

# Pushing the boat out

For 20 years it was a plain seaside bungalow with too many rooms - then its artist owner tore down walls, built a balcony and clad it in concrete. By Anne-Celine Jaeger



**P**ippa Blake's house - originally a 1940s bungalow - sits on the Chichester harbour seafront. When the tides are in, wind-surfers launch into the water just outside her home. "I love observing the ever changing weather, seascape and tides," she says. Despite its idyllic location, Blake's house, where she has lived for more than 20 years, had always felt like an awkward space to her. "There were

too many dividing walls, the sofa was squashed into a corner, the table was used as a dumping ground and there was no space for entertaining." So when her architect, Eric Guibert, arrived for their first meeting with a Derek Jarman book under his arm (the film-maker famously owned a timber house on Dungeness beach) and suggested a cement cladding for the facade and roof, Blake's reaction was one of excitement rather than fear. Having spent a lot of time in New Zealand - she is the widow of



MICHAEL FRANE (2) / DANA MARINICU (2)

the adventurer Sir Peter Blake - she was inspired by the islands' "batches", holiday homes that are "often no more than a shed with corrugated iron for a roof".

Although some passers-by now dub her house "The Nissen hut", after the prefab steel structure used for weapons storage in the second world war, Blake is delighted by the transformation, completed last summer. "It's like a load has lifted off me," she says. "I have a lot more pleasure being in the house."

**Cement cladding** Rather than opting for tin or metal for the roof and facade, Guibert suggested using cement. "Traditionally used in farm or industrial buildings, it actually has a soft, warm feel, and it ages beautifully," Blake says. "It's very alive - lichen grows on it - and being matt, when you look at it from the sea, it recedes into the vegetation, rather than stands out."

**Shades of grey** "Driftwood was the inspiration for the grey

colour scheme inside the house," Blake explains. She chose three different, warm greys, from a darker tone on the cabinet work to a softer grey on the walls and an even lighter shade on the ceiling. "At first I was worried it would be too dark, but grey is a great colour, because it's influenced by the other colours around it and by the light outside. It's very natural, and also the colour of the clouds."

**Uninterrupted walls** Formerly cramped due to an array of dividing

walls, the downstairs living area has been transformed into a wide-open space with uninterrupted walls, ideal for exhibiting artworks - Blake is an artist and painter - and entertaining guests.

**Sea views** To maximise the benefits of the house's seaside location, Guibert built a balcony and a glass porch with decking. As a result, Blake says, "I am much more aware of the changes of light now. The balcony makes you feel like you're on top of the water." The

decking was another nod towards New Zealand: "It's a very antipodean thing to have," she says. "You step out of the house and there's the sea."

**Carpentry** Blake hired Paul Flint, a local carpenter, to custom-build her kitchen cabinets and the shelves in the dining area. Given that she never returns from her travels without some interesting artefact or other - be it a sea urchin shell or a whale bone - she wanted open cupboards in both spaces.