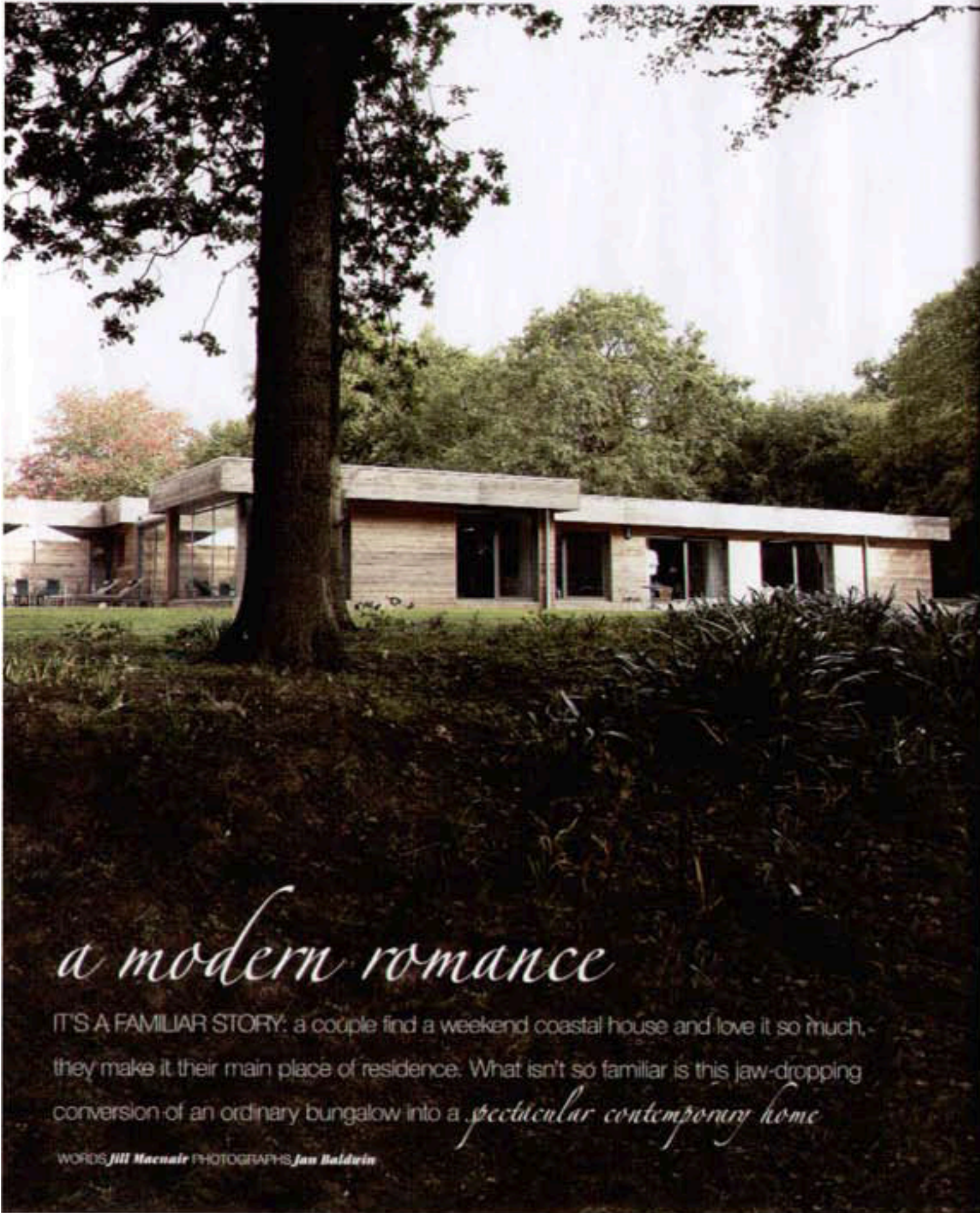


FROM LEFT The 1980s bungalow was insulated, then enveloped in rough-sawn Siberian larch, which weathers well. Floor-to-ceiling double-glazed doors and windows bring in the daylight and offer beautiful woodland views. Finlay runs barefoot to the beach at nearby Comber Sands



a modern romance

IT'S A FAMILIAR STORY: a couple find a weekend coastal house and love it so much, they make it their main place of residence. What isn't so familiar is this jaw-dropping conversion of an ordinary bungalow into a *spectacular contemporary home*

