

High on style

Forget loft living. Architect Elspeth Beard has turned lofty living into an art form with her stunning conversion of a Victorian water tower into an award-winning home.

Munstead Water Tower near Godalming is full of the unexpected. The first sight of it catches you unawares, rather like stumbling across Nelson's column in a leafy backwater, the tower looms suddenly in a quiet lane, 130 ft high and breathtaking in its sheer presence.

Elspeth Beard bought it at auction in 1988 and spent around eight years transforming it into the most amazing home. Its rooms are octagonal, with 15ft high ceilings. It has 62 mullioned windows, hundreds of steps on a wood and steel staircase which twists and

turns inside the tower, the kitchen ceiling is the original steel riveted base of the water tank and the galleried sitting room is flooded with light from an enormous lantern-shaped glass roof.

The tower was used for around 70 years to provide water to the houses in Munstead and surrounding villages. It had been used by the Home Guard during the second world war as a look-out post and the names of the part-time soldiers were etched in the brick at the top of the tower. When Thames Water became privatised, the tower was sold.

For £121,000, Elspeth bought a building with no planning permission or

listed building consent, water seeping in through cracked brickwork, a leaking roof and enough bird droppings to fill a skip. She said: "Although it was in a terrible state, it was exactly what I was looking for, a former industrial building to convert into a home."

The building consisted of six floors, with timber stairs bolted to the external walls and quarter landings at each level. A twenty foot spiral staircase in the turret provided access to the roof.

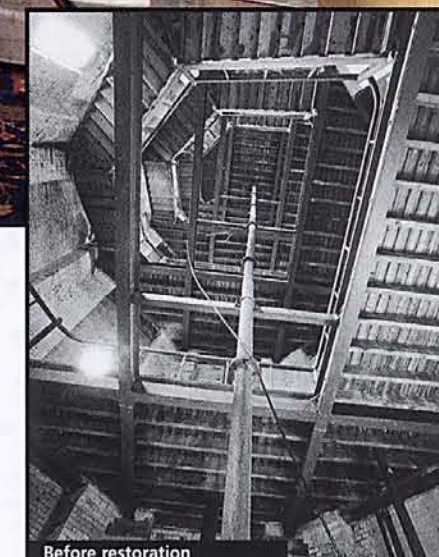
Elspeth decided to keep the existing levels, adding mezzanine and galleries to four of the floors. She has created a

▼ to Page 10



Far left: Munstead Water Tower catches you unawares, suddenly looming above in a country lane near Godalming.
Left: the large octagonal hall provides the starting point for a home that stands 130 ft high. Large double doors provide a dramatic exit to the staircase that twists and turns inside the tower.
Above: living daylight: The sitting room is reached via the original spiral staircase.

It is flooded with light from a glass lantern-shaped roof. A gallery runs around the inside walls and the spiral staircase leads to the external terrace which offers spectacular 360 degree views over Surrey and all the way to the coast. Elspeth has retained the original valve and float from the water tank and this stands like an industrial sculpture in the sitting room.



Before restoration

Photos: Colin Poole



High on style

▲ from Page 8

hall on the ground floor, two bedrooms and an office on the first three floors, a kitchen and dining room on the fourth floor and a living room at the top of the tower.

After a year spent seeking planning permission, listed building consent and fire regulation approval, work began. The tower was made watertight and 62 new windows were made by Clement Brothers in Haslemere to the original design. A steel and wood staircase was designed by Elspeth and installed to snake up inside the building between the tower walls and the octagonal rooms created on each floor. Galleries and mezzanines were also built to create different levels within the rooms.

Looking back, Elspeth admits that the project was as monumental as the tower itself. She undertook a lot of the work herself to keep down costs while working full-time as an architect. When

she moved in in 1991, her son Tom was just six months old. She then had a race against time to install heating before the cold weather arrived. "It was a completely mad, terrible time. I just don't know how I did it but somehow you just get on with it."

High ceilings and huge rooms dictated that Elspeth had to think big in all kinds of ways. On each floor are massive light wood and steel double doors, rather Art Deco in appearance, which create a dramatic entrance to each room and have the practical role of being fire doors. There are five loos, the kitchen has a Gaggenau oven built for the kitchen of a restaurant and each room has a delightful mix of antique and modern furniture displayed beautifully in the spacious light-filled rooms. And to keep the tower looking fabulous, there are three hoovers and cleaning materials on each floor.

After years of hard work, Elspeth now has the pleasure of living and working in a home with incredible panache and individuality and the celebrity of three architectural awards. And professionally, a

Clockwise from top left: think big: The kitchen is an eclectic mix of industrial and domestic style, with the ceiling created from the steel and riveted base of the original water tank in the tower. **Green slate worktops, dug from a mountain in Cumbria, run around half the room, incorporating a commercial-size Gaggenau oven and other appliances.** **A large polished wooden table creates an eating area.** **A bath with a view:** A Victorian roll-top bath stands in the mezzanine bathroom in Elspeth's room. **Room for imagination:** Tom's room is huge with stacks of space for all the essentials that boys love to keep plus a mezzanine floor with a ladder staircase.

few of the lessons learnt with the tower are now being applied to the conversion of a lighthouse in Somerset for clients. She is also working on a grade two listed starred cinema in Worthing which will blossom into a complex of restaurants, cinema and tourist information centre. Anyone interested in discussing possible projects with Elspeth Beard can contact her on 01483 860342.