

# Lakeside cool

*A modern thatched cottage, on the shore of a lake in the Netherlands, makes for a comfortable weekend retreat, furnished with a mixture of antiques and vintage pieces, and decorated with wood-lined walls and floors that shimmer with reflected light*

TEXT **MARCUS FIELD** | PHOTOGRAPHS **ELIZABETH ZESCHIN**





OPPOSITE PAGE Dutch architect René de Vries maximised space in this modern house by incorporating a basement floor sunk beneath the level of the lake. THIS PAGE Inside, the copper chimneypiece from ??????? forms the focal point of the open-plan sitting room; the side table is a carpenter's bench



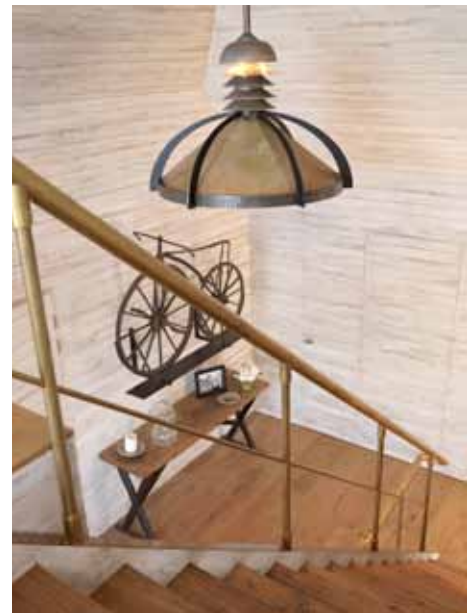
**F**or anybody unfamiliar with vernacular Dutch architecture, the sight of a thatched roof among the watery flatlands of the Netherlands comes as something of a surprise. It is, after all, a detail most commonly associated with quintessential English villages and their charming chocolate-box cottages. But in the magical lakeside resort of Loosdrecht, 30 kilometres from Amsterdam, the unexpected appearance of thatch on a striking new house turns out to be a sensitive act of homage to an age-old local tradition.

The story behind this [‘]hairy-roofed[’] house begins with a Dutch businessman and his New Zealand-born wife who were looking for a bolt-hole close to their Amsterdam home. After an inspiring visit to friends on the Loosdrecht lake they bought a run-down timber cabin and commissioned Robert and Josyane Young, of the London design company Rivière, to restore and furnish it for themselves and their three teenage sons. ‘We had already done their Amsterdam house so we knew what they liked,’ explains Robert. ‘We looked at the cabin, which was pretty but rotten, and it quickly became clear that it would be better to knock it down and start again.’

Robert and Josyane, together with their clients, interviewed three architects for the job of designing the new house and settled on a local practice run by René de Vries. ‘It all came together over an unusually boozy lunch,’ remembers Robert. ‘He literally drew the house on the back of a napkin and we knew he had it nailed.’ René’s ingenious design included the thatched roof – a reference to the historic Dutch technique of using reeds for this purpose – and a basement floor sunk beneath the level of the lake. This latter move cleverly increased the available space while ensuring that the house met the strict planning



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**FAR LEFT** The house overlooks the Loosdrecht lake. **LEFT** Two bespoke sofas, upholstered in hand-dyed sackcloth by Clarke & Reilly, make comfortable fireside seats. **ABOVE FROM TOP** Vintage Tolix chairs add character to the dining area. Robert Young found the boneshaker mounted on the staircase wall





requirement that it should occupy the same footprint as the original cabin.

With construction underway, Robert and Josyane set to work on their ideas for the interiors. 'Everything here is about the lake,' says Robert. 'All the life and fun is on the water so the house had to be part of that; we wanted a nautical feel.' With this in mind an early decision was to clad all the walls and ceilings in rough-sawn strips of pine finished in a thin layer of white paint to resemble limewash. 'The light and reflections from the water change all day,' points out Josyane, 'so the walls almost look as if they are alive.' The floors are also in timber, this time thick oak planks salvaged from eastern European railway carriages.

