

# Weekend

## Home

### Seacombe, South Devon

Sally Shalam

A contemporary house to rent is a rare thing. British city centres might play homage to modern masterpieces in steel and glass, but on the domestic front, developers hardly seem to be using a radically different template to that of the Seventies. So it's refreshing when Seacombe pops up on an email.

This beach house, which sits off a narrow lane linking East Prawle and East Portlemouth, on the southernmost tip of Devon, belongs to the Martin family. Architect Annie, who works at Stan Bolt's Devon-based practice, designed it and artist father Glyn built it.

Despite missing all previous landmarks on the directions, I spot the final one, a simple vegetable stall called Green Jane's, at the end of a lumpy track. Up ahead is nothing except said track and sky; it's like driving to the end of the world. Here it is. Set low into a scoop in the land, clad in cedar and hugged by a garden wall of schist which glints in the autumn sunlight.

Glyn Martin is waiting to give me the keys, mention geo-thermal heating and filtered water, and show me around the fruits of their labours, then he's off. It's just me now, and a view which makes my heart sing.

Three bedrooms are on entrance level: two doubles with bathrooms, balconies and full length views



across the garden to the sea, and a twin/triple for kids, all linked by a glass-fronted landing which opens on to an upper sundeck. Down a solid oak and steel staircase is the kitchen-diner, a sitting room with another dining area, and – ta da! – a secret door disguised as a bookcase which opens into a private cinema complete with overhead projector.

What always distinguishes modern architecture from traditional for me is the way it helps us interact with the elements instead of shielding us from them. Most of the glass windows here slide fully open so the boundary between inside and out is undefined. I only get this feeling abroad as a

rule . . . Shame there's no pool, but then again, there are no mozzies either.

It's late when the others show up and I'm slouched on a sofa in the cinema. "Hey, this is great," they say, settling down to the end of a Stephen Poliakoff film.

Next morning a kestrel is patrolling the garden. Kites hover and swallows dash about making final arrangements before their migration. From the kitchen I watch white sailboats on azure water. A lugger glides by.

We slide back glass "walls" and lay the table for breakfast on the sun-drenched terrace. "This is like the Special K ad," someone says. Except we're not counting calories, we're

scoffing the fresh eggs, homemade marmalade and bread provided for guests by the Martins, as a south-westerly ruffles through the cherry and fuchsia in the garden.

"I think the bathrooms deserve something better than Dove," comments another. Perhaps, but it strikes me this house is as much about practicality as style. Furniture is robust, surfaces easy to clean, information plentiful, and if it rains – well, there's a popcorn maker to go with that cinema.

We scramble down to the little beach, walk the coastal path, drink cider in the local pub, and scoop up bags of wonderful vegetables from Green Jane's. No one wants to eat

at a pub – why tear ourselves from a walled garden which disappears into an infinity of sea and sky? Besides, it's delightful cutting herbs and lettuce from the raised bed, then knocking up meals to eat al fresco in autumn sun on precious afternoons before the clocks go back.

● 01647 24474, [Seacombe-devon.co.uk](http://Seacombe-devon.co.uk). Seacombe lies between East Prawle and East Portlemouth, and sleeps a maximum of nine (not suitable for toddlers). From £455 (for a three-night weekend, low season) to £2,500 (for one week in summer 2009). Order fish, meat, milk and even papers from Green Jane's on 01548 511557.

[sally.shalam@guardian.co.uk](mailto:sally.shalam@guardian.co.uk)