

Cream of Woodstock

Inspect this charming home in Morse country

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It began with a tree

A year later, Will Anderson opens up his eco-diary

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Six to view

A 17th-century moated manor house in Hampshire

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Secret agent

Why doing an evaluation is like sitting for an exam with no revision

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THE INDEPENDENT

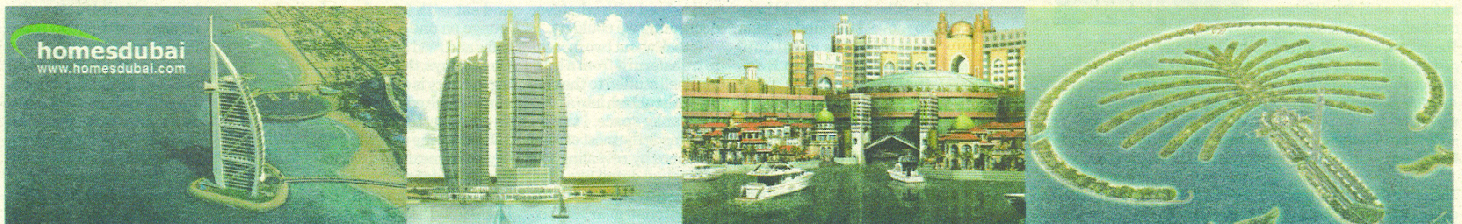
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Fly on the wall

How an artist combined studio and home

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VOX PROP by Alice Black

Is it ever alright to build on the green belt?

Some 19,000 hectares have been added to the green belt since 1997, says the Government. But if building targets are to be met, protected land is coming under growing pressure.

Ellen Robinson, office manager, Winchester, Hampshire: I live in a semi-rural area with trees and hedgerows, and where people's gardens attract all sorts of wildlife. But this is changing and we are seeing these plots broken up and sold off for building. How can it make sense to destroy this environment and, at the same time, stop any development on a neglected muddy field simply because it falls into the green belt? If we need more homes, we cannot just cram them into one area without any regard for the consequences.

Oliver Foster, senior policy officer, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors: The green belt is essential for stopping the development of urban sprawl. It is right that there should be a strong presumption against building in those areas. There is a danger that if we go down the road of trade-offs, the Government will extend the green belt in places where it is not needed, while eating into places where it is. But we should never say never.

Henry Oliver, head of planning, Campaign to Protect Rural England: It should not be touched because the whole point of the green belt is that it is permanent. All the same, it is possible to review the boundaries through the planning process, and in places such as Cambridge,



to engage in a debate. But unless we regard it as sacrosanct, its usefulness is reduced. The quality of the land is irrelevant. Whatever the Government says, the green belt is under threat from its own policies, such as housing development and airport expansion.

Yolande Barnes, head of research, Savills estate agents: Not all green belt is countryside or quality land. You can find previously developed sites in rural areas that look industrial but are not designated brownfield, which is why a broad-brush approach is not sensible. If we want sustainable development, each case should be looked at on its merits. It might be more important to create a green open space in an urban area than protect every bit of the green belt.

Pierre Williams, of house-buildersweek.info: "Green belt" is often a misnomer – the land isn't necessarily green, yet it has to be protected. That means that new houses are being built in residential areas, so nimbyism has shot itself in the foot. The only person who doesn't object is the one selling the land. It's quality countryside that should be protected, not scrubland.

WAFFLEWATCH by Mark Wilson

This spectacular two-bedroom maisonette is situated in the spectacular vicinity of Peckham in a quiet residential location. The property is on the fourth floor and offers two double bedrooms, a fully fitted kitchen and double glazing throughout.

The property boasts off-street parking, a lift for easy access and spectacular views of London. Avoid disappointment and view early!

Torrige Gardens, Peckham

This place does sound good, doesn't it? Spectacular, even. In fact, everything about it is so spectacular that you begin to wonder whether the writer



has misled all but the "S" page of the Estate Agent's Compendium of Enticing Adjectives. And since "sea view", "secluded" and "spa" were even less appropriate to a block in south-east London that looks like the inside of a prison, they thought they'd better play it safe.

