



A novel study: the tower at Sissinghurst, where Vita Sackville-West used to write

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

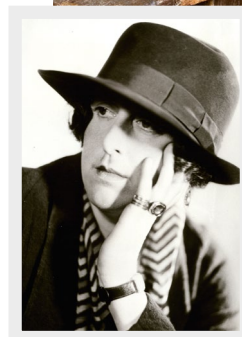
VISITING PLACES WHERE ARTISTS, WRITERS OR MUSICIANS ONCE LIVED CAN FUEL YOUR OWN CREATIVITY, SAYS CLARE GOGERTY. SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE PROPERTY ENVY...

What clinched it was the daybed. This is how a writer lives, I thought, as I stood in Vita Sackville-West's sanctum. I pictured myself scribbling mad, brilliant words, tucked away in a similar tower, before flopping on said daybed, creatively exhausted. Vita, I learnt, wrote in the mornings, then gardened in the afternoons. This was how to live: part-writer, part-gardener!

Of course, Vita had the advantage of owning an estate with an Elizabethan tower – Sissinghurst in Kent, now managed by the National Trust. But the principle was there. At an early age she told her mother she “would like to live alone in a tower with her books” and she made this dream come true.

Standing by her desk, I admired her determination to remove herself from the concerns of daily life for an hour or two a day to write, and to combine this with her love of horticulture. From her eyrie she wrote a gardening column for *The Observer*, poetry and books. Her husband Harold and two sons weren't allowed into the tower, only dogs were permitted to enter.

A visit to the former home of a writer or other creative person throws up a mixture of thoughts. Standing where they once stood, looking through a window they once stared through, seeing the pen they wrote with now lying dormant, is both inspiring and a little melancholic. On the one hand, witnessing the ordinariness of their lives makes your own creative dreams seem possible. Roald Dahl created incredible imaginary worlds on a piece of wood in a shed. Paul McCartney's childhood home had an outside loo. On the other, seeing the objects so familiar to them in their everyday



VITA SACKVILLE-WEST

Sissinghurst, Kent

As a child, Vita wrote daily, marking each day's efforts, often with the letters 'V.E.' - 'very easy'.

lives, preserved as museum objects, provokes gloomy thoughts about the transience of life.

Up in the tower at Sissinghurst, though, I was simply inspired. Ever since I've tried to recreate Vita's enviable 50:50 mix of writing and gardening that I discovered years ago. I'm almost there – not quite on Vita's scale or with her talent, and not from an Elizabethan tower – but I'm inching closer with every word I write and every bulb I plant. »



The creative shed

Dream of your own creative space by visiting these:

- Barbara Hepworth's studio in St Ives, Cornwall, was a large shed: upstairs she made plaster prototypes for her bronze pieces; downstairs she carved stone and marble. Aprons hung on the door, tools and half-finished sculpture keep it all real.
- Roald Dahl wrote on a piece of wood covered in green baize from the depths of a winged armchair in a brick hut in his garden. Now reconstructed as part of the RD Museum, it smells mustily of tobacco and old books.
- Dylan Thomas's converted bike shed overlooking the Taf Estuary was where he wrote *Under Milkwood*. Now rebuilt, an ashtray filled with fag ends gives it an authentic feel.
- Virginia Woolf spent three hours a day in her writing lodge at Monk's House, East Sussex, during the summer, when not distracted by things going on in the garden.

ARTISTS AND RESIDENTS

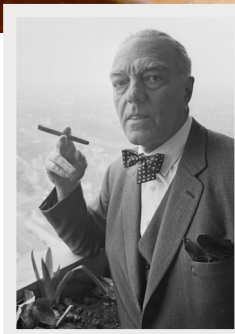
The abodes of creatives can be found countrywide. Here's a few of our favourites to get you started...

IDEAL HOMES

Spaces and design that will inspire

2 Willow Road in Hampstead is a place any mid-century-modern enthusiast would hanker to call their own. Designed as a family home by architect Ernő Goldfinger in 1939, it is much as he and his wife Ursula left it. Inside its concrete and red brick frame are walls lined with wood, massive windows overlooking the Heath, work by artists including Max Ernst and Lee Miller, and custom-made furniture designed by Ernő. A spiral staircase by Danish engineer Ove Arup unites the three floors. It is Modernism made family-friendly.