The main entrance is at the rear of the house and leads through a hallway into the large open-plan sitting room. 'We wanted a circular hearth so you could see past it to the water,' says Josyane, of the copper chimneypiece that forms the focal point of the room. Two bespoke sofas make comfortable fireside seats and contrast with a handsome pair of modernist 'Egg' chairs by Arne Jacobsen. The smart, functional kitchen is by Bulthaup and the raw-oak dining table is inspired by a favourite piece of Robert's at the Chelsea Arts Club. 'It will grow in character as it is used,' he explains. The dining chairs are vintage examples of the French Tolix cafe chair in their original colours. 'You can sit on them in your wet swimsuit so they are practical as well as good to look at,' says Josyane.

Other things in the sitting room reflect Robert's expert knowledge of English folk art and furniture, an area in which he has specialised for over 20 years as proprietor of his well-known antiques shop in Battersea. The decoy ducks on the shelves are Edwardian, the sofa table is a well-worn carpenter's bench, and the table lamp that sits on it has been adapted from a vintage fire extinguisher by the lighting designer Hector Finch. Robert's special interests are again apparent around the staircase, where a genuine boneshaker is displayed on a wall opposite a range of boatbuilders' tools. 'The bike is English, but bicycles have a special place in Holland too,' he says. Particular attention has been paid to the design of the staircase itself, with its brass handrail and open treads in the same thick oak as the floor. The lanterns used by sardine fishermen were the inspiration for the large metal pendant light that hangs here; an item specially made for the house by Jean Brown's Chelsea salvage company.

As for the sleeping arrangements, the house divides sensibly into adult quarters upstairs and a place for the boys in the basement. The grand bed on the top floor has been specially designed with antique posts supporting a canopy made to match the limewashed walls. More traditional English country furniture lends warmth and cosiness to a room otherwise filled with a silvery coolness reflected from the lake. The bathroom is custom-made

*'All the life and fun is on the water so the house had to be a part of that'*

by Durat in a black composite material which, says Robert, 'looks just like porphyry'. There is also a peaceful study with a window set into the graceful curves of the roof.

