

COUNTRY HOMES AND INTERIORS - NEEDSORE - 1987



Above: This former coastguard's cottage in Hampshire is now the home of interior designer Derek Frost (right)

A COASTAL FRONT

*Designer Derek Frost has
found his perfect country haven in
a simple coastguard's cottage*

Re-educating a town and beach boy to the rigours and delights of English country life takes a few years. Derek Frost's conversion is now complete, however. He was brought up in the Far East where endless days were idled away on white sandy beaches under a relentless sun. Most of his adult life has been spent in London where he runs his own interior design company for an impressive array of clients. He travels widely through his work, satisfying his need for change, and giving him opportunities to absorb different cultures.

It was something of a shock when, eight years ago, he was dragged off to look at a small cottage on the Hampshire coast by a close friend, Jeremy Norman. Derek confesses to having been 'a bit sniffy about the mud' at first, but Jeremy's wide knowledge of and enthusiasm for the countryside persuaded him that there must be something in ▷

WORDS · KATE FAULKNER
PHOTOGRAPHS · TIMOTHY BEDDOW







Above: Walls and hearth in Derek's living room are kept plain, complemented by the sofa, ottoman and carpet in dhurrie fabric by Shyam Ahuja from Liberty. Left: The Burr maple coffee table is Derek's own design

◁ it after all. Jeremy's authoritative views on bird life and plants fuelled his interest.

Their cottage is in a conservation area on the Hampshire mainland, not far from the Isle of Wight. It is one of a row of former coastguards' cottages, and was at one time accessible only by boat through the salt marshes. It's paradise for birdwatchers; little terns, little ringed plovers, oyster catchers, curlews, Canada geese, and shelduck can all be observed on the expanse between the cottage and the sea.

Equipped with his travelling drawing board, Derek often deserts London to lead a hermit-like existence at the cottage. He says: 'I can concentrate on pure design here; a lot of ideas come in the

calm, isolated atmosphere.' The varying shapes and textures created by the forces of nature in an area of remarkable beauty are an inspiration for his work and beachcombing for interesting debris, driftwood and stones has, he says, 'become a favourite pastime and main source of ornamentation for the cottage'.

Professionally, Derek is renowned for empty, white spaces. He liked the cottage the way he found it: 'It had a slightly run down air about it and I didn't want to tart it up.' But it's not quite untouched: the sofas, covered in natural coloured Shyam Ahuja fabrics, are scattered with brightly coloured crewel work cushions. A recent trip to Bali is recalled in the cushions from Sumba and ▷

Beachcombing is one of my favourite pastimes, and provides many ornaments for the cottage'



◁ pelmets of woven ikat cotton (made by cutting Balinese sarongs in half). A tapestry from Swaziland, depicting naïve cave paintings, hangs above the refectory table. Nothing is too structured or pompous: the cottage retains its intrinsic simplicity and charm.

Derek's strong attachment to water led him to build a pond in the courtyard of his London home, but it's the combination of country and sea at the cottage which provides the real therapy. He looks horrified, however, at the suggestion of swimming in the English Channel – I suppose this would be hard for someone who grew up bathing in sea as hot as a Roman bath. On the other hand, his small boat provides many





The bedrooms are deliberately simple.

In one, colour is provided by a striped cotton blind and a Shyam Ahuja bedspread; in another, by an ikat blind and bedspread from Indonesia.

Below left: Derek has become a keen gardener since moving to Hampshire

hours of pleasure. The Isle of Wight is very close and he loves to putter along the Newtown estuary to the conservation area where he can watch the migrating oyster catchers. But there's nothing to compare with going to Yarmouth. 'A trip to Yarmouth,' says Derek, 'is so refreshing. It has a pure and simple quality that remains so completely unsullied by the intrusions of urban life.'