Two-bedroom maisonette, London SE15, £155,000

MY HOME ABIGAIL LANE

Finding space way out East

A home and an office, a former factory floor has been transformed to suit this artist's grand, yet homely, ideals. **Tessa Williams-Akoto** reports

Artist Abigail Lane lives and works from a converted warehouse on an industrial estate in Hackney Wick, East London, from where she runs her interiors company Showroom Dummies.

I never really see my place as a flat. Although it is homey, it is very much a workspace too. What I love most about it is the scale. In my previous flats, I only had to lunge for things – here I get the chance to take a walk from one side to another. I love the "big sky" feeling, being high up with so many huge windows.

There are more than 27 windows and I don't have any curtains apart from in my bedroom, where I have blackout blinds. I didn't want the feeling of being hemmed in by curtains, plus they would cost a fortune.

Before I moved to here, I had a place in Shoreditch in which I could both live and work, and where my love affair with big spaces began. It completely changed the way I lived my life. I was there for six years, before the area had anything.

I held some great parties there: two followed the Turner Prize, one for Sam [Taylor-Wood] and one for Gary [Hume].

However the area soon changed, rents started to rise and more and more artists had to leave. When I realised that I would have to move, I decided to walk east along the canal until something turned up. Eventually I stumbled along across a wasteland of largely redundant buildings. As it turned out there were already a few pioneers living there and leading an alternative, "halfway house" sort of existence. Now, I love the fact that this space is so close to the river.

When Ethel, my Stafford-



shire terrier and I moved in six years ago, we had to do just about everything from rewiring the electricity to constructing new walls, and putting in new plumbing. One of the most time-consuming tasks was scraping, burning, and sanding the bitumen from the floor to reveal the maplewood boards underneath. I had great help from a good friend of mine, Dean Whatmuff, who kept on top of the whole project, making sure things were being done on time, ordering materials and keeping people on the right track.

It took a long time to raise the money to renovate the place. I held an auction of my work and other artists and had a proper auctioneer from Sotheby's. I bought a lot of stuff secondhand and helped with whatever decorating we could do.

It took about two months to transform it from a leaking shell stuffed to the ceiling with rubbish into a pretty swanky space. I think I have made the most of what was here by revealing lots of original detail like tiles, reconstituting the industrial kitchen gear and fixing the floorboards.

The building was formerly a factory for Burber-

ry, and my kitchen was their canteen, so there were many things to be moved.

My interior style is quite grand but homely, eclectic – and not at all flashy.

I had a gut-feeling about the corner I would like to sleep in, so that immediately became my bedroom.

From my bed, I can hear the birds singing and the river flowing.

I designed the "lightning" wallpaper behind my bed, and the venetian mirrored chest was a gift from another artist many years ago. Apart from that I don't have much else in my bedroom. I didn't want to look at my clothes, so I planned a walk-in dressing room.

I like cooking, so the heart of the house is the kitchen and all my sofas. I tend to relax at the kitchen table and eat with friends, or I lounge on one of the many sofas and read or watch TV. On Sundays, the surrounding industry is quiet and the whole place cools down, so it's good day to chill out.

Space is the ultimate luxury and it means you can let furniture define the space. The bathroom is off the kitchen and has a huge free-standing bath, which I bought from *Loot* for £70. It had been left to rust in

someone's garden. I painted it black. It looks really sharp now.

Furniture tends to find me. Since I have a big space, people give me things that no longer fit into their lives or homes. On my 30th birthday my friends bought me a surprise present of a Challen baby grand piano, which now lies in the hallway. My friends managed to lift it up the stairs and then presented it to me with a glass of champagne on the top and a book of *It's a Wonderful Life*. I don't tend to play it much, as I'm embarrassingly bad and the walls are too thin.

