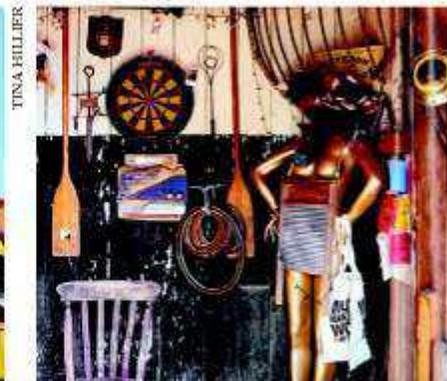


Imaginative
boltholes
nurture
creative
impulses

**Sharon
Verghis**

above
Some of the
hideaways featured in
Jane Field-Lewis's
My Cool Shed



IMAGINE reinventing your humble backyard garden shed as a live performance venue and recording studio. Or transforming an old shipping container into a whimsical, portable palace of books. How about turning a World War II air-raid shelter into a modern artist's studio, or running your shoemaking business out of a self-designed shed in your garden.

London-based stylist and author Jane Field-Lewis spoke to people who have done just that for her book *My Cool Shed*, a loving homage to the creative possibilities of the everyday garden shed.

Field-Lewis's latest tome (she's also the author of *My Cool Caravan* and *My Cool Campervan*) is dedicated to all manner of spaces, from the humble (a suburban garden shed decorated with animal skulls) to the lavish (a French artist's studio overlooking a storm-lashed Atlantic).

Long fascinated by the human need for boltholes and sanctuaries, Field-Lewis spoke to the owners and architects of hideaways of all kinds across Britain, France and Scandinavia. Intrigued by their stories as much as their spaces, she set about charting the eccentric impulses that drove them to create modern-day caves.

Working with photographer Tina Hillier, Field-Lewis has captured a pleasingly diverse array of fishing shacks, modern log cabins, beach huts and other retreats. There

are well-known writers' studios — George Bernard Shaw's rotating writing hut at Hertfordshire; Dylan Thomas's magically romantic, windswept writing hut in South Wales — and artistic spaces such as English sculptor Barbara Hepworth's tiny summer hut on her Cornwall property. But there are also the creative work spaces and sheds of ordinary folk: the vintage trailers owned by Richard, an American who rents them out to people who share his off-the-grid approach to life; the three sea shipping containers that Matt and Sophia, a young couple, have artfully turned into a design studio.

"I wanted to shine a light on these amazing little places, these amazing people that I found along the way," says Field-Lewis, who tracked down most of the shed owners through word of mouth. "I'd talk to people and they'd say,

'My friend is an artist who works out of an old air-raid shelter in Putney', or they'd say, 'You need to go and see this person with a fabulous beach hut'." Field-Lewis and Hillier visited and photographed almost all the properties in the book; among the few exceptions is the sole Australian entry, a stark, tower-like structure on a remote sheep station in NSW, which they were told about by a friend who spotted it on an architectural design website.

The idea for the book arose from Field-Lewis's passion for "individual expressions of style. I really like authentic style and design that comes from people's need to do something or find their own solution to a problem, rather than just going out and buying something that is beautifully designed."

She believes that in an increasingly turbulent world, people are becoming more passionate about transforming whatever spaces they may have into private havens; it represents a kind of cocooning. There's also a trend towards shunning empty materialism: most of these owners have adopted a design aesthetic based on the use of found objects, vintage items and recycled pieces, decorating their spaces with everything from children's plastic toy figurines to old jeans, fishing nets, vintage opticians' equipment, and even a taxidermied fox.

"Because of the economy, perhaps we're becoming a bit more introspective and we're looking at small things you can do to make your own life better," Field-Lewis says. "You look at your own home and what you might have that isn't going to cost much money and which is achievable. It's brought to the surface this kind of new creativity.

"In the book, there's a young couple who call themselves Junkaholique, who have his and hers sheds in their back garden. They're simple and inexpensive, but they've been painted and furnished beautifully, and the couple run a business out of them. I find that very inspiring."

Other favourites include the wooden shed owned by Somerset's Jon Earl, who turned it into an unlikely live music venue with a huge cult following.

"Jon, who has a genuine love of acoustic music, was at that point in life where he was a bit bored, and he had this shed in his garden that he was going to set up as a space for a cheese and cider society. But then he had this idea of having little acoustic music gigs in there, and it's been incredibly successful. He records the gigs and puts them up on YouTube, and he has a huge line of well-known musicians who want to come and play in his garden shed."

Field-Lewis believes these sheds help nurture creativity; she's particularly struck by how many women have painstakingly created these solitary spaces to paint, to write, to think. "Compared to men, I got the sense that the women almost liked being on their own more. I think for women, it's very hard within your own home to separate yourself, to find that other place in your mind to think differently. This way, they have a space of their own."

My Cool Shed (HarperCollins, \$29.99).