

House&Home

Lost in lockdown Bold, bright design from the fairs we missed - FEATURE PAGES 14 & 15

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Tricks and mortar

Being confined has made us

aware of the limitations of our

homes. Here are four life-

enhancing projects to plan and

design now. By Helen Barrett

ockdown 2020 made interior designers of us all. We did not necessarily want an entirely new house, but small inconveniences became enormous daily irritants. If only that home office were private, quiet and well organised, rather than a makeshift desk on a landing; if only we had soundproofed the walls; if only we could eat plump ripe fruit from the garden instead of queueing for hours to buy ropey produce; if only we had a plunge pool.

Whatever our desires, we wished we had got around to planning and designing them years ago, and we craved the moment when they could be commissioned. Now, as we - and architects, designers and builders - head cautiously back to work, the time is right to make a start. We asked five experts to guide us through the principles of designing and commissioning mediumsized projects that will enhance your home and your life, whatever the future may hold.

An urban garden cabin with Maria Speake of Retrouvius

If working from home is to be the future of employment, garden office cabins are the obvious - and practical - projects to plan now. They offer the chance to concentrate in peace, near to but away from the domestic fray. Or perhaps a private room for exercise or creative endeavours, a welcoming retreat for winter months.

A seductive idea, particularly if you plan on kitting your cabin out with underfloor heating, a wood-burning stove and a generous vintage desk. But few end up used only for work, says Speake of architectural salvage company Retrouvius. The House & Garden designer of the year has planned and installed several bespoke cabins: "They end up having deck chairs stored in them, so they must be prepared in such a way that those bits can be incorporated and stored. Otherwise it will turn into a junk shed."

The best, she says, are well-insulated and designed with generous storage to allow them to be multifunctional -aguest bedroom one week, a yoga studio the next - and accommodate changing enthusiasms and creative projects.

Basic cabins are straightforward. "A good DIY-er could do a cabin project themselves," says Speake. Others may want to commission architects and planners.





A cabin should have storage space incorporated. 'Otherwise it will turn into a junk sheď

Some cabins may require planning permission, depending on size, location usage and the approach of local officers, among other things. In the UK, says Speake, planners tend to interpret the rules differently from authority to authority, considering factors such as height and whether the cabin is accessible from the house. Other structures may fall under permitted development rights. Check with local planning authorities before you begin building.

The ideal cabin size is at least 3m deep by 5m wide, with additional storage and planting space. External proportions, says Speake, matter less, particularly in a city garden. "The ideal cabin length is

the full width of the back of the garden to maximise the space." Otherwise, she says, the gloomy passages between cabin and garden walls "end up as foxes' dens, or a dumping ground, and you can't plant there because it is dry and dark". A full-width cabin is also preferable proportionally, she says, when viewed from the house.

"Make sure you can plant it up and that plants can climb. Your cabin may have a flat roof, but you don't want to look down on that from an upstairs window, so use the roof as a planting space for wild grasses, meadow flowers or spring bulbs. That way, you will be looking down on something very special."

One option is to install a refurbished structure, such as a vintage railway carriage. Many in the UK, says Speake, were bought by householders to use as makeshift summer houses in the 1960s from railway companies after the government closed a third of British railway stations, a project known as the "Beeching cuts".

(Above and left) A cabin can be used as an office, a winter retreat or summer guest house; this one is by Retrouvius for a private client; Butter Wakefield (top right) and

her Ribbon

townhouse

(above right)

Wheel garden

for a Bayswater

another roof structure over the carriages. That is good, because it means the original carriage has been protected." Others may prefer a David Cameronstyle reproduction shepherd's hut,

which can start from about £5,000. "Shepherd's huts can take a lot of the hassle out of it, and they are great if you are not into DIY." Most are straightforward to assemble from a flat pack, or could be commissioned ready-made and craned up and over a terraced house at a cost of about £2,000. Speake advocates yet more visual

Speake says these old models are easy to

convert and may turn up on eBay or for

sale in salvage yards. "Often they put

connection with your cabin's garden setting. "The whole language of materials can be rougher and more raw in a cabin than in a house. For example, you can use old floorboards as cladding, and cedar shingle on the outside."