WORDS *Jill Macnaie* PHOTOGRAPHS *Jan Baldwin*





The garden, with wild boar, deer and pheasants, is a major part of the decoration.

John Carter has been zooming up and down his large lawn – perhaps best described as grounds – on a motorised mower. Since moving to Freemantle in East Sussex last April with wife Anna Carlos, their six-year-old son Finlay and John's 15-year-old daughter Minnie (who frequently visits from London), he admits to being 'completely obsessed' with caring for the grass outside their 1960s Modernist style, flat-roofed bungalow. 'I have to get the lines straight,' he says. Perhaps it's a hazard of swapping a compact three-storey house in London's Primrose Hill, where the garden is a tiny roof terrace, for a country manor with an extensive green award, views over Tillingham Valley (which belongs to Sir Paul McCartney) and the eight-mile glorious coastal stretch of Gamber Sands a short drive away.

John and Anna run a brand communication company, Gunning, which has offices in London and

New York, and whose past clients include Nissan, Levi's and US clothing company Target. They had considered buying a weekend house near the coast when the building came up for sale in November 2006. Something clicked as soon as they saw the place. 'It happened when we came up the drive,' Anna says.

It's a testament to their creativity that they could see past the damp, condensation and mock-Georgian extension that had become part of the house. The couple's plan was to upgrade it just enough to make it livable for weekend use because they were already reworking their London home with architects Andrew Whiting and Scott Batty from HGI Architecture. They were soon invited to help here, too, but only, says Andrew Whiting, 'to put in new windows and doors, add some insulation and fix up the roof. As we worked on it, John and Anna became more enthusiastic. They'd say, "It would be

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Simple materials such as rough timber, polished concrete and galvanized steel have been used throughout the house, including the living room, which features a striking mosaic chimney breast.

TIMBER CLADDING: a modern coastal material

As a durable finish, timber cladding has long been used on rural and coastal buildings, and the swing towards sustainable building has brought timbers, such as pine, spruce, larch and western red cedar, back into vogue. Softwoods pine and spruce need to be treated with finishing products, which release toxins, whereas larch and western red cedar can be left untreated. Consider sourcing a local timber, such as sweet chestnut, grown in thousands of hectares of coppice

woods around London. Try the Sustainable Building Association (sba.co.uk) for help on choosing wood from a sustainable source or Wood For Good (woodforgood.com) for stockists.

John and Anna picked Siberian larch because it weathers to a beautiful silvery grey tone – cedar ages in a similar way. They also chose a rough-cut finish that shows imperfections. Architect Andrew Whiting designed a special joint so the building edges meet easily.

interesting if we could do such and such," and we'd say "How about this?" and, as we went along, the brief gradually got bigger.'

Referencing the coastal landscape

The badly needed wall insulation is a good example of this. On top of the 90mm of urea-foam material, elaborately detailed, beautifully rough-sawn Siberian larch cladding now surrounds the house. This references the coastal landscape beautifully and gives the structure a whole new look. The building's interior, meanwhile, is far beyond the 'tidy-up job' initially prescribed. Upon entering, the first thing to hit you is the view through new, enlarged, aluminium-framed windows. In the living room, these wrap around the corner of the house so that the garden – and



The concrete flooring—perfect for a coastal lifestyle—is almost beach-like in colour

FROM ABOVE LEFT More light floods into the dining area through a generous roof light. Eames chairs are grouped around the table, which used to be a lab workbench; the kitchen was custom-made from driftwood, with pastel-coloured cupboard fronts and an old sign found on a roadside; the vintage Charlotte Perriand chair is one of Anna and John's collectibles. John and Freya go dune jumping

the wild boar, rabbits, deer and pheasants passing through it – is a major part of the decoration. 'It always amuses me how excited our friends get about the robots. That's a very London reaction,' Anna says.

