





Annaliza Davis meets a couple who have breathed new life into a derelict building in Brittany and turned it into a popular tea room

icture yourself exploring the distant coasts of Brittany, where you happen upon a toa room filled with colourful crockery and vintage furniture, where you're greeted by a woman with a captivating smile and précte English. This is Aleth, and Thé à l'Ouest is her tea room.

The road that leads to Morgat on the Crozon Peninsula has that glorious anticipation of the see about

the Crozon Peninsula has that glorious anticipation of the sea about to come into view, and it's here that you will find Thé à l'Ouest, just a stone's throw from a flat, saudy beach with clear waters; blissfully far removed from frenetic city life and urban commuting.

Push open the door and the first things you'll see are a black-and-white tiled floor and an eelectic collection of chairs, both ancient and

"It's strange how some people come in and say that it's 'so British', while others see it as totally French"

fiftes medamine, offset by a back wall of traditional, wooden shelving that soars to the ceiling, where oversized rea caddies and jairs of preserves are addies and jairs of preserves in the family. intus melamine, oitset by a back wall of traditional, wooden shelving that soars to the ceiling, where oversized tea caddies and jars of preserves are jostling for space. It's a moment of utter delight. "It's strange how some people

come in and say that it's, 'so British', while others see it as totally French," explains French owner Aleth Reymolds, who – along with her British husband Jason – removated the building from seratch and opened for business in May 2011.

"Back in the 1920s when this area was developing as a seaside resort for wealthy Parissians, this was the only place where they could buy food and the building was designed by the same architect who worked on their seaside villas."

After years as a successful business, it was finally stripped, sold and abandoned in the 1980s and left derelict until 2010, when Aleth saw it

and fell in love with the place.

"Jason took one look and said:
'No way.' The building was in a terrible state having been derelict; there was no water, no heating, and no electricity." Aleth holds back a muschievous smile, planning at Jason, and announces, "Within six months, we were open for business."

There is a lot more to this story – and to this couple – than meets the eye, and the story begins back in 1990, in Bristol.

The beginning
At the age of 18, Aleth was sent to
England for a two-weck language
stay, Part of the initiation into British
culture included a trip to a pub,
where she mer Jason (then 24) and
everything changed.

The couple stayed in touch while
she continued her other chacation in
France, visiting each other during
holidays until, in 1992, Aleth moved
to Bristol, Jason, a trained electrician,
was then a facilities maintenance

manager, but Aleth had to find work too.

"I took loot of little jobs," she explains, "in a supermarket and then careing tensils, while we renovated a house together. By 1996 we were married, and only visited France to see my family in Dijon or to come on holiday."

"That was how we ended up in Brittany," explains Jason. "We came to Telgrus seven years in a row and fell in love with the area. Around this time, we started to think seriously about mowing for myself after being offered redundancy, and having communed from Bristol to Cardiff to study architecture, Aleth gob her degree in 1999. One year later our first child, Louis, was born and the year after that, Marcus arrived.

"We'd previously met the mayor of Telgruse who helped line up a job for Aleth with an architect in Brest, so in August 2002 we took the plunge and moved over."

Despite being able to buy a properly morphyage-free near Cozon, the family soon encountered difficulties when Adeth's job turned out to be far from secure. Within three months, they were living off their savings.

"It's one of those things about the "French system," she explains. "Mine wasn't a French qualification, so it wasn't straightforward, Similarly, Jason's French wasn't great and be needed three years' experience in France to work on his own as an electrician, Dur Plan B was that he might have to work in England, s

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although we were really hoping it wouldn't come to that."
"In the end," says Jason, "I went to the unemployment office, and found someone who spoke English. She'd just had a request from a local electrician for a person who could work immediately. I did a practical test on a fuseboard, a quick interview, and started on the Monday; that pot us into the official French system and I worked for him for two and a half years."

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Family changes
In 2004, the couple had their third
son, Jude, who is disabled and has
In 2004, the couple had their third
son, Jude, who is disabled and has
learning difficulties, which changed
everything about their family life.
Jason applied for parental leave but
found himself in court accused or
professional misconduct. He won the
case but it was, understandably, an
extremely difficult year.
Aleth worked in a supermarket
until – again through friends of
firends – Jason found a job in Brest
with a marine company.
"In 2006, our youngest son,
Axed, was born and although a
recurring problem with my knee
meant that I had to leave my job,
the good news was that I then had
the experience and contacts needed
to set up on my own."

