

GRIFF RHYS JONES

'Naples seethes on, obsessed with its own concerns. It sums up why I travel'

page 3

'REMOTE AND RARELY VISITED'

Novelist David Mitchell on his love affair with Japan's isolated Oki islands

page 4



NATASHA BEDINGFIELD

'My whole body was so swollen that my friend had to cover me in ice'

page 7

Travel on Sunday



MARK WATTS/SHUTTERSTOCK/CAMBER SANDS

Castles on the sand

Ready to splash out? Our experts open the doors to Britain's most stylish beach houses

In a world that has stopped, shrunk, shut down, the sea remains irrepressibly free. Its infinite expanse and ever-changing drama is the antidote to confinement, a plunge into its breathtaking surf a tonic to reawaken the senses. As we emerge from lockdown, a great many of us find ourselves drawn to Britain's

wild coasts. You could travel the world and not find such soul-stirring beauty. Never has the British beach holiday been so appealing. So, find a beach house with nothing between you and the sea, your own little bubble to take over with people who make you laugh. Simple is fine, though the best houses

are designed to delight, and throw in luxuries and grown-up games – a hot tub or an outdoor kitchen, table tennis or a cinema room to keep everyone happy in all seasons. Space is the ultimate luxury – space together with location, the more remote the better, with an empty beach just a hop, skip and a jump away, across the dunes or

down a path through wild flowers. Here are 20 brilliant beach houses on some of Britain's most beautiful beaches for those first steps down to the sea. Laura Fowler

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

COVER STORY



→ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

LITTLE COTTAGE, PRAA SANDS, CORNWALL

Set apart at the empty end of Praa Sands, where wild white horses crash to shore on thundering hooves, Little Cottage seems suspended above the sea.

It is neither little nor a cottage, but a modernist masterpiece that is part of a residential development in the Cornwall, part Big Sur, designed by owner Alex Michaelis (the architect behind Soho Farmhouse).

Walls of glass bring the Atlantic inside. The stairs curve around a mid-century-style tower. Free-flowing open living spaces are filled with local art and the light that has for generations brought artists to St Ives, a few miles away on the north coast beside calmer, bluer bays such as Carbis. A glass wall slides open for indoor-outdoor living the moment the sun comes out. Upstairs, in each of its three double en-suite rooms, you wake up looking at the sea, bathe in roll-top baths with views of the horizon, and fall asleep listening to the hush and boom of the breakers.

It is kitted out like someone's home with thoughtful extras, from Bamford bathroom products to the piles of beach towels in the utility rooms, bodyboards, and a well-stocked kitchen with prosciutto in the fridge. The kids' bunkroom has boxes of Lego and board games, and there are games for grown-ups too: a library of DVDs, table football, a Yamaha keyboard, a Sonos sound system – and in the garden, a trampoline, fire pits and a hot tub, hidden by trees so you feel you have this wild spot all to yourselves.

A footpath from the gate leads through the bracken and brambles along the coast path or down to the beach. And what a beach! Wild surf, golden sand and rock pools.

"I wish we lived here all the time," says one of the children on our last day, voicing what everyone is thinking. On a whim we stay one more night, to put off leaving this kind of beach life for as long as possible, and extend the dream another day.

□ Sleeps 10. From £281 per night (three-night minimum stay) with Sand & Stone (020 8740 3097; sandandstoneescapes.com)
Laura Fowler

THE BEACH HUT, MILLOOK, WIDEMOUTH BAY, CORNWALL

It's almost 30 years since it opened, but this pale-green clapboard shack on a secret surf beach in North Cornwall is still the ultimate hideaway for two. Accessed via a single-file roller-coaster road from the golden sands of Widemouth Bay, it's willy-nilly rooms, set on a grassy bank above a black pebble beach in a 52-acre Site of Special Scientific Interest. Seabirds circle the cliffs, beachcombers drift past and champion surfers emerge from the left-hand point break. There's a surf shed, a battered boat-house and an upturned boat. Otherwise, it's just you and the elements.

