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FT Weekend

Pierre Cardin Inside the visionary fashion designer's Venetian palazzo

The secret life of sheds





**Backyard
Painting Studio
by Open Kaart**
Rufus de Vries

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Dutch practice Open Kaart recently converted an existing shed into a painter's studio in the Netherlands city of Woerden for €35,000. Its architect Pieter Graaff says that for small projects tailor-made structures are cheaper than standard ones. “Only by using parts of the existing shed, by a close collaboration with clients and contractor and a smart solution for installations, a painting studio way below the price for a new construction could be realised.”

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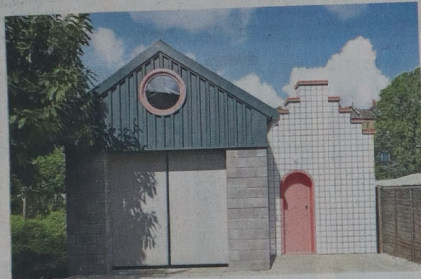
Pierre Cardin Inside the visionary fashion designer's Venetian palazzo — AT HOME PAGES 14 & 15

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The secret life of sheds

Property | The space at the bottom of the garden is the best place to experiment with bold design. By *Emily Rhodes*



(Above) Writer's Shed by Surman Weston; (left) Lomax Studio by CAN Architects; (right) Cork Study by Surman Weston
Writing by Emily Rhodes
Photography: Wei Hong Ng



Everyone has a want for a secret space," says architect Tom Surman. He is explaining the appeal of his Writer's Shed. At night, light shines through the gaps between the slats of its cedar frame; the glow of its wood-burning stove is visible from the house. With its elegant, angled shape, it looks like an enormous illuminated jewellery box nestling in suburban Hackney.

The shed was one of the first projects undertaken by Surman Weston, Surman's London-based practice. "We wanted to make it inviting, something that would draw you down from the house." It is certainly nothing like the spider-ridden wooden storage huts stuffed with bikes and lawnmowers, usually found in London's back gardens. The desire for "secret space" — in the form of a bespoke, contemporary and

spacious garden shed — is driving an entire architectural trend. "The sense of separation is really important," says Jonathan Silver, an architect whose Pavilion, an "undeniably modern" shed structure, sits in the garden of his own west London flat. "You really get away; you can shut the door."

Today's luxury sheds are a hideaway from noisy family life — a place for adults to indulge their creative urges

and pet projects in peace. They are also ideal projects for young architectural practices to showcase innovation and style. David Cameron, the former UK prime minister, may have opted for an off-the-shelf shepherd's hut structure in which to write his memoirs but there are many more imaginative options.

For householders, the risk is minimal.

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The secret life of sheds

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Writer's Shed – “our baby” says Surman – came about when a friend, who had planned on buying a ready-made shed, challenged Surman Weston to design a bespoke structure for the same price. The practice completed the project for £35,000, just 20 per cent more than the ready-made price. Though Surman says: “We paid ourselves a bare minimum, just so we could get it built.”

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A 2019 Riba award-winning studio shed for two artists by CAN Architects was the result of a sculptor and print-maker's similar frustration with “being pushed around” in the hunt for London studio space. The artists who commissioned it first thought about building a studio themselves, but their daughter persuaded them to “do it properly”, and the sculptor appreciated “having another creative person look at the project with a truly different perspective”. Architect Mat Barnes, director of CAN, worked closely with the artists and incorporated materials they had salvaged; old scaffolding poles, for instance, were

It's only 20 steps through the garden, but you're completely on your own

transformed into the roof structure.

The exuberant design of Lomax Studio, with its pink window and door, was born from a desire to “reflect the bold work of the artists”, says Barnes. Council planners were open to such a striking design, in part because “you can't see the building from a public street”.

Silver's Pavilion is clad in high-quality anthracite zinc and acocoya wood: “I wanted a sense of wow; I wanted to feel really proud of it.” He designed the shed to be a flexible space: a studio where his wife can paint and he can sculpt, as well as a place to lift weights or practise yoga.

