



Rewriting Rural Futures: The Lady Who Sees Gold in Every Beam of Timber

On a misty morning in the English countryside, it's easy to see why old barns, sprawling estates, and weathered outbuildings are often viewed as relics of the past. Yet for one visionary business lady, these dormant spaces aren't forgotten corners of history, but rather canvases for reinvention, brimming with possibility.

Meet Sonia Aucott the Founder of Aucott Interior Design Ltd and the lady looking to build legacies from beams and unlock the hidden values in families unused properties. From rustic barns turned wedding venues to stone annexes reborn as creative studios or guest cottages, her new venture is part consultancy, part design practice, and entirely about breathing new life into the rural landscape.

While the opportunities are vast, the challenges facing landowners are equally real. The pressure of inheritance tax looms large for farming families and estate owners, often tying their hands when it comes to traditional business expansion. What once might have been ploughed back into livestock or crops must now be carefully weighed against long-term tax planning and financial survival.

That's where Sonia's business steps in. By helping families transform unused or underused structures into thriving venues and spaces, she offers a way to generate revenue without compromising the land itself.

A derelict barn might become a sought-after wedding destination, its rugged beams providing an unforgettable backdrop for couples seeking romance with a rustic edge. An old granary could evolve into a yoga retreat or art studio, drawing visitors and revenue into the countryside.



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Location | Lainston House
PR | Bloxham PR

Even modest annexes can be re-imagined into rentable accommodation, supporting tourism while preserving family heritage.

"The idea for the business came to me back in 2023 after having watched Clarkson's Farm. It highlighted just how hard it is for Farmers to make a living these days," says Sonia. "Having come out of the EU they have lost many of their subsidies and whether it be due to governmental or environmental threats it's never been harder for them to produce food for the nation. In the Spring of 2023 there were changes to Class Q planning laws, which essentially enable farmers and landowners to convert disused agricultural buildings into accommodation and commercial premises without express planning permission. This also had a positive impact for equestrian land that could be converted into training centres and outdoor sporting facilities. In simplistic terms this changes in the law gave farmers and landowners across England greater freedom to diversify and protect their businesses.

Then last Autumn after a year of navigating huge personal and professional challenges I felt I had lost my way with the business to the extent that I even considered leaving the industry altogether. But that then threw up issues regarding my sense of identity. Having known nothing else for over twenty years, if I wasn't an interior designer anymore, who, or what was I? And so I decided to invest in my professional development by working with a mentor. She cleverly took me back to basics to identify my core values which were a passion for heritage and hospitality, underpinned by a desire to serve, a renewed passion to create beautiful interiors and with a clear set of boundaries."

With this renewed vision Sonia saw an opportunity to diversify her own business. She is eager to help rural businesses develop hospitality venues which will generate recurring sources of income for years to come, all whilst they can still focus on their core day to day activities.

"I'm thrilled to say I now feel more aligned and driven in my business than I have for a long time," smiles Sonia.

Sonia's love of art and design was first rooted from her Mother's side of the family, where her Grandfather and his siblings were keen painters. A pivotal moment came at age of thirteen, during a visit to Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, where a portrait of Mary Harpur ignited her dream of becoming an art restorer. She later gained early experience in the Art Conservation department at Leicester's New Walk Museum, but career guidance steered her toward interior design.

After time spent in less creative jobs, she pursued her passion fully, studying Art History at Birkbeck University while

SONIA AUCOTT WEARS: THE OXLEY FEDORA, CAMEL, £109.00, HICKS & BROWN. MAE GREEN/WHITE FRILL NECK STRIPE SHIRT, £59.00, JOULES. BEATRIX KHAKE GREEN SHOWERPROOF DIAMOND QUILTED JACKET, £139.00, JOULES. PEARL TRIO NECKLACE GOLD, £60.00, NUE HOOPS.



building a career in interior design. She worked with a BIID interior designer, managed a Birmingham showroom, designed show-homes for developers, and later moved into hotel design. Following the birth of her daughter, she stepped back to complete her degree before relocating to Dorset, where the arrival of her son inspired her to launch her own interior design business, encouraged by friends and family seeking her expertise.

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Sonia’s flair for transforming interiors wasn’t just about aesthetics, it was about creating spaces that told a story, balancing heritage with modern function. That background has become her secret weapon in this new chapter.

“As a BIID (British Institute of Interior Design) Registered Interior Designer we work to their established 6 step design process. From Initial Consultation, Concept & Spatial Design, Design Development, Tendering & Design Sign Off, Implementation & Installation, to

Styling & Final Walk Through, the process is the same whether we are designing for a private client or for a Rural Diversification project. We work closely alongside clients, architects, contractors and other specialists to develop schemes which are beautiful and sustainable in equal measure.”

It’s this designer’s eye that enables her to curate projects that don’t just generate income but also feel authentic to the families and communities who own them. A wedding venue with soaring rafters that still whispers of its agricultural roots. A photography studio drenched in natural light. A guest annex that becomes the heart of intergenerational living.