The former 1920s tea room was bought in 1992 by Roger Barker and Irene Douglas, who stripped the floors, whitewashed the walls and added fairy lights, a log burner, a DVD player and a web room. Both worked in film and advertising, and in the early days, starry names such



LIVING THE DREAM

A gathering around the fire pit at Cam Mar in Polzeath, Cornwall, before the days of social distancing, top; Dune House at Thorpeness, Suffolk, above

as Kate Winslet (who stayed there) and Tori Amos (who did a shoot there) helped to put it on the map. In recent years, it has been upgraded to include a super king-size bed, a Sonos Five, and luxury shower products by Noble Isle.

Its real appeal, though, lies in its simplicity and its seclusion. There's a magical circular walk right outside, along a clear-running stream, through woods and windswept fields and back along the coast; for a night out, the Farmer's Arms in Woolsey, a 17th-century pub with food by Ian Webber, is a 40-minute drive away. For the most part, though, you'll be happy to hunker down, tuck into your hamper of goodies (scones with jam and Cornish clotted cream) and sit on your veranda, gazing at the waves as they crash on the shore.

□ Sleeps two. From £1,350 for a short break (uniquehomestays.com)
Lisa Johnson

BAREFOOT, CAMBER SANDS, EAST SUSSEX

Camber Sands is one of the UK's most glorious beaches, with five miles of shifting sand, sea and sky stretching from medieval Rye towards Dungeness. This classic white weatherboard house is right on it – unless you have a four-wheel drive, you have to walk the final 150 yards on foot.

Owner Mark Leversedge used to "stare at it" covetously as a child – and no wonder: the last of only five beach houses on this stretch, the pitched-roof house is embedded in the dunes, with a mezzanine bedroom overlooking the sea as the sun rises and sets and the stars twinkle over the water. The open-plan set-up isn't ideal for light sleepers (there's a walk-in shower and children's beds curtained off); then again, who wants to sleep with views like this?

Leversedge finally got the opportunity to buy the house 12 years ago, initially using it as a family bolt-hole, and it still has a personal feel, with its photographs of ecstatic kids in the dunes. Downstairs, there's a more private dou-

ble and a twin, a bigger bathroom, and an open-plan living area with a fully equipped kitchen, a large dining table, and comfy chairs and sofas around a wood-burning stove. This leads to a new improved deck and barbecue area and the place is perfect for hours of swimming in the sea, running on dunes and wandering over the beach, watching the sun glow on ripples in the sand.

If it clouds over, you can head to Rye to brunch at the Fig, shop for home-wares and fabrics (try Crook & Cozy, Pale & Interesting and Merchant & Mills), climb the 12th-century church tower, and spy on wildlife in Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. Then go for dinner at the glamorous Gallivant hotel and wander home along the beach to a fire pit on your deck, musing on the numerous celebrities – including Emilia Clarke – who have also stayed here.

□ Sleeps eight. From about £1,250 for a two-night weekend; £2,000 for a week off-peak (barefootcambor.co.uk)
LJ

ROCKSALT, MOUSEHOLE, CORNWALL

This Grade II listed cottage is named after the rocks below, where the locals once salted mackerel – and it's so close to the sea that, looking out through the second-floor dormer window, it can feel like you're on it. The charming, vintage-feel interiors include a free-standing bath and a wood burner, and the garden terrace overlooks St Michael's Mount.

□ Sleeps four. From £750 for a short break (boutique-retreats.co.uk)
LJ

THE SIGNAL STATION, THE LIZARD, CORNWALL

In the late 19th century, signallers at this maritime communications hub flagged messages to 1,000 ships a month; with its beachy interiors, crumpled roof terrace and dizzying views to sea, it is now the kind of place you'd want to hole up in for weeks. Outside, the South West Coast Path leads to Kynance Cove past the National Trust-owned Lizard Wireless Station.

