

# Home Improve

**H**ands up if you've ever taken something away from a hotel. I don't mean miniature shampoos and boxes of matches, or even a towelling robe (naughty), but a style idea to copy in your own sitting room, bathroom or boudoir. For a long time, we have looked to the elegant interiors of boutique brands such as the Pig chain or the Soho House members' clubs to provide us with design inspo, but, no matter how cosy or convivial they seem, there's no escaping the fact hotels are too big and busy to recreate the intimate feel of a real home. Which is why holiday lets are the new taste barometer against which to measure your own interiors. The best ones are just like your own place – only better.

Vacation pads have to be top of the range – and picture perfect – to compete. Last year broke staycation records (helped, of course, by England's hottest summer on record); more foreigners are holidaying in Britain thanks to the weak pound; and, due to successive tax changes that have made buy-to-let less lucrative, increasing numbers of landlords are converting their longer-term rental properties into specific holiday boltholes. Some advertise private beach access or hot tubs to stand out; others offer Botox before breakfast.

Any holiday-home owner would do well to take a leaf out of Amy Maynard's visitors' book. The publicist and freelance journalist spent six months converting a workshop in the garden of her home in Appledore, a Kent village featured in a poem by AA Milne and in ITV's *The Darling Buds of May*, into a chic cabin. Yet the finished product is more New England than Little England.

"I grew up down the road, in Winchelsea, and after years in London, wanted to come back to live in the countryside," says Maynard, 38. In August 2015, she and her husband, Charlie, 51, also a journalist, their children, Lottie, 6, and Theo, 4, and pets Sidney the cat, Heart the hamster and Zeus, an 80-year-old tortoise, packed up their life in south London, and moved to a timber-framed four-bedroom house that was once the village shop.

"We'd seen about 100 houses before we bought in Camberwell, but when we decided to move here, we just saw one place down the road and then this one. I didn't go back to my job after taking maternity leave, so the plan was always to buy something with the



**MAKEOVER MASTERCLASS**

# HOW CHIC IS YOUR SHACK?

As holiday lets up their game in a crowded market, they have become a key source of style inspiration. None more so than this Kent outhouse, says *Alexandra Goss*



**The Outbuilding, once a carpentry workshop, has been converted into a highly Instagrammable holiday let – at a cost of about £150,000. It sits at the end of the family garden in the village of Appledore**

potential to make some extra income." The money-spinner was an old outbuilding at the top of the 100ft garden. "The guy that owned the house before us did a lot of carpentry, so this was a kind of rudimentary workshop – it looked a bit like an old-fashioned caravan, part of it with a curved roof made from corrugated iron and another part with a pitched roof that was all boarded up," Maynard says. All that remains of that initial structure are the two exposed brick walls either side of the living space. "They were such a big part of my vision, those walls," she says. In an echo of its predecessor, the new Outbuilding, as it is named, is a timber frame clad in cedar shiplap, painted a moody lead-grey. The corrugated cement sheeting on the roof and the steel-framed french doors nod to the Outbuilding's industrial past. "I wanted to keep the

black window frames – other than that I didn't want it to be too matchy-matchy; inside, I wanted it to feel like a real mix. And colour was a real thing for me." Mossy greens, inky blues, cherry reds and blush pinks – they're all there, with items from in-demand designers (funky tile brand Bert & May, luxe fabrics from Christopher Farr and Vanessa Arbuthnott, and ubiquitous-for-a-reason Farrow & Ball paint) paired with cheap eBay and antique-shop finds. Yet, rather than being in-your-face, the clash of colours, materials, styles and textures marries perfectly. The steel-framed windows, echoed in the bedroom and shower screen, tie the look together; the curtain and blind fabric is repeated to provide continuity; the Instagram-perfect colour-coded bookshelves add a sense of order. Indeed, the attention to detail in the property – which sleeps four

comfortably, though there's also a trundle bed underneath the bunk beds – is almost monomaniacal. The pictures are hung with millimetre precision; the light switches, radiator valves and door furniture are all a uniform brushed brass; the only speck of chrome is a fitting at the very top of the shower, something that irks Maynard. "I love hosting, meeting new people, but I get really obsessive about making sure it's always perfect. I don't clean it myself, but it does take up a lot of my time, always thinking about what needs doing. I do worry. If I got any sort of negative reviews I'd be absolutely devastated, which is silly, but it was such a labour of love." Disagreeable feedback doesn't appear to be a problem. The visitors' book is brimming with compliments from guests from all over Europe, and she's a "superhost" on Airbnb, with five stars