Structural changes have been minimal as planned – the house already had a rooey open plan. Hül took out a chimney breast, which left a hole in the ceiling of the dining area but is now replaced with a large roof light. A second roof light illuminates the corridor leading to three of the four bedrooms. The fourth is in its own wing on the other side of the house.

It's the materials that are key to the feel of the house, which, says John, is 'open and easy rather than hard work and pretentious. Under heated concrete flooring – perfect for the wellies-and-cagoules coastal lifestyle – was ground down so bits of stone and aggregate are visible, and the colour is almost beach-like.

Scavenged materials

The kitchen has been constructed from driftwood, plus there are plywood and Formica cupboard fronts in pale pink, green and blue. John tracked down designer-maker Neil Jolliffe to do the, whose ethos is about re-using materials, and they went on a variety of scavenging trips for the house.

The dressing room is a similar mish-mash, combining fisherman's baskets with old bits of wood, all found in Dungeness, and the dining table is a reworked lab workbench that's still ringed with Bunsen burner marks. Surrounding it are original Eames chairs in a hard-to-find shade of taupe – a finishing touch that is typical of Anna and John, who collect limited-edition furniture and art. They agonised over these details – even worrying about the position and type of nails

that were used on the larch-clad extension room (which replaced the old mock-Georgian structure).

In the end, funds for their London roof terrace have gone on their Peasmarsh home instead. 'It would have been cheaper to knock it down and start again,' John jokes. But the pay off is huge: the house is now their home, while the London pad is a place to slip over when working in the office. 'Friday was a big part of our decision. In London, hard to getting on a bus to go to the school playground. Here, he goes to a school with 47 acres of field and forest,' John says.

There's still lots left to do. A swimming pool is being finished and Hül is sketching ideas for a timber work studio. And there's always the beach... **ANNA** Curring (020 7566 5300, curring.com), H&P Architecture (020 7566 5300, hutchinsarchitecture.com), Neil Jolliffe Interiors (01977 452457).

JOHN AND ANNA'S SHORE THINGS

● Shingle or sand beach?

Anna 'Sand. It's fantastic to be near Camber because it's the only beach that's sandy for miles. Suffolk is the next best.'

John 'You can't be on Camber alone when it's out of season – it's empty and beautiful.'

● Favourite coastal activity?

John 'Kite flying, although that's more of an amateur activity in my case.'

Anna 'Gone jumping. And recently we've also been

tying up the local windsurfing school in Fye.'

● Favourite place for fish and chips?

John 'The Pilot Inn, Dungeness (01797 300314).'

● Best local walk?

Anna 'Strolling from Camber to Beckley Woods.'

● Best sea view?

John 'From the ridge up at Lidmore, looking out to Wickhampton beach and Peil Level. It's gorgeous.'



1 These antlers are sourced from the red deer of the Scottish Highlands. Numbers reach such high levels that, twice a year, some are culled to reduce the effects on other wildlife. Scottish antlers, £94, Fipsa Stour

2 This John Lewis cowhide is printed with a Friesian design and costs £395 (around four square metres)

3 Our fave designer piece in the house is the Lounge chair and ottoman by Charles & Ray James, £4,525, Vitra

4 For a similar feature wall, try the interlocking random tiles (30 x 30cm) from Island Stone, £70 per square metre, available in various colours

5 This inexpensive plastic table is a future design classic: the Dockata table (H75 x D105cm) from Ikea is a good buy at £35



coast LOVES...

... *JOHN AND ANNA'S* stylish, spacious living room. No clutter, just carefully considered pieces. Organic materials, and raw textures and colours complement the great outdoors, viewed through enormous windows