

the glasshouse

opposite:

Although only used as a part-time retreat, Mathias has achieved a very permanent settled feel. The small, personal garden around the glasshouse creates a private, cottage atmosphere.

below:

The interior space has been carefully utilized, including the neat kitchen, built into one corner of the interior framework, and hidden from view behind a wicker screen.

A nineteenth-century greenhouse has been converted into a wonderful weekend retreat at a rural homestead near Hamburg, in Germany.

Every weekend through the summer months, architect and interior designer Mathias Schröder packs his car and makes the hour and a half drive to his unusual converted greenhouse, set in the gardens of a mansion house. Here, modern comforts mingle with a simpler, quieter way of life in the most spectacular and peaceful setting.

Mathias first discovered the glasshouse eight years ago during a weekend trip to the area. He was looking for a retreat within easy reach of Hamburg when he came across Gut Testorf, an old large farming estate or "gut," still with its workmen's cottages and stables (some of which have also since been converted into homes). He came across the ruined shell of a large greenhouse in what was once the kitchen gardens for the community. It is more than a century old, and had been unused for many years, and most of the original glass panels were broken or missing. But the





t h e g l a s s h o u s e

opposite:

A wood burning stove in the bedroom provides warmth at night for sleeping.

below:

The bedroom—made from solid brick at one end of the glasshouse—provides a more conventional, enclosed interior space. The reclaimed floorboards and rich red painted ceiling overhead provide a contrast to the glass panelled rooms beyond.

majestic and imposing decorative iron frame of the greenhouse was still standing, and with it the fragments of the building's original character. Mathias was immediately captivated by the building, and approached the owners of the gut with the idea that he would renovate the ruin himself if they would allow him to rent it from them on a long-term lease. And this is how it all came about.

Although the metal framework was salvageable, the remaining fabric of the building had all but crumbled, and for the most part much of it had to be rebuilt using reclaimed material where possible, to retain the patina and authentic character. Apart from the addition of a few windows in the brick section, the exterior remains much as it would have looked originally. And despite its internal adaptation from plant house to small-scale, part-time home, the layout and division of the interior space too is more or less unaltered. The only real change Mathias has made is to remove a low ceiling in the brick section, to open the space up, and create more height in the room. He has even managed to incorporate modern essentials, such as a kitchen, and bathroom, which is enclosed by partition walls;

apart from these, he has left the design of the building untouched.

The house is essentially split into three rooms. The main entrance leads through wooden doors into the brick section where the bedroom is now set. From here you enter the first glass space, comprising the dining area. Ahead, through glass doors one moves to the final area of the house, a glorious, sun-filled sitting room that feels rather like a conservatory. In both the glass rooms the floor has been laid with old bricks set into sand, which create a barn-like atmosphere, evoking both the vernacular origins of the building, and a rustic style.









left:

Dining beneath a glass ceiling, whether by daylight or candlelight, is a unique quality to this intriguing dwelling.

opposite:

While electricity and running water have been installed, the property lacks heating, and Mathias relies on the glass panels to absorb any natural light and warmth from the sun. So, for the most part, the house is used mainly in summer.

More than anything, Mathias enjoys being part of what he calls a special community, living in a glorious setting surrounded by the grandeur and heritage of an old country estate. In contrast to Hamburg there is no traffic here, no people to bother you, only the sounds of nature and a farm at work. For more energetic days there are walks along the rugged northern coastline which is close by.