□ Sleeps six. From £1,395 for a short break (uniquehomestays.com)
LJ

SEREN MOR, NEWPORT, WALES

Winner of the 2013 RIBA Welsh Architecture Award, this modern cliff-side house is arranged upside down to make the most of the knockout Newport estuary views. There are floor-to-ceiling windows in the beamed open-plan living space and kitchen at the top, deckchairs on the balcony, ideal for morning coffee, and a wild-flower garden with kayaks in the shed so guests can get out on the water.

□ Sleeps 10. From £1,995 for three nights (uniquehomestays.com)
Emma Love

FERRING BEACH HOUSES, FERRING, WEST SUSSEX

The star of the show at this neighbouring pair of properties – the Pink House and Yellow Sands – is the back garden with its heated pool and immaculate croquet lawn that meets the pebble beach at the end. Two spacious living rooms with big oak dining tables are made for gatherings; upstairs, the best of the clean-lined bedrooms come with a private veranda. For cooked breakfasts and club sandwiches, the Bluebird Cafe is a few minutes' walk away.

□ Sleeps 20. From £2,750 for a two-night weekend (kateandtoms.com)
EL

THE VICTORY RESIDENCE, NR DEAL, KENT

This is the last in a row of characterful fishermen's cottages in the village of Kingsdown. There are maritime nods in the royal-blue kitchen and pebble-themed artwork; a sun room that looks on to the pebbly beach out front; Crittall-style doors and wood-pannelled walls; and bunk beds for the kids. Borrow bicycles and pedal along the promenade to Deal and then afterwards, pop to the pub next door for supper.

□ Sleeps 10. From £250 per night (kidandcoo.com)
EL

MIDROCK HOUSE, ELIE, SCOTLAND

Part of the East Neuk coastal stretch, the pretty village of Elie is known for its mile-long crescent of sand. Just above Ruby Bay, overlooking the Firth of



AS SEEN ON TV...

Cape Cove in Argyll and Bute, above, featured in the BBC drama *The Nest*; Seren Mor in Newport, Wales, below; Rocksalt, at Mousehole in Cornwall, below left

SHANGRI-LA, WAXHAM, NORFOLK

A smart timber chalet designed by Mole Architects is set in nearly an acre of private land behind the dunes at idyllic Waxham beach. Inside, pared-back plywood walls are complemented by designer furniture (Louis Poulsen pendant lights, Eames dining chairs), and in the TV room, leather sofas and groovy reclaimed multi-colored beach tub cladding. Rise early and walk along the coast path to Horseay Gap, where seals slumber on the sand.

□ Sleeps six. From £945 for three nights (cnolstays.com)
EL

HIVE BEACH HOUSE, CHESIL BEACH, DORSET

It's hard to beat the location of this wooden house; raised up on rocks just above the Jurassic Coast in Burton Bradstock and a stone's throw from the popular Hive Beach Café. The look is Scandinavian-meets-nautical: striped duvet covers and deckchairs, and a lifebuoy hanging from a ladder that leads to a bedroom above the small kitchen.

□ Sleeps six. From £175 per night, minimum two-night stay (hivebeachhouse.com)
EL

BEACHCOMBER'S, ANGLESEY, WALES

Originally a bathing hut for the owners of the Carreglyd Estate, now this clapboard cottage is a low-key bolt-hole on Borthven Beach. Doors from the living room open to a deck at the front and a grassy verge that drops to the sand below. There's a cosy nook for reading, reached via a ladder above the sitting room, a breakfast bar and barbecue.

