

# BOATHOUSE BOLTHOLE

Artist Miranda Gardiner used her creative eye and magpie instincts to convert a ramshackle boathouse on a Devon estuary into a beautiful sanctuary, using reclaimed and vintage finds

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**F**ramed by evergreen pines and dark wooden balustrades, the view from the deck of Miranda Gardiner's South Devon boathouse changes as the tide ebbs and flows. A private path leads down to the shingly foreshore of Bowcombe Creek, part of an AONB that's a haven for wading little egrets at low tide and the route to the market town of Kingsbridge and the sailing hub of Salcombe at the mouth of the Kingsbridge Estuary. 'In the evenings, it's a wonderful spot to watch the sunset glowing a copper colour in the fields beyond – it feels so calm,' says Miranda, an artist whose thoughtful renovation of this holiday property allows it to blend in with the shorescape, like a hide in the reeds.

After years spent dreaming of converting an old garage into a romantic retreat, Miranda found the boathouse back in 2014, a 10-minute drive from the village of Loddiswell where she lives with her husband Diggory and their teenage children. Built on the site of a 1930s chalet building, the shed had housed a classic wooden Salcombe yawl sailing boat for 30 years. Now, since its conversion, it's all about escape. Every



corner offers a new place to rest and relax, from the reclining loungers by the fire pit to the large window seat near the dresser, an eBay find that serves as a well-stocked gin bar with honesty box.

## BACH ON THE CREEK

Having travelled extensively in New Zealand, Miranda was inspired by the Kiwi philosophy of embracing the outdoors, and loves spending time on the coast with her children. 'At low tide, you can walk along the creek foreshore, beneath the overhanging trees, 



LEFT The dining space feels light and airy with reclaimed wooden table and chairs sliding doors out onto the wooden deck ABOVE The Irish dresser with brass details that Miranda's husband Diggory adapted is the centrepiece of the kitchen

which remind me of the pohutukawa trees with bright red flowers that hug New Zealand's coastline,' she explains. 'The sea is part of our existence as a family and this place is about recreating that sense of being barefoot. We have been so grateful that during lockdown we could still go for a swim, walk on the beach or go fishing. It's those inexpensive, lovely interactions with people that are so special.' Visiting family and guests can kayak their way around too. 'I love getting physically immersed in that view – there's something that resets me when I'm by the coast,' adds Miranda.

Inspired by the concept of the Kiwi 'bach' or beach house, the interiors of this one-bedroom property have an old-school, rustic feel. While there are plenty of nautical touches, the vibe is more 'washed up on the shore' than neat coastal motifs. Upstairs, in the cosy double bedroom under the eaves, there's

an eclectic mix of vintage prints and artworks on the walls. A string of buoyancy rings and worn fishing floats hangs on one angular block of wall to break up the harsh lines – these were found in the Shetland Islands by her father-in-law many years ago.

### RECLAIMED RENOVATION

Miranda and Diggory, a retired headmaster, have converted this boat store lovingly, using as many reclaimed materials and furnishings as possible, partly to keep the environmental footprint low but also for the added character that different textures, colours and patterns bring. It's a far cry from the modern, floor-to-ceiling glasshouses so often rebuilt along this stretch of coastline.

She was hands-on throughout the project and felt comfortable dealing with builders' merchants. 'It's such a creative process. It's harder to visualise the end

result three-dimensionally than with a flat painting, but I've been around builders since my twenties and I enjoy chatting through a problem with them over a coffee to find a solution.' And because this wasn't a quick build, they had time to find sympathetic materials, with the roof being a prime example. 'I mentioned to my brother-in-law that ideally we wanted reclaimed Delabole slates, and he happened to say he was just stripping off a 150-year-old roof from a Devon longhouse near Exeter. They were put onto the boathouse with copper nails and it looks beautiful.'

