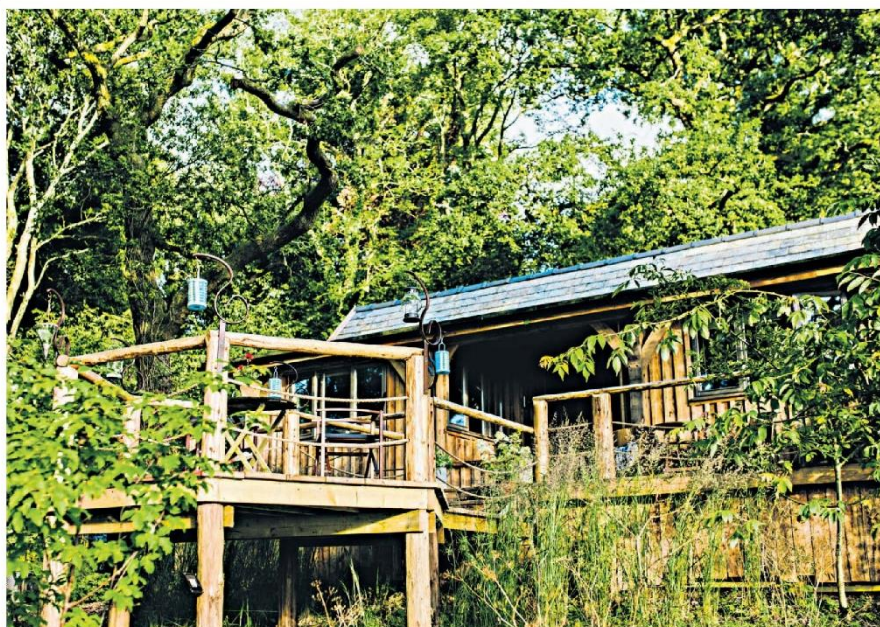


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COVER STORY



It's a chance to turn your back on the world, if only for a night or two

The glossary of glamping grows ever more complex. No sooner have we all, just about, wrapped our stay-cating hands around pods and teepees, and may be even tipis, than the concept has expanded to an architectural exotica of glamping, geobuses, castles and UFOs. Who knew sleeping back to back could be so confusing? Which is why there's something so satisfying about the cabin. A cabin is a cabin, according to the dictionary, "a small shelter made of wood, in a location that's wild or remote". I'd add to that something less tangible – an essential essence of "cabinness", for which there's no single word (although the Germans probably have one).

While many are more glam than days some come equipped with hot tubs, Egyptian cotton bedding, smart TVs and flushing loos – a proper cabin will still offer that deliciously snugly X-factor – a combination of coziness, back-to-natureness, unnecessary simplicity. An ambience especially suited to winter, when all you want to do is hunker down. To stay in a cabin isn't just looking, it's wondrous, woodsnaky hug. To test this theory, my partner and I spent a wet November night in the embrace of The Oak House.

Through only a few miles outside Bath, it sits just off the Cotswold Way National Trail, gazing west towards Wales, feeling far more removed



ESSENTIALS

The Oak House sleeps two in five miles (skin from Bath Spa train station) from £185pn (0117 204 7880; canopyandstars.co.uk/oakhouse).

ESCAPE THE BALEY BLUES The Oak House's exterior may be from above, the kitchen, bathroom and cosy living room of the retreat.



There was no TV, although it took me a while to even notice. In an instant we'd happily succumbed to the best kind of cabin fever, which sees political noise disappear behind owl hoots, heron calls and leaf rustle, behind the whirr of the coffee grinder and the mew of Jimmy the cat. Our most taxing task was keeping the fire alight.

than its geography suggests. No rustic backwoodsman's hut, it's a well-outfitted retreat, creatively crafted by a local carpenter, and comprising almost entirely recycled finds. The floorboards are former scaffolding planks, the washbasin salvaged from a lift, there's a Sixties Danish sofa, a 19th-century settle, Indian doors into the bathroom, pleasantly worn kilims, books and knick-knacks have been rummaged from eBay, while a puma's pelt hangs – said to be a bringer of well-being to the countryside – sits up on the beams, hopefully doing its job.