The genius of Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, former home of Jim Ede, a curator of the Tate, and his wife Helen, is that it feels within reach. White walls, undulating wooden floors and Windsor chairs aren't an impossible dream – 'I could create



ERNO GOLDFINGER

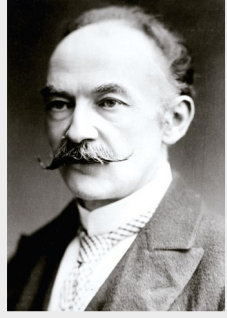
Hampstead, London

When Ian Fleming, one of Goldfinger's neighbours, used the name in a novel, Goldfinger threatened to sue... We've been indicting you, Mr Bond.



somewhere like this' you think, as you gaze at a spiral of spherical pebbles on a table top, or a pewter platter holding a single lemon. What differentiates it is the collection of paintings and sculptures by friends of the Edes, from Alfred Wallis to Henry Moore, which are woven in among the rugs and plants, like they are something you might pick up just anywhere.

THOMAS HARDY
Higher Bockhampton, Dorset
 Hardy is buried in poet's corner... all but his heart, which is buried alongside with first wife and parents in Dorset. His heart is literally in the countryside.



Death beds

The bed in which a writer or musician died provides a moving final chapter to their life story.

- Charles Dickens died in 48 Doughty Street, London (dickensmuseum.com) on 9 June 1870. His single, four-poster bed, draped in velvet, was where he faced the final curtain.

- Handel bowed out in his bed in Brook Street on 14 April 1759, attended by his servant who slept in the adjoining room (handelhendrix.org).

- William Wordsworth died of pleurisy at home, Rydal Mount, Cumbria (rydalmount.co.uk), which is still owned by the Wordsworth family.

STEP BACK IN TIME

Homes that are 3D history lessons

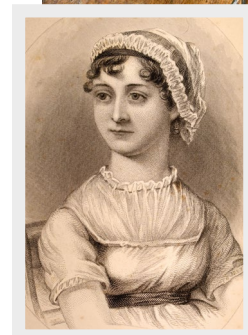
Homes preserved to honour the memory of a writer say as much about the age they lived in as they do about their inhabitants. To the modern visitor, Thomas Hardy's thatched cottage in Dorset, just outside Dorchester, with its flower-filled garden, pleasing wooden furniture, stone floors and white-washed walls is the epitome of bucolic bliss. The truth for Hardy, however, was very different. Like many other 19th century rural families, the Hardys struggled to get by, especially in the short, dark days of winter when food was in short supply. The open hearth did little to dispel the draughts and the chill from the stone floor, and there were many mouths to feed and plenty of clothes to launder.

Hardy was born in the cob cottage, built by his great-grandfather, and it looks much the same now as it did then. He lived there until he was 34, when he left to get married. The daily battles he experienced at home and witnessed all around him were chronicled in his books, some of which,

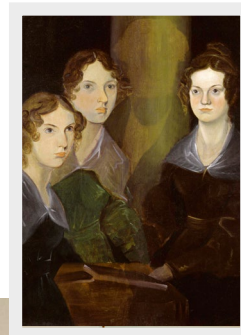
including *Far From the Madding Crowd*, were written at his desk in the bedroom.

Like her books, Jane Austen's former home, Chawton in Hampshire, reveals much about the role of women in society at the time. Dependence on men for financial and domestic security meant that from 1809 she lived, rent-free, in a house owned by her brother Edward. She shared the house with her mother, sister Cassandra and friend Martha Lloyd. Presumably an unusual set-up for the times. When she wasn't writing, she shared similar pursuits to other women of her class, including needlework, which she was particularly good at. Visitors to Chawton can see the shawl she embroidered and a quilt she stitched, and a piano in the drawing room, where she often played to amuse herself and her guests. »

“Austen's former home reveals much about the role of women in society”



JANE AUSTEN
Chawton, Hampshire
 At Chawton, Austen rose each morning, practised the pianoforte and made breakfast for everyone before they got up. And then she wrote a bit, too



THE BRONTË SISTERS
Haworth, West Yorkshire
This famous portrait of the Brontë sisters, painted by (and once featuring) their brother Branwell, was found folded up on top of a wardrobe.