The property is full of serendipitous finds like this that the Gardiners have collected over the years. Miranda bought the antique doorbell from Totnes market in the 1990s and rescued four kitchen chairs from the nearby tip for the princely sum of £10. A local second-hand shop in Kingsbridge, called Two Rooms, ➡➡➡



ABOVE The boathouse fits into the outdoors philosophy that so inspired Miranda from New Zealand travels

### MIRANDA'S TOP DEVON ACTIVITIES

- **Sea swimming.** 'I started sea swimming last June – without a wetsuit – splashing among the waves at Torcross with my friends, the “mermaids”, is so invigorating.'
- **SUP.** 'Stand-up paddleboarding or kayaking makes it so easy to get afloat and I love going underneath Bowcombe Bridge, just down the creek.' SUP hire is available at [waterborn.uk.com](http://waterborn.uk.com).
- **Foodie feasts.** 'Just a couple of minutes' walk away is The Crabshell Inn, a family-friendly pub right by the water which serves up morning coffee, stone-baked pizzas or dinner with wine. As a treat, we order takeaway from chef Jane Baxter's Wild Artichokes – that's what I'll be doing for my birthday.' Find out more at the [thecrabshellinn.com](http://thecrabshellinn.com) and [wildartichokes.co.uk](http://wildartichokes.co.uk).
- **Beach time.** 'Even when we previously lived on Dartmoor, we have always gravitated to Bigbury-on-Sea, the beach that overlooks Burgh Island. My son Raz particularly feels the pull – he's a keen surfer and now a surf instructor, so we have spent many hours there over the years.' Go to [discoverysurf.com](http://discoverysurf.com) to find out about lessons.
- **Fishing.** 'We sometimes take the boat out to go mackerel fishing either just over Salcombe Bar or behind Burgh Island.'

became her go-to for vintage furniture and accessories: 'Discovering Pete [owner of Two Rooms] when we had very little money and a bit of a lag on the project was great because we could buy bits and bobs when things popped up, such as a brass handrail. It's like a puzzle, finding all the missing pieces when they appear. If I'd had a ready pot of money and more time, I'd have been more tempted to buy everything immediately online.' Her favourite find is the muted yellow cupboard now hanging on the kitchen wall, full of different teas. 'It's a lovely colour and with these markings, it breaks up the wall. We think that it may have been a French seed cupboard with vents.'

Miranda commissioned Ben, a local cabinetmaker, to craft the windows, and Diggory built the kitchen cabinets and counter tops. 'To get back into carpentry, I attended the Nick Carey workshop a few years ago, just outside Dartmouth, and made the coffee table in the boathouse from cherry and ash using only hand tools,' says Diggory. The large kitchen island is a one-off piece made from the base of an old Irish dresser purchased from Pete and joined to reclaimed hardwood to create a larger counter top (and hidden storage) that is great for cooking and socialising.

In the bathroom upstairs, a French

wooden storage box contains towels and copper panels from a bar in Torquay bounce the light around the room. Two sea snail or 'paua' shells from Kaikoura on New Zealand's South Island add a dash of mother-of-pearl glimmer, while the print of 'crazy angler fish' by the sink is yet another point of interest.

### STILL LIFE

In her studio at home, Miranda works with acrylic paints and some pastels; recent commissions include a seascape of Sennen Cove in Cornwall and a view of the Avon Valley, but mostly her work is still life. That artistic eye naturally seeps into every aspect of the boathouse, from the display of pots and vases on a windowsill to the layout on every wall. Above the cosy blue corner sofa sits a painting of a boathouse that goes well with that dark inky blue, plus two small paintings of her own. Miranda has used colour to separate space in the open-plan living area, while in the lighter, airier kitchen, her teal still life adds a splash of colour and the pale, shabby chic dining table breaks up the heavier brass and darker wood kitchen cabinets. The mix of natural shades, sanded down textures and mismatched woods reinforces the intention to relax.

'Like any still life, making this holiday home special has been about creating a

good composition. This place wouldn't serve as a functional family home, there's no washing machine here, we've just included the best bits.' Since opening to guests in October 2019, the boathouse has sparked numerous marriage proposals and is a popular destination for honeymoons and anniversaries. It's mission accomplished for Miranda's romantic plan.

**Bowcombe Boathouse in Kingsbridge, Devon, TQ7 1LA ([bowcombeboathouse.com](http://bowcombeboathouse.com)) sleeps two and costs from £205 per night, two-night minimum stay, book via [canopyandstars.co.uk](http://canopyandstars.co.uk). Miranda's still life and landscape paintings can be found at [mirandagardiner.co.uk](http://mirandagardiner.co.uk).**



ABOVE & LEFT Miranda had dreamt for many years of finding a waterside property to renovate BELOW Upstairs, the cosy bedroom has its own deck overlooking the water