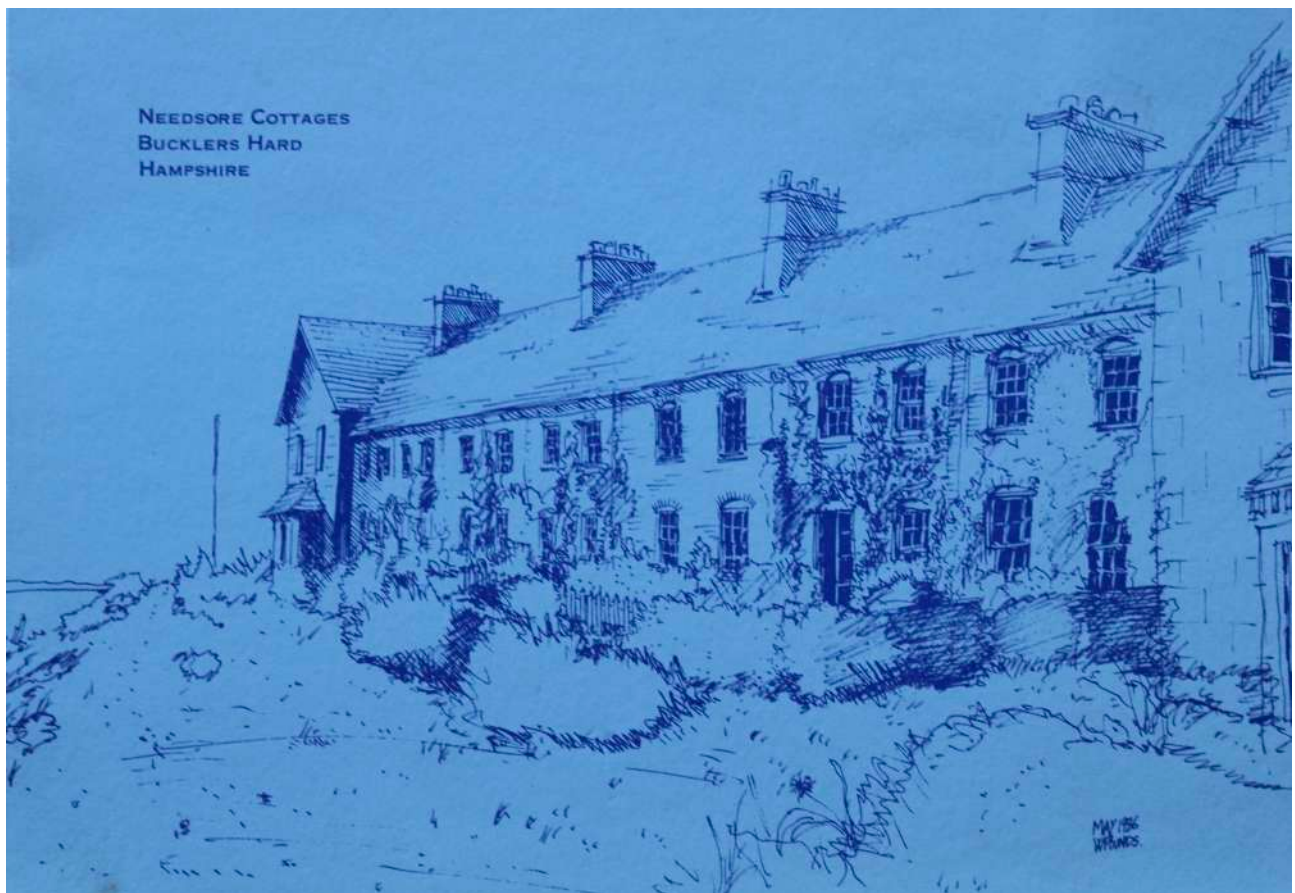
Regular visits to the cottage also developed in Derek a love of gardening – on a purely unfussy level. In front is a small garden overlooking the marshes and sea and at the back a larger one that looks over countryside. 'It took a long time to know what plants would thrive here,' says Derek, but once he had mastered this he

discovered the delights of close contact with growing things.

Sophistication with a touch of whimsy make Derek's furniture designs stand out. At first glance they appear sleek and beautiful, but there's always a humorous touch. Derek has designed some pieces specifically for the cottage that accentuate the whimsical but are decidedly rustic. In the living room is a chest of Douglas fir; the windblown, bleached colour of the wood, inset with oyster shells, echoes the beach beyond.

Derek appreciates that he has the best of both worlds: 'the sense of isolation and specialness of this part of the coast' as well as the urban pleasures of London. 'It is a highly privileged position to be in, one not to be abused.' □

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By: William Pounds 1986