London lodgings

As most musicians end up in the capital at some point in their career, the city is littered with former homes of rock legends. London Rock Tours (londonrocktour.com) take you to the homes of the rich and famous, where you can stand and stare outside Mick Jagger's Edith Grove apartment, Ringo Starr's King's Road flat, and Brian Epstein's apartment, among other classic rock locations.

Other capital homes:

Amy Winehouse spent the last months of her life in Camden Square, NW1, where she died on 23 July 2011.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono rented a flat at 34 Montagu Square, W1, for three months. Their landlord was Ringo Starr, the leaseholder.

Harry Nilsson owned and lived in two-bedroom Flat 12, 9 Curzon Place (now Curzon Square), W1. It was also where his friend Cass Elliot, of the Mamas and Papas, died in 1974. Keith Moon of The Who later rented the flat and also died there in 1978.

Freddie Mercury lived in Garden Lodge, 1 Logan Place, W8. The walls surrounding the house are plastered with letters and tributes from fans.

David Bowie lived in Beckenham between 1969 and 1973. A walking tour, inziggysfootsteps.com, takes you to his other local haunts.



ART MADE CLEARER

Putting books & paintings into context

Walk into the former home of the Brontë sisters in Haworth, West Yorkshire, and it is like walking into one of their books. Few writers captured a sense of place like they did, from the bleak moors that rose up near their parsonage home, to the forbidding stone buildings scattered on the hills. Their domestic setting had a profound effect on their writing, as did the gloomy churchyard seen from the house.

To our eyes, their home feels substantial with its mahogany furniture and crimson curtains, but the Brontës ran the home on the modest income of their parson father. Although relatively comfortable, their lives were filled with tragedy as the motherless sisters and their brother died one by one,

leaving their father to outlive them all.

A visit here is like time travel: the same dining table the sisters gathered around to write is still there, and is imbued with poignancy as you learn how it became increasingly deserted as each sister died, leaving Charlotte to write and pace around it alone. The hand-printed wallpaper is an exact replica of the original, the furniture is authenticated and you can walk on Parson's Field, the meadow behind the parsonage, to get a sense of how they lived and what the wild setting meant to their work.

The Mapp and Lucia books of EF Benson couldn't be set anywhere but Rye in East Sussex. His home, Lamb House (now managed by the National Trust) appears as 'Mallards', the home of Miss Mapp in the novels. You can look through the bow window at the view of Rye (called Tilling in the books) that inspired Benson to create his world of small-town snobbery and one-upmanship. Lamb House was also formerly home to author Henry James.

"A visit is like time travel: the same dining table is still here"



JIMI HENDRIX

Mayfair, London

Jimi lived in the flat next door to composer George Handel's home (obviously not at the same time).



ROCK STARS GET REAL

The ultimate back-stage passes

With their wayward lifestyles, you'd think that members of the rock 'n' roll fraternity wouldn't have much to teach us about clean living. Drop into Jimi Hendrix's flat in Brook Street, London, though and you'll hear that he fastidiously made his bed every morning – drummed into him no doubt by his time in the US Army. In the evening he liked nothing more than lying on it with his girlfriend Kathy Etchingham and watching *Coronation Street* with a cuppa.

Visit the childhood home of John Lennon in Liverpool, where he lived with his Aunt Mimi until he was 22, and you enter a world of antimacassars, fringed lampshades and suburban wholesomeness. Whereas Paul McCartney's more modest home with its single bed and outside toilet is a reminder that humble beginnings can lead to chart-topping, stadium-filling success. You can see inside both homes only on an organised tour; nationaltrust.org.uk. **S**



JOHN LENNON

Woolton, Liverpool

Lennon was born in during an air raid on his home city.



Curiouser & curiouser

It's surprising what you find in the homes of great artists

- Jimi Hendrix's soft toy, Dog Bear, which was knitted by a fan, went with him to three different flats, including the one in Brook Street, London, now a museum.
- Roald Dahl displayed his own hip bone, removed during an operation, on a table of curiosities in his writing shed.
- A wolf pelt lies on the floor of Rudyard Kipling's study in Bateman's, East Sussex.
- Among the many personal items in Beatrix Potter's home, Hill Top, in Cumbria, is a certificate won for her Herdwick sheep at the Penrith Agricultural Society show.