□ Sleeps six. From £430 for three or four nights (boltholesandhideaways.co.uk)
EL

CAPE COVE, ARGYLL AND BUTE, SCOTLAND

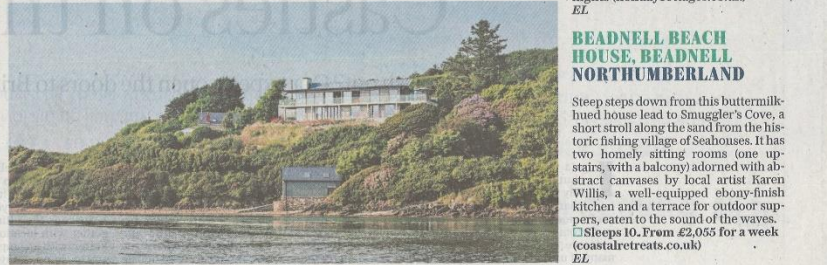
Fans of the BBC drama series *The Nest* will be familiar with this phenomenal property, on the shore of Loch Long on the Rosneath peninsula. Built on the site of a former Second World War naval lookout post, the main space is an open-plan living-dining room with slate-grey hues and glass walls facing the water; outside are several viewing decks with fire pits and a cedar hot tub, plus a private shingle beach and jetty.

□ Sleeps 10. From £2,139 for seven nights (holidaycottages.co.uk)
EL

BEADNELL BEACH HOUSE, BEADNELL, NORTHUMBERLAND

Steep steps down from this buttermilk-hued house lead to Smuggler's Cove, a short stroll along the sand from the historic fishing village of Seahouses. It has two homely sitting rooms (one upstairs, with a balcony) adorned with abstract canvases by local artist Karen Willis, a well-equipped ebony-finish kitchen and a terrace for outdoor suppers, eaten to the sound of the waves.

□ Sleeps 10. From £2,055 for a week (coastalretreats.co.uk)
EL



COULD BE THE MED...
The Moul in Salcombe, Devon; Barefoot at Camber Sands, Sussex, below; and Pobble House in Kent, bottom



GRIFF RHYS JONES MR & MRS JONES



Naples sums up why I poke about in the corners of the world

I know where I should be now. Not stuck to this sofa (literally, thanks to the heat and my shorts) but in Naples. For the past three years Mrs Jones and I have attended an event there around now. For reasons that we are all bored with hearing about, it has been cancelled. But I will return. This city under the volcano sums up why, despite the fact that I am entirely happy in my garden, I must start poking about in other corners of the world – just to see and feel what is beyond my gate. Naples is inexhaustibly fascinating. Last year I was at the Museum of Archaeology – a junk shop of conspicuous ancient Roman, Pompeian, house and garden consumption. The doomed population was busy acquiring all this “now” stuff, just before the pyroclastic flow engulfed them. It’s *Up Pompeii* rewritten as *Big Little Lies*. Nobody seemed to be reading Catullus or Cicero. They weren’t standing in a toga legislating. They were lounging, drinking, dinner-partying and getting pissed. A small and exquisite statue of Dionysus stands in one corner – his animal skin draped across his shoulders, his gaudy jewellery picked out in relief. He is properly, androgynously, pointedly perfect (except for the loss of the jug he was carrying for feeding his pet panther, which broke off some time ago). I can see exactly why they worshipped this god. Not as “the only god”, like Christians, but as a representative of one bit of us – the irrational state of “being human”. We need strangeness, the excitement of “peculiarity”. That’s Dionysus (and why he is also Bacchus,



Observe Neapolitan life pass by – at speed

are the churches. Go in them. If you meet a set of steps go up them. Yes, there are rubbernecking cruise-ship parties, but they will stick to the obvious routes. Naples has a superfluity of knockout, empty, socially distanced holy space, accessed by simply opening the biggest door you see.

