



Alex Bagner's beachside bolthole was her family's weekend escape from the city – but one lockdown later, it could be where they stay. She tells Jessica Doyle how they made it their own

# How a holiday cottage came to feel like home

WHEN THE lockdown came into force back in March, journalist and editor Alex Bagner, her husband and their three children were in the fortunate situation of being at their holiday home, a converted fisherman's cottage on the beach in Deal, Kent. Since they bought it 10 years ago, it had been their weekend and summer retreat, albeit one they have spent more and more time in since opening The Rose, a stylish hotel and restaurant nearby, two years ago. With its blend of wood-paneled walls, floral patterned wallpaper and fabrics, and modern Crittall windows, the cottage makes the

perfect coastal counterpoint to their life in London. Here, Alex explains how they nailed its blend of rustic charm and contemporary cool – and why their holiday bolthole now feels more and more like home.

## How have you changed the cottage since you bought it?

We kept it as it was for a couple of years while we worked out what to do, then did a full refurb, and added a lot of space. We built the front extension, which is now the kitchen and dining area, and also made the attic into a bedroom: we really wanted to be able to have friends to stay,

**Above left** Alex in the dining area; the chairs are Wishbone by Carl Hansen. **Right** A pair of armchairs – found on eBay and re-covered in Sanderson fabric – and a woven table from Ceraudo (ceraudo.com) stand outside the main bedroom, which is painted in Oval Room Blue by Farrow & Ball (farrow-ball.com)

Photography  
INGRID  
RASMUSSEN





**'We got obsessed with pannelling – it's a great way to add character'**

minimal and practical; a lot of the things we have here, like the Ercol daybed, would look ridiculous there. We even have a sauna here, which we made by converting what was an outdoor loo. It's a bit of a crazy thing to do to such a small house but such a lovely thing to have – and it means you can swim in the sea all year round.

**What was life like here during lockdown?**

We feel so incredibly fortunate having had this time here, with the beach almost to ourselves. It's been a weird time work-wise, but so good for us as a family. The longest we have stayed here before was six weeks over the summer holidays, so to be

**Above** A blue velvet sofa found on eBay is teamed with vintage armchairs in the sitting area; the painting is by Deal artist Edward Bridges ([edwardbridges.co.uk](http://edwardbridges.co.uk))

**Right** Crittall doors open from the kitchen/dining area on to the garden

**Below** The bedroom wallpaper is by Swedish brand Svenskt Tenn ([svenskttenn.com](http://svenskttenn.com))

and we can put a whole family up there now. The house can sleep 10 people in all, which is almost unheard of for a cottage on the beach.

**When it came to the decor, did you have a vision?**

We weren't as into interiors at the time, so it was quite a natural thing. The beach here has always reminded me of Sweden, which is where my family are from. People always say the cottage is quite Scandi-inspired. It didn't have any interesting original features, it was very simple; so it was a blank canvas. We decided to fake the cottage look and added panelling all over the house, with a different type in each room; we got quite obsessed with it. It's a great way to add character.

**Where did you find furniture?**

It's a total mishmash of things that have just sort of appeared, whether it's pieces that family have thrown out, or we've found in the garage, or that we've brought down from our London house. We've picked things up from various places locally too:



there's an amazing market in Deal on Saturdays, and also some brilliant vintage shops. A lot of the knick-knacks have been presents from friends, or something we've found on eBay. It's not as if we furnished it straight away and everything matches; it really has just come together.

**Is it different in style from your London home?**

Completely. Our London house is very modern, and much more

here for so long and not have those Sunday-night blues when you have to go home has been amazing. I've been swimming every morning, which is something I've always wanted to do. We still have our home in London, but there has been quite a lot of rethinking going on; we feel very settled here. ▀

*Alex's cottage, known as The Victory, is available to rent via Keeper's Cottages ([keeperscottages.co.uk](http://keeperscottages.co.uk))*

