

# COUNTRY LIFE®

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EVERY WEEK | JULY 17

## Where architects call home



The genius painter time forgot  
Living the high life: peregrines in the city  
Cecil Beaton's garden and Noddy's birthday







# When architects have to do homework

We've all seen the dream houses created by leading architects, but how do they adapt existing buildings for their own use? Clive Aslet explores the rural domestic settings of three professionals

Photographs by Dylan Thomas



Far left: A house inside a barn. Left: Tom Croft in his first architectural project, now his home. Above: A new deck overlooks the gardens

## Tom Croft's Kentish barn

TOM CROFT'S Whitstable home, occupied with his wife, Max, and daughter Kitty, is a barn that originally belonged to a farmhouse bought by his grandparents. The house has long been sold, but The Barn remains, having been converted by Tom for his parents in the 1980s: 'Houses for architects' parents are a classic first project.'

Only half the barn contains formal rooms. 'One of the mistakes people make is to turn barns into houses; once you put on a front door, it's over—the place is no longer a barn.' Instead, Tom created a 'house inside a barn. You can walk through the big door on the

entrance front and out the other side, into the garden, without ever going into the house.'

Visually, there is an influence from the Postmodernism that then ruled the architectural roost. 'The rooms take the form of bits of abstracted buildings. It's like a ship in a bottle.' The architectural vocabulary is abstract and largely free of mouldings, as, he admits disarmingly, he didn't know how to design them at that stage of his career.

The Crofts senior filled The Barn with family paintings and furniture. Since inheriting, Tom and Max have not seen any reason to change the decor significantly; their only major work has been to create a deck from which to view the garden. Having been designed by Tom's grandfather to be read from the farmhouse, this required a degree of reorientation.

Barns with gardens in the South-East inevitably evoke the romance of Sissinghurst and Great Dixter and this is no exception. It's certainly a contrast to the Crofts' London home, built in the 1970s and renovated in an enthusiastically Modern style.

Tom admits to having a 'bipolar' existence, but The Barn has played its part in developing his career, as many of his projects have involved the reimagining of historic buildings. 'I learnt that the best you can do is not too much,' he says. Friends who recently gathered for a party for a big birthday celebration, seated in the unconverted half of The Barn, will know that minimal architectural intervention is no barrier to having fun.

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