**Be my guest** Visitors enjoy the carefully curated interiors, which combine eclectic furnishings with classy fittings and a liberal dash of Farrow & Ball



across every element – from cleanliness to check-in process to value for money (the property costs from £140 a night for two people). As well as having a website with professional photographs (by richardgadsbyphotography.com), Maynard created an Instagram account, theoutbuildingappledore, which is drumming up increasing numbers of inquiries – especially when retailers, such as Bert & May (almost 79,000 followers), repost her photographs. Bathrooms are apparently a favourite topic of interiors Insta-influencers and Maynard receives gushing praise for its herringbone-patterned white and green tiles, marble washbasin and calming seashell prints on the wall. That errant bit of chrome is discreetly hidden. However, while it may appear effortless to guests, creating a holiday let behind the house that Maynard and her husband bought for £725,000, according to the Land Registry, wasn't straightforward. Neighbours initially objected to the plans over concerns about parking and football going past their house, while the first architect they hired had to pull out for personal reasons (they subsequently used Rob

Pollard at RX Architects, based in Rye). And, though the Outbuilding is quiet, not all guests will wish to share a garden. "I was initially worried because the Outbuilding is close to the house – it's about 10ft away," Maynard says. "In the summer our children are often outside, and if guests have children they love it. And if they don't – sometimes Lottie and Theo will appear on the patio; if you're having a romantic weekend you don't want that. I have to judge it." The perfectionism has come at a cost. Maynard estimates the total bill, including furniture, was as much as £150,000, more than double the £70,000 initial budget. However, the outlay is starting to pay dividends: estate agents have confirmed the building has added value to the house and by next month, a year after it opened, it will have grossed £30,000 in rent. (She pays income tax on profits and qualifies for the rent-a-room scheme, so the first £7,500 of income is tax-free.) While the Outbuilding's interior design is its USP, Maynard hasn't forgotten the basics: she's bought good pillows (including anti-allergy options), quality linen (200 thread count, 100% cotton), a decent television (hooked up to Netflix), a plentiful supply of pods for the Nespresso machine, posh toiletries from Jo Malone, toys and baby paraphernalia, and a blissfully comfy mattress. "I just hate it when you go somewhere and there's a crap bed and crap TV, and you think, 'Why did I bother?'" she says. "I wanted it to feel like a home."

**“I get really obsessive about making sure it's always perfect. If I got any sort of negative reviews I'd be absolutely devastated”**

theoutbuildingappledore.com; airbnb.co.uk/rooms/23125684

**GET THE LOOK**  
**Living room/kitchen** Steel-framed double-glazed french doors, from £4,800; thegreenwindowcompany.co.uk. Kitchen units from howdens.com, painted in Railings, £69 for 2.5 litres; farrow-ball.com. Marble shelves from The Shop Next Door, in Rye; light above is the Astro 7615 Joel Grande, £175; oceanlighting.co.uk. Gold frames with red mounts, by Frame Company, from £8; amazon.co.uk. Helios 8 clean-burn stove, £485; stovesareus.co.uk. Linen blinds in Ronja Charcoal, £20 a metre; linenfabrics.co.uk (made by curtainsbyrae.co.uk).

**Bedroom** Wall paint is Farrow & Ball Cromarty, £46.50 for 2.5 litres. Headboard covered in Simple Ticking Detail – Sweet Pea, £52 a metre; vanessaarbuthnott.co.uk. King mattress with memory-foam topper from Groupon. Bunk beds in hallway painted in Farrow & Ball Studio Green.

**Bathroom** Green Herringbone tiles, £2 each; bertandmay.com. Matki-One wet-room panel with black frame effect, £1,379; matki.co.uk.

**Builder** Ryan Blake, of Blakes Building Solutions; 07809 460297, info@blakesbuildingsolutions.co.uk

Keep an eye on budget, but don't compromise on your vision. You want to create something that stands out. If your heart's set on a pricy shower screen, go for it and save money elsewhere.

**AMY'S TOP TIP**