It instantly felt like an escape. Rain-soaked from arriving on foot, we stripped off muddy trousers, pulled on pyjamas and stayed in there for the duration. Why not? We were going nowhere. It was the sort of place where real wine must be drunk, Scrabble played, novels read (or watched).

Multiple marriage proposals had been made here. One guest had written an Oak House haiku. Another said that they'd planned to visit Bath and Bristol during their stay, but "every time we were out we felt homesick and wanted to get back". And that's the cabin-ness. The feeling of safety to which we crave to return. A chance to turn your back on all the scary stuff and escape from the real world, if only for a night or two.

It sits so happily amid the woodland it looks like it's been grown rather than built

15 more great cabin escapes

A LITTLE LUXE, HIGHLANDS

It's hard to beat the location of Eagle Barn, found between Glen Affric and Glen Strathfarrar and surrounded by rugged moorland. With three major lochs on the doorstep, as well as the Farrar and Glass rivers, you can head out to catch your dinner before curling up under the red cedar-wood timbers in front of a warm fire or sitting out on the deck to watch for deer. There are 10 cabins to choose from, all offering a little luxury in the wilderness – some even have their own private sauna. **£ Sleeps two to six, from £1,454 per week (011465 76100); eaglebarne.co.uk**

BEACH BOLT-HOLE, BRACKENBANK, CORNWALL

Watch wild winter waves crash in from this stylish cabin, tastering on the cliffs above Whistand Bay. The inside has a bright, contemporary-nautical vibe – there are portholes, big sea-view windows and white-blue-grey tones – plus all the mod-cons: from TV and woodburner to Wi-Fi and a coffee machine. Can't face cooking? Michelin Guide-listed The View opens weekends in winter is a mile away. Even better, beaching walks along the South West Coast Path beckon from the door. **£ Sleeps five, from £600 per week (01627 580100; beachretreats.co.uk)**

NORDIC NOOK, DEVON

There's not a neighbour in sight at this hideaway, high above the Taw Valley. Hand-built by the farmer in whose fields it sits (and from whom you can order a most hamper for the barbeque), the cedar-clad Secret Ramoer Cabin has a cool Scandi vibe: soothing tones, Swedish wood-burner, stylish kitchen, fold-back doors. Stay cosy inside, or amble down the meadow to light up the fire pit or jump into the wood-filled

hot tub to gaze up at Ramoer's officially listed Dark Skies. **£ Sleeps two to four, from £125 per night (01416146146; darkskies.com)**

NEW HIDEAWAY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Inhale the smell of fresh-cut cedar: in their own meadow in the Forest of Dean, only opened this month. There are no backcountry privations here. Each is decked out with stylish bathrooms and well-equipped kitchens where you'll find home-made scones on arrival, as well as snuggly sofas, handcrafted furniture and vintage art. Outside, there are swing seats on the veranda and Japanese soak tubs for warming up chilly nights. **£ Sleeps two, from £90 per night (01894 79477; therooftamping.co.uk)**

DESIGNER DEN, EAST SUSSEX

Just outside Bex, only 65 minutes from London by train, the easy-access Cabin by the River is more Soho House than Lucy Crockett. Furnishings are fabulous: a rustic-hive mix of Moroccan tiles, Matthew Hilton leather sofa, James chairs and abundant throws and cushions plus an Empire-size bed. Start with a coffee on the riverside decking, before pooling around lovely Rye's antique shops, galleries and gastropubs, or taking windy walks to the sea. **£ Sleeps two, from £90 for two nights (07773 708062; cabinsandcastles.co.uk)**

SERENE SOUNDTRACK, WEST YORKSHIRE

Drift off to the sound of a babbling stream – though make sure you've used the composting lavatory

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