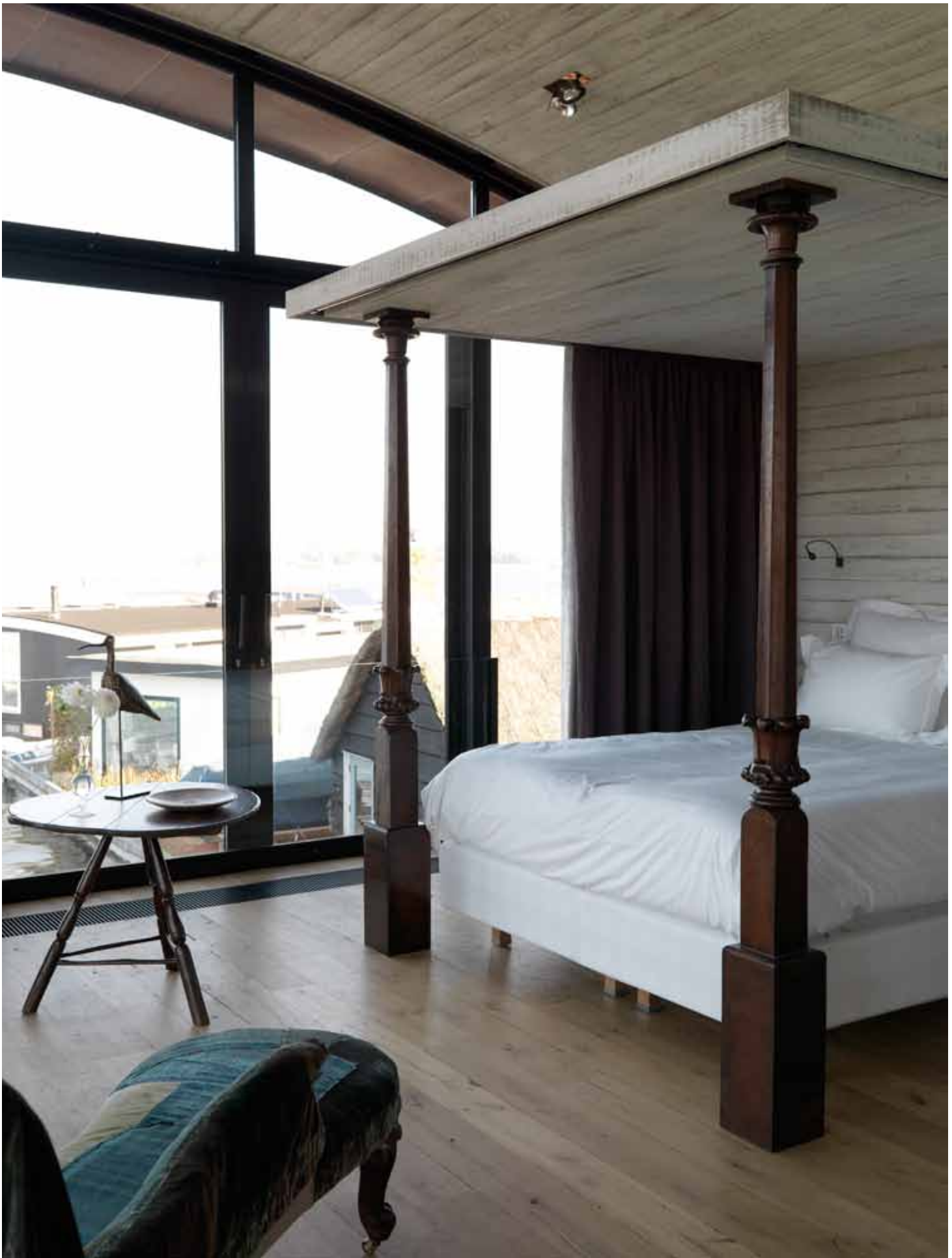
Down in the basement the fun begins. Here a bedroom for the boys is fitted out with two sets of bunk beds built into the wall like sailors' berths on a ship. There is also a den, complete with cool, brightly upholstered Sixties armchairs and a lime-green shagpile carpet by Designers Guild. For decoration, Robert and Josyane rummaged through their client's boyhood toys and made displays of his old footballs, cars and his vintage shaving mirror. The basement also contains a spare room, this time with a double bunk, and a bathroom to match the one on the top floor.

Although this house is larger than the original cabin, its function as a simple retreat on a lake remains the same and everything about it is designed to this end: tall doors open on to wide decks to encourage outdoor living; there is a private jetty and a separate boathouse with its own kitchen and shower. 'It all fits together so well; it's very understated,' says Robert. In fact, he and Josyane like it so much they confer on it the highest accolade that designers can give their own work. 'Of all the houses we've done,' says Robert, 'this is the one we would most like to live in ourselves' □

Robert and Josyane Young: 020-7228 7847; [www.robertyoungantiques.com](http://www.robertyoungantiques.com)

**THIS PAGE FROM TOP** The basement incorporates a spare room and a children's bedroom (centre), panelled in the same painted pine as the rest of the house. The segmental bathroom window set into the vaulted ceiling following the curve of the roof. **OPPOSITE** A Victorian daybed, re-covered by Clarke & Reilly, stands in the main bedroom; the bed was made from nineteenth-century posts supporting the new pine tester