“I love it when our clients allow us to really get into the creative flow. We ask a lot of questions at the beginning of the process and take inspiration from our clients, their heritage and the landscape in which their project will sit. We don’t have a ‘house style’ or follow trends but rather seek to create spaces which are aspirational, unique to our client, and will stand the test of time.”

The rise of this kind of rural reinvention is more than just an entrepreneurial trend; it’s becoming a lifeline for communities. By opening estates to new uses, farmers

and landowners can diversify their income, support local economies, and keep heritage alive.

For Sonia, though, it’s also about empowerment.

“I work with a lot of clients who feel daunted by the scale of their challenges,” she says. “But, when they see what’s possible, that an old building can actually fund the future, it changes everything.”

In a time when the countryside faces both financial pressures and cultural shifts, her vision feels both radical and necessary. It’s proof that sustainability doesn’t always mean starting from scratch. Sometimes, it’s about looking at what’s already there, and seeing not what it was, but what it could be.

“By diversifying into hospitality farmers, land owners and other rural businesses can have a profound and positive impact on their local community. By creating destination venues or holiday accommodation they will increase tourism in their area which in turn creates jobs for local people whether that be operational staff or supporting small scale food & beverage suppliers. This generates income for the local economy and will secure a positive legacy for the client and the community for years to come.”

Breaking ground in the traditionally male-dominated worlds of farming and estates hasn’t always been straightforward. Yet Sonia believes being a woman gives



SONIA AU'COTT WEARS:
MAE GREEN/WHITE FRILL
NECK STRIPE SHIRT, £59.00,
JOULES. BEATRIX KHAKI
GREEN SHOWERPROOF
DIAMOND QUILTED JACKET,
£139.00, JOULES. PEARL TRIO
NECKLACE GOLD, £60.00, NCL
HOOPS VIERZON JERSEY
LINED WELLINGTON BOOT,
BLACK, £220.00, LE CHAMEAU.

SONIA AUCOTT WEARS:
CLAUDIA NAVY CREAM STRIPE
BOYFRIEND SHIRT, £55.00,
JOULES. HOLLY NAVY BUTTON
THROUGH KNIT VEST, £48.00,
JOULES. FOXLEY BROWN
CHECK WOOL RICH WIDE LEG
TWEED TROUSERS, £139.00,
JOULES.



her a distinctive perspective.

“In what can often be a male-dominated sector we bring a lightness of touch and feminine insight,” explains Sonia. “As we work closely with other members of the design team, our clients and other stakeholders, we carry the creative vision for a project from start to finish. Sometimes there are unforeseen challenges on site from scope creep to discovering a problem in the construction process, unexpected costs, or delays in the build schedule and we come alongside our clients and hold their hand through these ups and downs while keeping the creative vision firmly at the front of our minds. Interior Designers can often be brought in later on than an architect or contractor and important design considerations can be missed. I’m keen to ensure that doesn’t keep happening but rather that our feminine insight and wisdom will be sought right at the beginning of a collaborative design process, and not further down the line. And part of that creative vision includes the sourcing and installation of all the finishing touches right at the end of a project from window treatments and soft furnishings, to artwork and decorative accessories to make a space welcoming and aspirational. These are the elements that guests will notice first but will leave a lasting impression.”



SONIA AUCOTT WEARS:
HOLLY NAVY BUTTON
THROUGH KNITTED VEST,
£48.00, JOULES. SINGLE
BREASTED FIELD BLAZER,
TAWNY, £549.00, HOLLAND
COOPER. FOXLEY BROWN
CHECK WOOL RICH WIDE LEG
TROUSER, £139.00, JOULES.

Her ability to connect with clients on a personal level, while also guiding them through complex financial and design decisions, has become one of her greatest strengths. By combining empathy with vision, she not only transforms spaces but also helps families feel heard, supported, and empowered in the process.

When asked what her long-term vision was for her new business, her answer was so selfless. It was apparent that this venture is truly about building for others.

“I want to help families to generate beautiful hospitality venues that generate recurring sources of income for them for years to come. By so doing they can focus on their core business activities which will secure food production for our nation and investment for their local economies. The hospitality industry has suffered huge challenges in recent years and I hope we can play just a small part in creating

destinations in which people want to linger and create memories.”

Sonia’s journey is a powerful reminder that it’s never too late for women to change the direction of their careers. From early ambitions in art restoration to years spent navigating roles, she never lost sight of her creative passions, eventually pursuing interior design and later founding her own business helping families and estates transform unused properties.

Her story illustrates that career paths don’t have to be linear, and that following your instincts, even later in life, can lead to both professional success and personal fulfilment. Sonia embodies resilience, adaptability, and courage, showing that women can reinvent themselves at any stage, combining life experience with new skills to create something meaningful. For many, she is more than an entrepreneur; she is a role model, proving that embracing change, trusting your vision, and taking bold steps toward your passions can open doors that were once thought closed.

To get in touch with Sonia Aucott about a project you’d like to begin work on or to start a consultation, email Sonia at sonia@aucottinteriordesign.co.uk or head to her website www.aucottinteriordesign.co.uk

*“BY DIVERSIFYING INTO
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