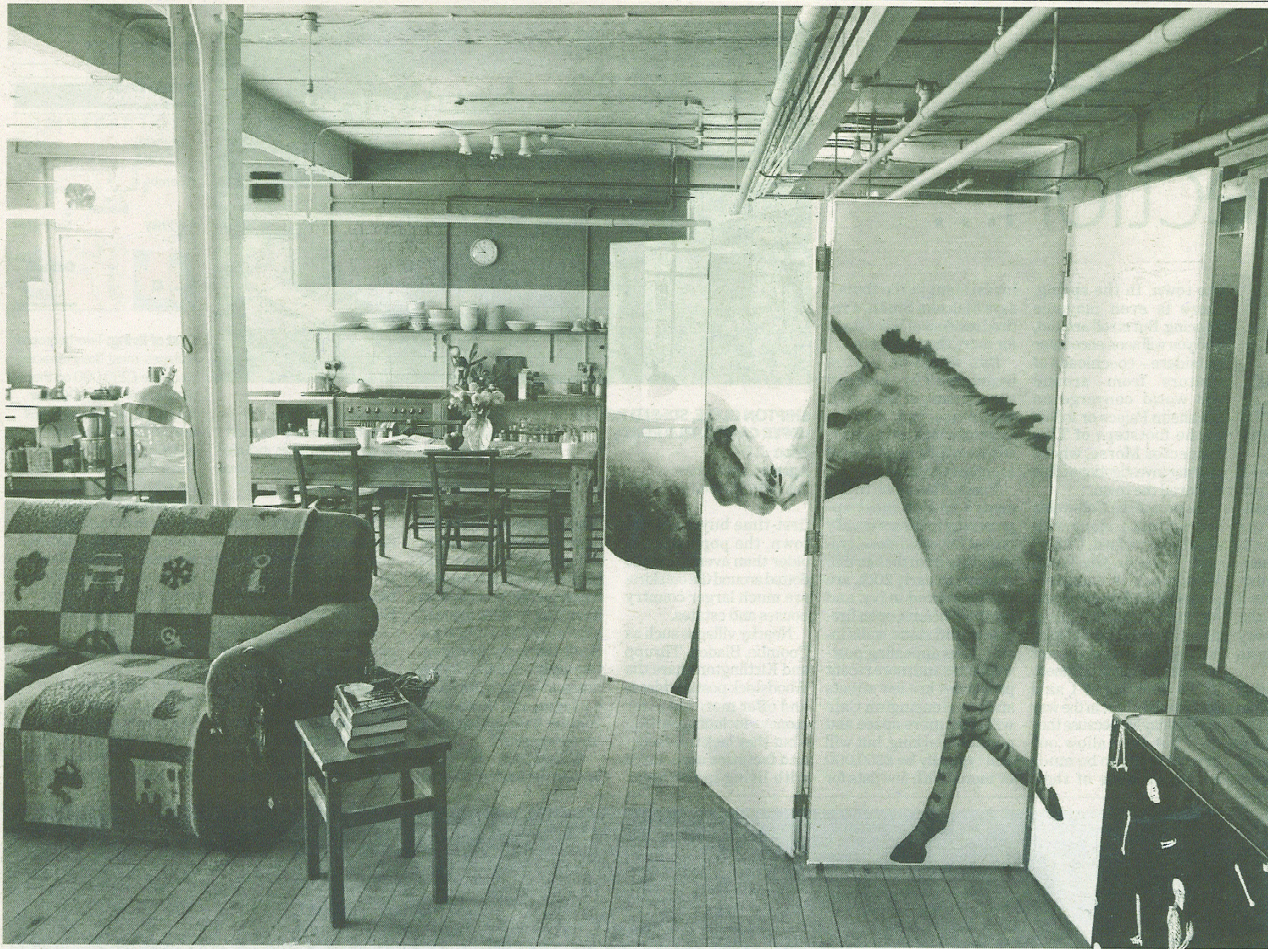
Since I started the furniture design company, Showroom Dummies, with Brigitte Stepputtis, who also works as the head of couture for Vivienne Westwood, and Bob Pain, a print specialist, the house is even more full of furniture. My place is our showroom and the heart of its creativity.

We've produced a perspex screen, which is my favourite piece. It shows the image of "kissing asses" on one side and falling parachutists on the other. For more sentimental reasons, I am also pretty fond of my kitchen table because of all the things that have taken place around it. I bought it many years ago from Castle Gibson.

The fact that I have a secret garden, a hermit's house and wild rocket, all a stone's throw from my home is very useful.

There is also a FedEx building, an industrial tyre-shredders, burnt-out caravans and now even an organic Turkish emporium, that all make this the truly Wild Wick. It's diversity and growing pains are what make the area exciting and unique.

www.showroomdummies.com



Resting her bones: Sofas and the kitchen are at the heart of the house, shared by Abigail and Ethel, her Staffordshire terrier, pictured below on the bed by the artist's lightning wallpaper
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