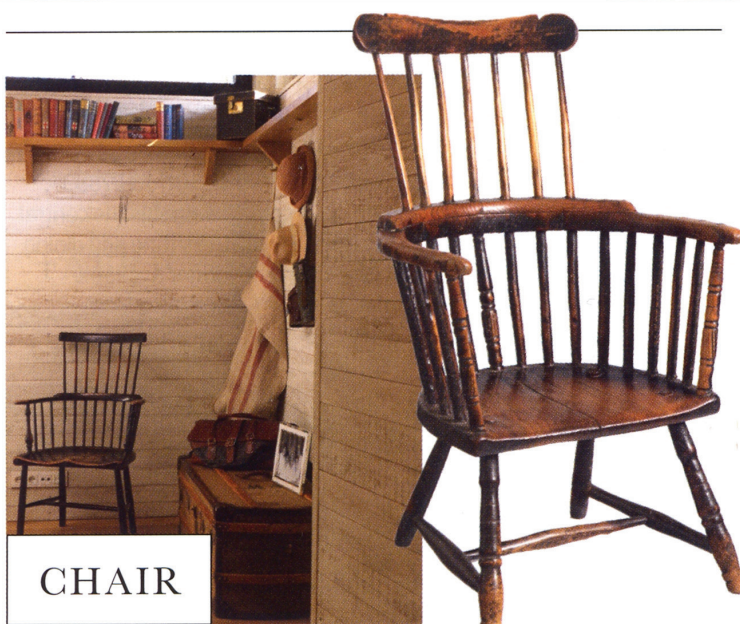
**BATH**  
The sleek black bath in this house (durat.com), but the 'Solikko' model in the same style. It measures 65 x 160 x 75cm.



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...e characteristic of this house, in this spirit. Lighting designer (brfinch.com) adapted a vintage table lamp for the sitting room (200-443658; www.robertyoung.com). The pendant lamps, which have been painted in various colors; these measure 25cm high. Above the dining table hangs a large, rustic, copper-colored pendant lamp. Young sourced this from antiquesbydesign.co.uk). It costs £295.



**CHAIR**

*If you like the look of the shepherd's chair in this room, then visit Robert Young's company, Robert Young Antiques (020-7228 7847; www.robertyoungantiques.com). This comb-back Windsor armchair, c.1790, is a very close match. It is made from ash and elm, measures 94 x 57 x 38cm and costs £3,750.*



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## CONTRIBUTORS

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### ROBERT AND JOSYANE YOUNG *Antiques dealers and interior designers*

Robert and Josyane Young met in their early twenties when Josyane came to London from her native France and began work as Robert's assistant. Robert explains that they were united by their 'shared passion for wonderful and often neglected

things with integrity and a timeless character'. The pair now live together in a cluttered Victorian house in south-west London and list Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, the colours of Provence and the still lifes of Giorgio Morandi among their influences: 'We look at surfaces and textures, form, line, colour and pattern.' Robert and Josyane describe their style as 'understated and classically informed with contemporary accents' - a notion they put into practice with their design for a modern thatched cottage in the Netherlands (page 98).



### PHILIPPA THORP *Interior designer*

Having completed her art foundation course at Chester College, Philippa Thorp soon landed a job at The Walt Disney Company and then at Citibank. She cites these two experiences as 'the real turning point in my life: we had to work hard and we had goals to achieve.' Four years on, a friend mentioned that she wanted to set up her own interior-design business and Philippa jumped at the chance to join her. Initially, Philippa was responsible for doing the books, but soon she was running the entire practice and it was her name above the door. 'We strive to be innovative,' she says, 'to be imaginative, to push ourselves to do more and create more than the client might ever have expected.' Pages 104-107 illustrate Philippa's restful scheme for a small Chelsea house.

### MARCUS FIELD *Writer*

'I could never decide what I wanted to do when I grew up,' says writer Marcus Field. 'There were too many possibilities: artist, gardener, chef or architect - but I slipped into journalism.

This turned out to be the perfect solution as you do all these things vicariously by writing about them.' He was similarly indecisive when choosing where to live and this has resulted in a 'very complicated tripartite life' that is split between London, rural Andalusia and a Victorian house in Devon. Marcus was editor of the architectural magazine *Blueprint* and arts editor of the *Independent on Sunday* but has been freelance since 2006. This month he writes about a lakeside cottage in the Netherlands, aiming 'to tell a good story in the simplest way possible'. Turn to page 98 to see the results □

