

PASTORAL SYMPHONY

Helen Moore's favourite room is not actually part of her home, it's a shepherd's hut in the garden, where whitewashed interiors and pretty vignettes create the perfect writing retreat with views of fields and woodland

Words Natalie Flaum | Photographs Brent Darby | Styling Pippa Blenkinsop



Helen's shepherd's hut is surrounded by woodland and has its own cottage garden edged with upturned bricks. The hut was supplied by Tuin in kit form and has been painted in Sadolin Superdec colour RAL 7038, with a picket fence to match. The enamelware and folding garden chairs are from Hoggy's Antiques at The Malthouse Collective. Additional plants from Dobbies. The bunting and cushions are by Sarah Hardaker. The deckchairs (behind the hut) and drinks crate are from Garden Trading. For a similar woven shopper, try The Basket Room



THE STORY

Owners Helen and Gary Moore live with their grown-up children Olivia and Harris, and Spencer the Dalmatian. Gary is a construction manager for a building company and Helen is a blogger, stylist and crafter (whitewoodandlinen.com and Instagrammer @whitewoodandlinen)
Property A shepherd's hut in the grounds of the couple's 1990s bungalow, not far from the village of Liphook in Hampshire
What they did Carpenters built the shepherd's hut from a flat pack. The couple insulated and painted the internal walls, ceiling and exterior and installed a wood-burning stove. They also created a cottage garden with a picket fence and a path edged with bricks

haded by ancient oak woodland on the edge of the South Downs there is a special room with spectacular views. A garden building with a difference, with open fields to the front and a leafy canopy at the back, Helen Moore's shepherd's hut is the ultimate writer's retreat.

'We'd been in our new home for a few weeks when I looked out of the kitchen window and spotted something odd and large covered in black plastic,' she says. 'I must have walked past it a hundred times as I directed our removal men and even placed a cup of coffee on it as I pondered where to put plants and containers in the garden.'

Helen decided it must be something to do with her husband Gary's work and thought no more about it. 'Although he dropped a hint a few days later, saying that it was a gift to help me with my blog,' she says. Weeks went by and on Christmas morning, Helen unpacked the large parcel.

'There it was, my own shepherd's hut and I felt so lucky,' she says. 'My daughter Olivia named her Belle, which is perfect as she is so beautiful!'

With help from Gary's contacts in the building trade, the couple excavated the site and built a concrete base. Then one sunny April weekend, two carpenters assembled the shepherd's hut. In the winter that followed, Belle was battered by extreme wind and rain, which resulted in a leak. The couple decided to insulate and line the inside with pine tongue-and-groove panels with a water membrane underneath, ensuring that each pine knot was treated before painting the walls and floor.

Helen also wanted to install a stove. 'Given the fact that the entire hut is made of wood, we asked an expert to check all the work and stove parts, to make sure it was safe,' she explains, 'and our little potbelly stove was up and running exactly a year after Belle first arrived.'

Helen's ethos on decorating is to make-do-and-mend, reuse and recycle. Her appreciation for upcycling and anything thrifty comes from her childhood. 'I was extremely close to my grandmother, who used to give me scraps of material to make dolls' clothes,' she recalls. 'I cherish my photographs and memories of her.'

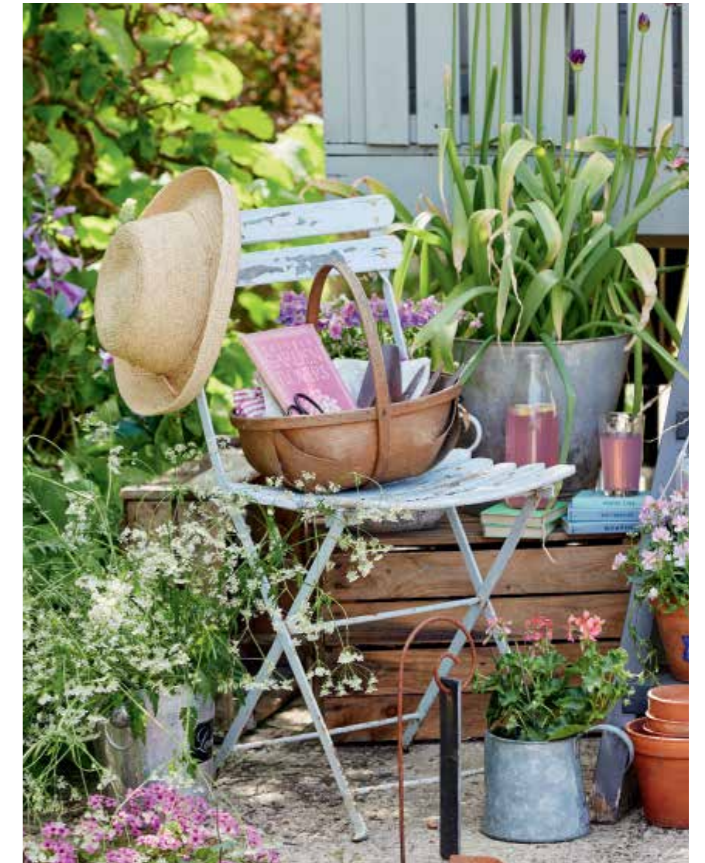
Twenty years of renovating homes has taught Helen to be imaginative with her budget and with other people's discarded treasures. 'I tend to follow my heart and trust my instincts,' she says. 'I love faded floral linens and fabrics that tell the story of their past. And I can't resist the patina of vintage wooden furniture, decorative French rococo swirls and timeless English country houses. I like lived-in homes with a sense of charm and informal design; all inspiration for my own individual style.'