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House & Home

Let there be light – as long as it's not LED light



Luke Edward Hall

Readers' questions

I have moved into a rented house with LED ceiling lights that give off a harsh, unpleasant light. I can't change them but I would like to minimise the effect. What are my options?

There is only one option: keep them switched off. LED downlights are not good for much, apart from blasting a room with (as you describe perfectly) harsh, unpleasant light. I am assuming the light you mean is of the bluetinged variety. Many LED colour temperatures are available - 4000k, for example, is usually referred to as "neutral white" because it is neither blue nor yellow. A temperature of above 5000k would appear very bright and blue. It may be useful for conducting serious surgery, but surely no sane person would want this effect in their home.

I hold my hands up: we have downlights mounted within the ceiling in our London flat (they were there when we moved in), but we never switch them on. They have a yellowish glow rather than blue, but even downlights with a warm temperature still light people and objects from above, which is no good. And they are ugly things — small, yes, but still noticeably displeasing.

I would do away with ceiling lights altogether, other than in parts of the home that benefit from something striking: entrance halls and above kitchen islands and dining tables, for example. Here it is possible to have fun: there are options a thousand times more exciting than plain, horrid downlights, of course: lanterns, candelabra and all manner of pendants.

In your rented space, it makes sense to make the most of table and floor lamps for two main reasons: people and objects look best when lit by low-level lamps, and you can take them with you when you move.

In our cottage in the country, I have learnt that a space looks best when lamps are of different ages, made from different materials and placed at different heights. In the living room we have a couple of table lamps (one brass and another pale-blue ceramic), a 1980s low brass reading light and a taller floor lamp wrapped in bright red leather. Our collection of various lamp shades made from fabric and card creates a soft, warm glow.

Northamptonshire-based Windsor House Antiques usually has a large range of antique table lamps. I have been eyeing up a French bronze and opaline version with a green, gilded serpent wrapping around its stem. For contemporary lighting, I often look to Circa Lighting, which was founded in Savannah in 1998 and collaborates with leading interior designers such as Kelly Wearstler and Christopher Spitzmiller (one of his is pictured at right).

Everyone loves a lit candle in the evenings, but do not feel you have to stop at the dining table. One of my favourite ways to bring light into a room is to hang a candle sconce. Not only is the light warm and inviting, they are decorative in their own right. Sconces look great when electrified, too, like the gilt-wood pair at Georgian Antiques in Edinburgh, decorated with large eagles, swags and ribbons.

I like pairs above a fireplace and either side of a mirror or a large piece of furniture such as a cabinet or dresser, and the odd single sconce dotted around. We have a brass one made by the English Lamp Company in our downstairs bathroom, which we light when we have dinner guests. A scallop shell hides a tapered candle, and the glow created is marvellously pink-tinged.

Let us tip this question on its head – literally, because I am also a fan of a

It may be useful for conducting surgery, but surely no sane person would want LED downlights in their home simple floor uplighter. If you have a dark corner that could benefit from extra light, whack in an uplighter, such as the ones made by the excellent Mr Light Limited. They are portable and can be hidden easily.

Is there any place for a boring LED ceiling light? Some simple surface-mounted single spotlights I find attractive in a plain, sensible way, and I would happily use these in a utilitarian space such as a laundry room or basement corridor. Holloways of Ludlow has a good range. I like their Ascoli single spotlights and, because they come in a good-looking bronze finish, their Poire single spotlights.

Another idea: perhaps one day I will be able to get that fragment of a Roman sculpture I often dream about. I rather fancy the idea of a chic single spotlight directing a brilliant beam of light on a stone ear or pair of lips.

For more images and links to Luke's recommendations find his column on ft.com/house-home

Luke answers readers' questions on design and stylish living every week. Email him at lukeedward.hall@ft.com and follow him on Instagram @lukeedwardhall

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House & Home Unlocked

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Tricks and mortar

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Security matters, too, particularly when storing expensive computer equipment in home offices. Speake suggests sturdy, reclaimed vintage doors made from high-quality materials such as old mahogany or rosewood, and upgraded with modern locks. She recently designed a cabin with reclaimed copperlight windows: "A sweet, homely feeling at night."