The seemingly bare interior hides all sorts of boons: a full-height storage cupboard conceals a folded table-tennis table; a sunken bed lies beneath a timber floor; birch plywood wall panels slide open to reveal a sink and a shower room. Silver enjoys crossing the garden to use the Pavilion's shower: “It's wonderful to get out and be in the garden at that time in the morning.”

The cedar for Writer's Shed was chosen for the way it “greys down” over time, helping it to settle into the garden. The cork cladding and wildflower roof of its Cork Study (designed for a seamstress and musician couple in 2015) help it nestle into the tiny garden site.

Sheds take space away from a garden but they often improve use of the remaining area. This is apparent with

the Enchanted Shed designed by Austrian practice Sue Architekten in 2016, for which a derelict shed was converted into a summer workspace for a house in the Vienna Woods.

The appeal of the renovated structure – painted, insulated and with a large pane of glass in its front wall – has spread to the area between the house and shed, where larch decking and fruit trees adorned with lights have made it “both cosy and open”, according to project architect Christian Ambos.

Jim Reed's appreciation of his garden's

mature weeping cypress and yew trees inspired the design of a series of sheds around the trees as part of the architect's 2018 Yakisugi House. The four sheds – clad in charred larch planks (a Japanese technique known as *yakisugi*) – were designed to include a potting shed, a place to house bikes, tools and, “most importantly, a small space to get away from the house”.

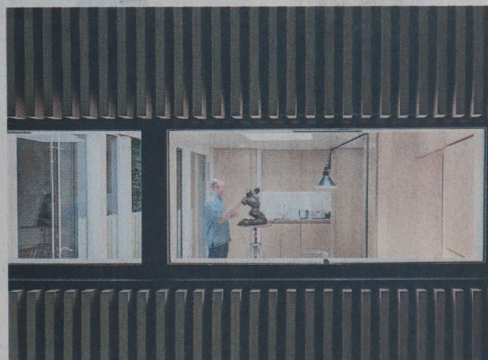
This latter space was meant to be somewhere Reed could work from home while escaping the distractions of his family. “It's only 20 steps through

(Clockwise from top) Enchanted Shed by Sue Architekten; Silver & Co's Pavilion; Yakisugi House by Reed Watts Architects

Andrew Buchberger, Jason Taylor, Ben Tynegatte and Reed Watts Architects

Backyard Painting Studio by Open Kaart

Rufo de Vries



the garden, but you're completely on your own.” Now, however, his teenage sons make use of its sofa and television and are persuading him to turn it into a gym. Reed does not resent their appropriation: far from it. He sees adaptation and modification as key to the shed's success: “As our lifestyle changes over the years, I have no doubt that there will be another iteration.”

Ceramicist Lubna Chowdhary also wanted a shed for working close to home. “I wanted to be in control of my own destiny,” she says, after years of moving her studio around London as rents increased. Fifteen years later, she recalls how moving her studio to her garden was invaluable while raising her son; she could “nip down to the studio between breastfeeds” when he was a baby. The time saved by not commuting and the ability to work at any hour of the day meant she was able to work and be at home with him after school.

She had initially intended to make the studio-shed in her Streatham garden herself, but read an interview with the architect Sir David Adjaye and decided to see if his practice might take it on. “I thought it might be the sort of project that would be good for a junior architect to get their teeth into.”

Adjaye responded with interest and – to keep closer to budget – waived his design fee. The result was his 2004 Pottery Shed, made for £22,000: a modernist box with cheap yet elegant corrugated Onduline roofing and walls and floor-to-ceiling windows at either end. “It looks like it just landed here,” says Chowdhary.

Chowdhary reflects on how she has “lived through the studio's history with it”, frequently opening it up to admiring visitors, but she also admits to feeling a pressure to make the space “look as good inside as it looks on the outside”. She even wonders if “perhaps having such a nice studio inhibits the way you work, as you're so conscious of not wanting to make a mess”.

It is possible to overcome the risk of having too beautiful a bespoke shed, however, as the sculptor in CAN's studio says: “I damaged the floor in the first week, so now I just don't worry about it.”