

# THE NESTING BOX

Looking for a *weekend bolthole* for themselves and their three boys, REBECCA and MARK PARTRIDGE found a shabby bungalow tucked away on the dunes at Camber. And so began the process of renovation

WORDS **Lauris Morgan Griffiths** PHOTOGRAPHS **Bill Kingston**



THIS PAGE The Partridge family eat together in the kitchen/dining room on a recycled German beer table and benches OPPOSITE A deck runs the length of the house, the perfect place to lounge in a deckchair. They are £115 each from Southsea Deckchairs



THIS PAGE, ABOVE After the 1930s house was renovated, the exterior was painted traditional East Sussex black; the original kitchen cupboards were repainted and given new handles and worktops; Rebecca and Mark; the nearby beach is a constant source of fun for the boys OPPOSITE Charlie and Rufus have a giggle in one of the window seats



Charge down the track across the road, followed by a scramble across the dunes, and the five members of the Partridge family (six if you include Labrador puppy Lola) are running along the sandy stretch of beach outside their holiday home in Camber, East Sussex.

As a mum to three boys with tonnes of volcanic energy to dissipate, Rebecca knows the importance of a day at the beach. 'We go swimming – although I prefer paddling – shrimping, play boules or rounders and hide and seek in the dunes.' And when they have all run themselves ragged, they 'retire for a barbecue in the dunes with coffee and hot chocolate or chips and ice cream from the nearby Kit Kat café. Not necessarily altogether!'

The area has a special significance to Rebecca and accountant husband Mark, who, 14 years ago, spent their first weekend away as a couple at a B&B in nearby Rye. Later, Rebecca rented a barn down the track for her girls' book club weekends. She loved the area and asked Georgina, the owner of the barn, to let her know if a house ever became available. When one did, Rebecca bagged it before it even came on the market.

### A RENOVATION PROJECT

The house was a 1930s, sturdily built, long, timber-framed Colt bungalow. 'When we bought it, it was hideous,' Rebecca says. 'From the outside, it was brown and had uPVC windows. The interior wasn't much better.' But it also had a wide, west-facing garden, butting onto a field of braying donkeys. 'I loved it the moment I saw it,' she says.

Mark needed more convincing. With busy work lives and three young sons – Tom, Charlie and Rufus – finding time to do the

‘As it’s a beach house, I used *muted colours* – GREYS AND WHITES – which lend themselves to the ENVIRONMENT’



THIS PAGE, BELOW The beach is just a stroll away, through the sand dunes FAR LEFT AND ABOVE LEFT Rebecca has cleverly furnished the house on a budget with vintage mirrors and an old school shoe locker ABOVE Rebecca in the hall with Lola OPPOSITE Framed Cole & Son ‘Woods’ wallpaper and a cowskin rug from Ikea furnish the living room

renovation was a challenge. ‘How we did it, we really don’t know,’ Rebecca says. The family’s main home is in Lewes, so at weekends, they all slept on mattresses in the sitting room while Mark and Rebecca worked on the rest of the house, putting in French windows, building a deck and re-instating wooden windows. They also painted the exterior the traditional East Sussex black.

#### CLEVER DECORATING IDEAS

Rebecca transformed the interior from a tired, dreary place into a light, airy, welcoming home. ‘As it’s a beach house, I used muted colours – greys and whites – which lend themselves to the environment.’ She did this on a shoestring budget, which required a considerable amount of creativity and ingenuity. In the kitchen, they put in new worktops and a new sink but kept the cupboards, which they painted with Farrow & Ball colours and gave new handles. The tiles were sealed and painted rather than replaced.

The intention was to make the house pay for itself by renting it out as a holiday let when the Partridges weren’t using it themselves, so it is very family friendly and has three double bedrooms and a ‘YMCA room’ – a den for the boys. All the rooms, except one, open straight onto the deck. It has two bathrooms, one with an en suite cleverly fitted in the bay window, and a garage converted into a games room complete with dartboard and pinball machine.

Rebecca has a talent for taking things out of context and using them elsewhere: wire shoe lockers contain toiletries; Fornasetti wallpaper and Marimekko fabric have been framed and make attractive pictures; coat hooks have been given new life with a coat of white paint; narrow German beer tables and benches are used as a kitchen/dining table; a marine bulkhead has become a





‘We have a DIFFERENT way of living here than we do when we’re at home. We *eat outside* in MOST WEATHERS’

THIS PAGE In the master bedroom hangs a framed piece of Fornasetti wallpaper. Rebecca bought the gentleman’s cupboard from a charity shop and the light is from Ikea OPPOSITE Hard-wearing floor paint is essential for a family-friendly interior



THIS PAGE, LEFT Inspired by the family's surname, Partridge, a bird theme is seen dotted throughout the house ABOVE LEFT Labradoodle Lola with Rebecca – all the rooms except one have French doors that open onto the decking RIGHT AND BELOW Mark and the family enjoy a different pace of life at the property OPPOSITE Taking Lola for a walk among the dunes



lampshade, and decorative window film creates privacy on the door to the bathroom. The result is more wabi-sabi than shabby chic.

### VINTAGE FURNITURE AND STARGAZING

A self-confessed 'bit of an Arthur Daly', Rebecca has always been a keen bargain hunter and collector. This has paid off, as the house is furnished from antiques markets, the internet and schools, the latter an offshoot of her vintage toy business. The business, Nest, was forged after Rebecca, who was 'going a bit stir crazy' being a full-time mum, got together with a neighbour, Jess Bird. They discovered a shared aversion to brash, primary-coloured children's furniture and sought out vintage, traditional pieces for their children's rooms. As they hunted for old school furniture, schools began to contact them to offload shoe lockers, chairs and desks. And so the business was born, the name, Nest, suggesting itself from their surnames: Partridge and Bird.

'We have a different way of living here than we do when we're at Lewes,' Rebecca says, summing up the whole experience. 'We eat outside in most weathers. It is wonderful to be so close to nature and watch a skein of geese fly overhead or herons on the fence. And we love sitting around the fire pit at night in the garden, with a glass of wine, talking and wondering at the stars.'

And what of Mark – was he finally convinced about the house? Yes, says Rebecca – now it is finished, he knows they did the right thing and they both love their beautiful long, black bungalow.

To rent the cottage, see [cambersandscottage.co.uk](http://cambersandscottage.co.uk) or, to find out more about Nest, visit [kidsnest.co.uk](http://kidsnest.co.uk). Rebecca also sells vintage kids' furniture at Lewes Antiques Centre, Lewes, East Sussex.

For more coastal homes, see [coastmagazine.co.uk](http://coastmagazine.co.uk)

FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE STOCKISTS PAGE

### REBECCA'S FIVE TIPS FOR HOLIDAY LETS

- 1 Provide good-quality bedding, pots and pans, and sharp knives.
- 2 Have a stash of DVDs and games handy for rainy days. A woodburner is a good idea to keep winter weekenders cosy.
- 3 Leave a file of 'Things to Do': local activities, places to visit and recommendations of local bars and restaurants.
- 4 Beware of the new tax rules for holiday lets that come into place in 2012. To take advantage of tax breaks, the property must be available for 210 days each year and rented for 105.
- 5 Have a reliable person on the spot who can manage the changeover and deal with difficulties that require local tradesmen.