A path from house to cabin is important, even if it is no more than a couple of flag stepping stones. "People always say they want the grassy lawn right up to the cabin door, but in winter when it's rainy and muddy and full of worm casts, they soon change their minds."

retrouvius.com

A kitchen garden with Butter Wakefield

The best thing about designing kitchen gardens, says Wakefield, is that they are just as suited to urban yards as they are to grand country houses. "You don't need a lot of space — but you do need absolute top-quality soil."

The London-based designer specialises in overhauling compact city plots. Her "Ribbon Wheel" garden for a Bayswater townhouse, with its romantic, blowsy planting fringing cobbled pathways, won the small residential and hardscape categories in this year's Society of Garden Designers' awards.

Kitchen gardens, she says, are satisfying projects for new gardeners because when planted correctly, they can be productive within weeks. Follow a few basic

Kitchen gardens are satisfying projects for new gardeners as they can be productive within weeks

principles, and you will be gracing the table with wholesome, homegrown bounty by summer's end.

First, the structures. South-facing beds are best, so plants can be sundrenched most of the day. Wakefield suggests building beds to a maximum width of 1.2m to allow easy tending. "Then you can make them as long as you like." She favours low-cost timberedged raised beds. Line them with land-scape fabric, then enhance their appearance by adding woven willow surrounds with hazelwood poles. "They slot into place — four pieces tie together like a picture frame. Because they are natural they will not last for ever but they are charming and elegant."

Waist or thigh-height beds are best, says Wakefield: "Easily controlled, watered and your produce won't get clobbered by slugs and snails."

Depth and quality of soil are then the top priorities. Nourish with soilenhancing fertilisers, such as Carbon Gold Biochar, seaweed and spent mushroom. "Spend money on soil and fertiliser — as much as possible, and it should be organic."

Next: water. Produce beds need a lot, either from a hose or sprinkler, or with an irrigation system. Wakefield likes leaky pipes, such as those made by HydroSure, which sit below the surface of the soil. There is little evaporation, and the pipes can be run at night so plants will not dry out on hot days. "It's not foolproof, but it does mean minimum hand-watering," says Wakefield.

Once elegant beds are in a sunny position, what does she recommend for crops? Tomatoes are bounteous by August and tumble along with cane support, so long as the soil is of high quality. Remember to pinch them out. Salad and radish plants, too, germinate quickly



and are productive all summer. Strawberries scramble happily in sunny soil, but use cages to shield them from birds.

"Stagger seed plantings and seedlings," advises Wakefield. "If you put them all out at once you will get a glut—then nothing in three weeks." New gardeners who lack confidence can buy ready-prepared bundles. Harrod Horticultural offers a package of plants, including a complete large, year-round vegetable patch for £299 and a gourmet vegetable patch for just under £50. "And don't forget stakes and supports." butterwakefield.co.uk

A playroom with Tess Newall

Reimagining a room for a child does not have to be complicated or expensive, and Newall specialises in homely charm. The interior designer's handpainted murals for walls, ceilings and furniture embellishments have a deceptively naive quality, reminiscent of the Arts & Crafts-era rooms by Vanessa Bell at Charleston in East Sussex.

"A playroom should be a place to retreat, to spark play — the decor is important for dreaming and imaginings," says Newall. Aim for magical and theatrical rather than cutesy.

(From top)
Circus nursery
painted by
Tess Newall for
Georgina and
Tom Peacock,
with interior
design by
Rosanna
Bossom;
infinity pool
by Guncast
at a home in
Surrey, UK



For a bonus beginner's guide to planning and designing a media room with Lucy Barlow of Barlow and Barlow, go to ft.com/house-home

How to: Tess Newall's painted circus-tent ceiling

Measure and divide total wall space equally. Pencil-mark each point where ceiling meets wall.
 Measure and mark the central point of the ceiling.
 Pull a length of string taut from a pin in the central ceiling.

point to one wall point. Follow

mark each stripe, placing the

string line with masking tape to

remain the colour of base layer.
Repeat around the room.
4. Use a narrow paint roller to fill in stripes, allowing drying time between coats.
5. Once dry, remove masking tape gently to ensure no base colour is lifted. Use a small paintbrush for touch-ups.

tape within the stripe that will

A cluttered playroom is inevitable, but children's rooms should not be overwhelmed with decoration and detail, she suggests. "You don't want constant stimulation. Sometimes plain and simple is better for the imagination."