Baroque-encrusted, Ruskin-dismaying glories such as St Gregory are matched by unexpected, soaring, austere Gothic masterpieces such as San Domenico. In the empty cavern of the nave of semi-forgotten St Nicholas, a man approached, beckoning me into a crescent of hidden, florally carved sandstone Roman temple altars, dating from early in the first millennium, solely because we looked interested. Repairs to a back wall have revealed the ancient remains, bricked up centuries ago. Only in Italy, I felt. Only in Naples. Go beyond the list of guidebook “must-sees”. Walk, climb or, more sensibly, take the funiculars. There is an entire third city above you on the hill associated with getting totally out of it. He is the “Stranger God”. I travel to get out of it. On my third visit to Naples I was still in thrall to the mysterious, irrational excitement of the place, or places. The first year, Mrs Jones and I mooched around in the renovated Shoreditch quarter, behind the park where the shops and supermarkets and ice cream parlours are a modern, indulgent Pompeii. “But this is southern Italy,” you cry. “Isn’t it depressed? Aren’t the Italians all riding on a black economy to financial doom?” Search me. Crooks have to flash their money. Watch *Gomorra*. This must be where they spend it. Ferragamo and Prada and black-market clubs down every alley. Delicious bambino outfits hang in every window. Just the prices bring you out in a sweat. Cross the road if you can and head off eastwards into the Spanish quarter, and Peter Sarstedt land. “I remember the back streets of Naples.” Double live in cavalline. Whole families balance on single scooters charging at breakfast speed down steep alleys. In “the old town” – another outlandish district – there

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black-faceted upper story and a glass-walled ground floor. The place is all super-high-spec and minimalist, from the polished concrete floors to the Arne Jacobsen lighting and the bespoke modular sofas. Bedrooms are timber-clad and cosy, and there’s a first-floor library. Head north to spend days crabbing at Walberswick or walk south along the coast to Aldeburgh. **EL**

KIORA, WHITSTABLE KENT

This elegant clapboard beach house built in 1904 sits in the best spot in Whitstable – right next to the promenade overlooking The Street, a shingly sandbar that protrudes into the sea for half a mile at low tide. Just a 10-minute stroll up the beach from the centre of town, the house has four bedrooms, a well-equipped kitchen complete with wood-burning stove, a spacious, sofa-filled drawing room with a baby grand piano and the most heavenly outdoor dining terrace overlooking the beach. **EL**

THE MOULT, SALCOMBE DEVON

Even the Earl of Devon would be impressed with what the owners have done with this place since he sold up. The pink Victorian house has had an elegant contemporary makeover, including a home cinema, games room, Sonos system and baby grand piano. Each of the 12 fresh, light rooms is unique. Outside, the Mediterranean-style terrace has a 72ft heated pool and uplifting views across Salcombe Bay; follow the steps down through the tropical-planted gardens all the way to South Sands Beach below. **EL**

CARN MAR, POLZEATH CORNWALL

The only thing separating this dreamy house from Polzeath Beach below is the South West Coast Path, accessed through the garden gate. Inside, it is a haven of calm – all white, grey and dusky pink hues, and blond wood furniture. There’s a reading room with beanbags and binoculars; a sheltered terrace for windier days; and an outdoor fire pit for toasting marshmallows as the sun dips over the water. **EL**

NAUTICAL AND NICE
The Signal Station at the Lizard, Cornwall



POBBLE HOUSE, DUNGENESS KENT

Named after the old Kentish word for pebble, this Riba award-winning house suits the wild, stark desertscape of Dungeness. The midcentury furniture in the light-filled open-plan social space is arranged around a log burner and sea-facing corner windows while the dining area is distinguished by Hague Blue walls. A glass corridor connects to the restful bedrooms, and outside, the garden-beach boundary is marked by wooden sleepers. **EL**

DUNE HOUSE, THORPENESS SUFFOLK

Part of the Living Architecture stable and designed by Nordic Jarmund/Vignasna Architects a decade ago, with a

SAPHIR BEACH HOUSE, MAWGAN PORTH CORNWALL

Perched above Mawgan Porth’s white sand bay, this chic clapboard house combines a crisp white and subtle sea-inspired blue colour palette with appealing rustic furniture. But outdoors is where it really comes into its own, with a seriously cool open-air kitchen and festoon lights strung up over the dining area. Plus, a few steps

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