It's hard to imagine improving on the shepherd's hut's setting, but earlier this year Helen decided to plant a cottage garden and a winding path to the steps. 'At the height of summer, the long grass and wildflowers looked perfect,' she says, 'but it wasn't so good in winter, with so much bare earth.'

The couple cleared 20 rubble sacks as Gary dug the new garden's foundations. 'He also cut and sanded 94 posts for our new picket fence as I painstakingly primed all four sides before applying the paint,' says Helen. 'Olivia and Harris held spirit levels as directed, while Gary fixed all the posts in place and our cottage garden began to take shape.'

Through her blog followers Helen has established firm new friendships and with more than a little help from her friends the cottage garden is thriving. 'One friend gave me some bulbs and my friend Sara, who has one of the loveliest gardens I've ever seen, supplied endless plants and cuttings,' says Helen. 'We have sown lots of cornflowers and borage, which looks so pretty frozen in ice cubes for a summer jug of Pimms.' Helen says that of all the plants she grows, hydrangeas are the hardest working and longest lasting. She loves the colours that sweet peas, verbena and dahlias add to the garden and likes to display them as cut flowers in jam jars and dry garden blooms to enjoy all year round.

Helen's shepherd's hut and garden renovation has been a labour of love. Now complete, Belle is a weathered shade of blue-grey that blends in perfectly with the garden, while inside it's white and bright and packed with thrifty finds, each one telling a story. 'Belle is my retreat, the most magical place where I never fail to be inspired,' she says. 'On warmer days I love to throw open the doors, enjoy the garden and farm views and listen to the birds sing as I'm writing my blogs.'



Clockwise from top left: Helen says she uses her shepherd's hut every single day and is never happier than when it's warm enough to have the doors open onto the garden. The bunting is from Sarah Hardaker; an enticing place to rest after a bit of weeding, the folding chair is from Hoggy's Antiques at The Malthouse Collective. Chalked on a slate plant marker from The Little Red Robin is 'Belle', Helen's affectionate name for her shepherd's hut; Spencer the Dalmatian enjoys the garden view; the perfect summer treat on Helen's vintage china



SHEPHERD'S HUT TIPS
 Choose your site carefully – think about the views of your garden from the hut, as well as the views of the hut from your home. Also consider what time of day you will use the hut most. When will it be in shade, when will it get the sun?
 If the hut is for your private use and on your own land, planning permission is not generally required, but it is wise to check at planningportal.co.uk. A shepherd's hut can be positioned on grass or hard-standing. Suppliers will discuss this with you.
 If you have mains services, then electrics, running water and a flushing WC are all possible. If not, consider a composting or cassette WC, gas water heater and solar lights. Your supplier will advise on wood-burners, but there must be a heat shield lining, an air vent, and a carbon monoxide detector.
 Expect to pay from £4,500 for a basic unfinished timber hut for self-assembly from Tuin. A ready-built cabin clad in tin or timber, supplied finished and furnished, with king-size bed, electrics, micro kitchen, wood-burner, and en suite bathroom costs from £34,000 at Plankbridge. Sussex Huts claims its corrugated tin huts need little maintenance; timber ones should be repainted every 6–8 years.



Additional words and styling: Karen Darlow

Clockwise from top left: Helen displays favourite fabrics and decorations on a vintage cherry picking ladder, from Findlays. Helen's friend Sara made the heart garland from vintage fabrics; the wire shelves are from The Packhouse and display vintage sheet music, floral prints and a framed photograph of Helen's grandmother, who was her inspiration; the Clarke potbelly cast-iron wood-burning stove is from Machine Mart, and the vintage desk and stool were both Ebay buys. The plaid throw is from Ikea

The antique chandelier is from The Country Brocante, and the candelabra was an exhibition find. Helen sourced the vintage day bed through Ebay, and dressed it with assorted cushions from Sugar & Spice, Peony & Sage, Dinky Donkey Delights and Sarah Hardaker. The rug is a vintage Laura Ashley design and the wooden stool was a gift when her daughter Olivia was born. Gary made the 'Hels' sign with letters from The Paperie Makerie