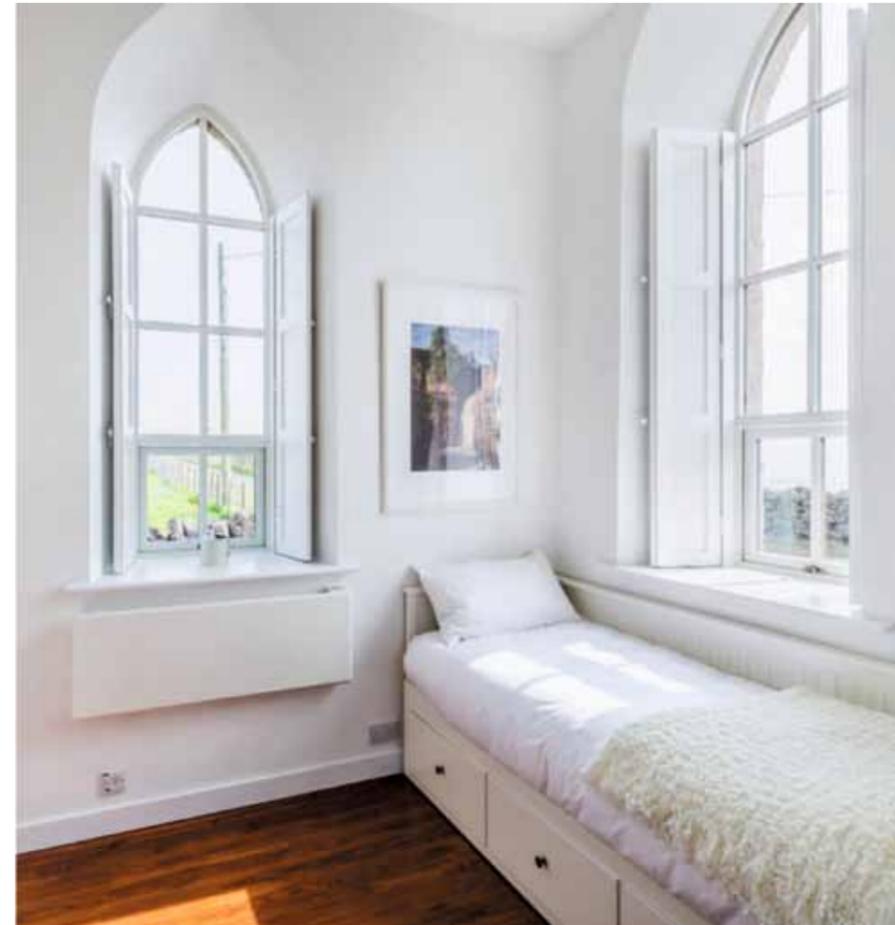
building and, by 2015, it was transformed into a unique holiday home for seven guests.

'We thought this would be such a fantastic place for our families to come to,' explains Camenzind. 'The location of the chapel on the top of a hill, within such an amazing landscape, is so stunning and memorable that it becomes obvious why it was built in this location. People used to come here for contemplation and celebration, for beautiful occasions such as baptisms and weddings. The chapel has a very special positive spirit and this was the feeling that we wanted to retain.'





The interior is modern, open and bright with traditional details that complement the building's location and history. The kitchen dining table is made out of reclaimed wood collected from an abandoned railway station. Reclaimed timber railway sleepers were also used as steps, leading from the terrace to the garden.



The chapel is now a cosy self-catering cottage for up to seven guests, offering stunning views of the Dales. A homely rural feel is maintained throughout.



**Previous page:** Camenzind preserved the historic stonework of the chapel and recycled the roof tiles, which ensured they would fit well into the existing landscape.



Stairs lead up to the mezzanine floor, which contains three bedrooms and two ensuite bathrooms. There is also a fourth bedroom and family bathroom on the ground floor.



The harsh weather conditions of Upper Teesdale meant the chapel, in its exposed location, had suffered years of strong winds and driving rain. Because it had not been sufficiently maintained, a lot was required to make the building habitable. In addition to considerable water ingress and damage to the interior finishes, the roof had deteriorated and the rafters needed replacing. There were also no services, which meant water, electricity and sewage treatment had to be newly installed.

Camenzind's aim for reconstructing the chapel was to preserve the historic building's fabric and bring its unique structure back to life by retaining the grandness of the original hall, as well as the beautiful Gothic windows that flood the space with daylight. Locating master bedrooms on the mezzanine floor above the original window line was a challenge, as it gave limited headroom upstairs. This meant the team had to look for smart solutions for making the bedrooms feel more spacious, practical and comfortable for guests.

'Every detail, including the built-in wardrobes, had to be thought through,' Camenzind relates. 'We even built a 1:1 mock-up in our office to test the layout and ensure it worked at full scale. We wanted visitors to be able to appreciate the history and local architecture while providing a beautiful environment to explore the countryside and its vast range of activities. Historic buildings like the chapel have the charm of ageing and growing together with their surroundings, a natural quality that cannot be replicated.'



**Renovate Innovate**  
by Antonia Edwards  
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