The tea room
"How did the tea room come about? That's a good question?" laughs
Aleth. "I was always very aware that we were totally dependent on Jason's work and that if ever I had to pick up the architecture, I would have to train again and validate my qualification, and would then probably have to commute to the cities, which was far from ideal. At the time, we entertained a lot, and

"When I came here, I immediately saw what I wanted to do, but Jason is far more realistic than I am'

These pages: the family work very hard but find the quality of life to be amazing

our friends always said we should

our friends aiways said we should work in caterring.

"We had very different ideas. It was a time of, let's say, some tension." A look passes between them. "Jason felt that for the first time we had a fairly stable income, the house was mortgage-free and essentially finished, but I was itching to start a project and began looking to start a project and began looking. essentially finished, but I was itching to start a project and began looking at places with potential for gites or tea rooms.

"Of course, when I came to this place, I immediately saw what I wanted to do, but Jason is far more realistic than I am."

"It wasn't just the renovation," explains Jason. "The biggest problem was that it had no garden, and we have four boys. But then, I started thinking, when they're a bit more independent, they could walk to the beach from here. I could see it could be something really special – eventually II suppose it was a leap of faith."

They bought the building in December 2010, and it was without water, electricity or heating. Miraculously, in May 2011, they opened a restaurant and fea room at the premises thanks in no small part to Jason working, an epe final 27-hour shift!.

"On the practical side, the businesswomen's network, Entreprendre au Feminin [Iwww. entreprendre au Feminin [Iwww. entreprendre au-Feminin.net], was really supportive. However, I had no cattring experience and, because I wasted everything to be home-made, I was working from Sam to Spm non-stop. The first year, a friend worked with me, but the second year I employed two local pirks, which didn't work out."

"Aleth pretty much broke down for a week," recalls Jason. "Our accountant told us not to make any reask decisions when we were so tired. However, the puperwork was piling a wood on the control of the pretty of the puperwork was piling a wood on the puperwork was piling a wood on the control of the puperwork was piling a wood on the control of the puperwork was piling a wood on the control of the puperwork was piling a wood on the puperwork was piling a wood on the puperwork was piling a wood of the puperwork was piling a wood on the

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up; I was letting clients down because I was having to rush back and forth to feels supplies and help out at the tea room; and we were bardy seeing the boys... you simply can't go on for long like that."

"The boys were so brave," remembers Aleth. "They'd left a house with a room each, all done, to come to a wreek where I ouis had to spend six months in a tent in the folia. It was a lot to ask."

At this point, alleth decided to stop the restaurant service and concentrate on the tear room and gifts. This proved to be a wise decision. The tea room that, as well as serving home-made, organic serving home-made, organic goodies, sells everything from Cornish clotted cream to pastel-striped cupcake cases, colourful tableware to old-fashioned builed

QUESTIONS

sweets. On every shelf, there are gift ideas, little indulgences and practical kitchen utensils, making it an Alacidin's care of delights, with a magical armosphere that is certainly heightened by Aleit herself, with her ebullient personality, and the couple's strong partnership. This year too, the couple will resume the restaurant service, thanks to a trained chef working alongside Aleth, who will now be more free to spend time enchanting usessomers with her natural warmth.

Any regrets?

"There have been moments where we considered going back to England," admits Aleth. "In fact, when it was really tough, we even asked the boys how they felt about it. They all said they'd like to visit, or maybe study there, but not live there permanently.

"The children have things here

that they would never have had in England," admits Jason, "like, for example, Marcus and his surfing. Their quality of like here is amazing. We would have had to earn and pay an awful lot more to get anything like this in England."
"As we are standing now, in a state of exhaustion after 10 years, "Im awrate it's been a very long road," says Aleth. "Sometimes it feels as it we're always chasing after something, It's been exciting but it has been tough, no doubt about it. But then, are we the people to sit around and do nothing?"

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The question hangs in the air for a few moments, before Aleth adds: "Some of our customers have suggested that we make this a franchise, and open tea rooms in Nantes, Bordeaux, and Lille. Even America or Australia have been mentioned. If 8 true that if this business were in the city, it would be less seasonal, and I would be able to spend more time with the boys."

"But them," adds Jason, "so much of the atmosphere here is the building you can't necessarily reproduce that:
"Sull," resumes Aleth, with a smile. It makes you think, Maybe an idea for the future!"
Whatever the future holds for this enterprising family, you can't help feeling it will be a bright one. IF Tel: 0.033 (0)2.98 26 97 83

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