Newall suggests plain walls and a ceiling mural, which is effective in smaller spaces: "That will give you the greatest impact." One of her most requested is a circus-tent ceiling, an optical illusion with an immersive effect that she says is simple to achieve in an afternoon with the help of masking tape, string and a tall friend (see step-by-step guide in box). "It's more subtle than a big mural."

Another foolproof ceiling theme for the cack-of-hand is a starry night sky. A ceiling painted inky-blue can be blockprinted or stencilled with sponge and gold paint. "I like differently shaped stars, some can be wonky, others can be Florentine and eight-pointed," says Newall. "You will end up with a sore neck, but your ceiling will have impact."

What about storage? Cubed open shelving bought off-the-peg can be painted, block-printed or stencilled by hand. But Newall prefers neat rattan boxes and baskets to enormous toy-boxes. "Small children can chuck toys into them easily when it's time to tidy up, which gives them a sense of independence." Similarly, a diminutive table and chair for creative projects bestows a sense of ownership.

Newall suggests avoiding permanent fixtures such as decorated fitted furniture, which may be right for a five-year-old but is likely to be mortifying by the time they reach 10. "My personal taste is a vintage look, which ages well even if it gets bashed about, and will never feel tacky." Harsh lighting can be unsettling for young children. Newall recommends night-lights for security and comfort. Otherwise, her clients' playrooms are technology-free, at least on the surface. She often works with joiners to hide TVs and computer screens. tess newall.com

A swimming pool with Guncast

With public pools closed, a private place to stretch and steam an aching body is a captivating idea, especially after a hard day's work in the garden cabin. According to Andy Carr, design and commercial director of the West Sussex-based company, even before lockdown his clients were pondering not only conventional pools but accoutrements such as hot tubs, steam rooms and showers. That nebulous

"wellness" concept now includes

full-on facilities in the back garden.
Guncast, which specialises in highend pools, works with architects and designers on the technical side of homespa projects. Carr has just completed a basement home spa in a house in Cheltenham, complete with plunge pool, sauna, steam room and shower, at a cost of about £300,000. He has worked on larger projects up to a cost of £1m.

Maintenance is expensive because it involves checking equipment such as pumps and filters, ensuring chemical levels are safe and cleaning. Fortnightly specialist services can be booked for about £120 a time to keep pools pristine, but many of Carr's clients do the work themselves. He recommends changing filters every two weeks.

"From a spa, you want a thermal journey — hot followed by cold, always," he says. That may mean a sauna is built with a plunge pool, a shower or even just an ice machine to cool the water.

For a straightforward outdoor pool for laps, the starting price is about £120,000. Finding the right plot is the first step in planning. In the UK, a conventional pool does not usually require planning permission, unless it is being dug on a private estate or within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But one potential problem is trees, says Carr: "You can't damage them, because of tree protection orders. If you are undermining them when digging, that can scupper the project."

Nearby trees are fine, but be prepared to spend time and money fishing debris from your pool. One solution is to install a moving floor at a cost of roughly £200,000, which seals off the pool in winter. "It raises up and down, so that it can double as garden space," says Carr. "Although the cost often puts people off."

Carr advises a shallow and deep end. "Families need a pool in which younger children can learn to swim and older ones can learn to dive," he says. "If your pool doesn't have at least one area that is 1m deep, you will eliminate a whole category of users." He recommends a maximum deep end of 1.8m. "You can go deeper — some people go to to 3m — but if you imagine a pool with a 25-year life, are you going to use the deepest parts more than a handful of times?"

be comfortable."
guncast.com

"If you can't stand up, you won't

Find a list of suppliers at ft.com/house-home Helen Barrett is editor of House & Home