



# CAMBER SANDS CALLING

Marta Nowicka has transformed a former coastguard's cottage in East Sussex into a relaxed retreat from city life, a place to breathe in the ozone, go out on the water, and explore local independent shops and cafés

STYLING & WORDS ALI HEATH/NARRATIVES

PHOTOGRAPHS BRENT DARBY/NARRATIVES



LEFT Marta has transformed a former derelict, end-of-terrace, beach cottage into a chic but low maintenance space that offers a peaceful retreat from busy city life  
 ABOVE Marta and her border terrier Anka enjoying the sunshine on the East Sussex coast from the Coastguard's Cottage garden

Working as an award-winning interior architect, Marta Nowicka is no stranger to reimagining quirky, rundown spaces, and this Sussex cottage which she shares with her photographer partner, Voytek Ketz, and son Lucas, is no exception. One of nine former coastguard's cottages built in 1875 at Jurys Gap, it is situated by the water's edge a few miles away from Dungeness and a short stroll from Camber Sands Beach. 'The retreat is located next to fenced off MOD land and a quiet nature reserve – uniquely wild and rugged, and home to rare flora and fauna found only in low-pollution areas,' says Marta. 'Just a 90-minute drive from London, we arrive, breathe in the fresh air and immediately feel like we have escaped. The tranquil setting and sea views offer a powerful antidote to city life: otherworldly, remote and wonderfully all-consuming. It brings a very different dimension, and I always have an immense sense of being nowhere and everywhere at the same time.'

Having spent years searching for a





derelict coastal property in East Sussex, Marta discovered the place by chance on Rightmove in 2011 and within three days had agreed to purchase. 'The house was in a terrible state of disrepair – stripped bare and graffitied throughout; while outside it resembled a metal scrapyard, full of old vandalised cars, buses and boats. Despite the chaos, it felt like an opportunity, with many original features and nooks,' explains Marta.

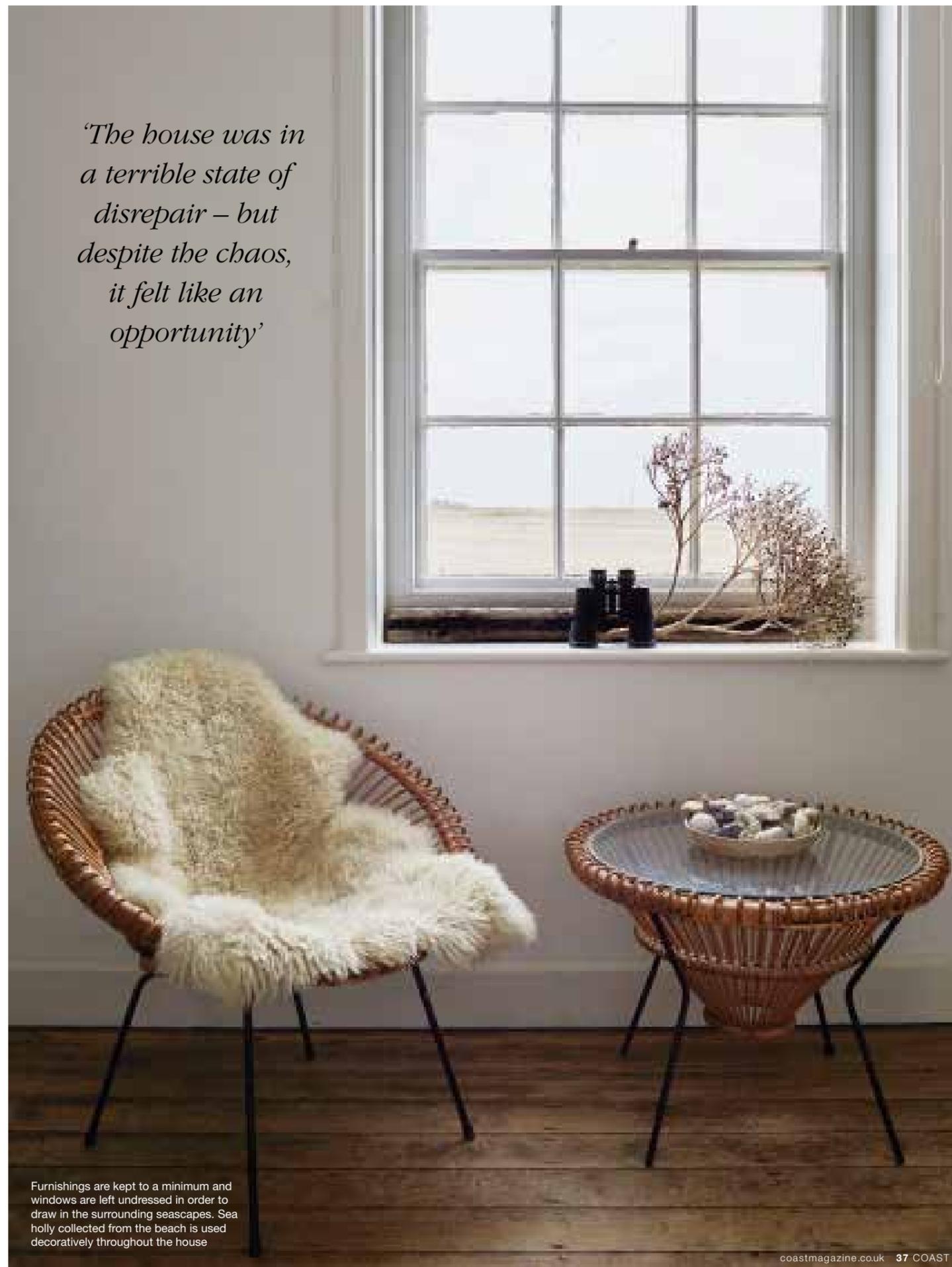
Bespoke timber windows were added, the lower ground floor damp-proofed and new bathrooms installed. Some walls were clad with insulation and tongue-and-groove, while others have been stripped, and authentic raw plaster walls were left untouched. The renovating involved creating two new sleeping levels: a master bedroom in the former attic cavity, reached via a white-washed, ship-like staircase complete with rope handrail. A nautical nod, but in true Marta style, the lack of copious seaside clichés feels



ABOVE & BELOW Transformed with old railway sleepers and rusty planters, Marta has created an enchanting deck and herb garden that is soon to be extended. Inclement weather has a rich rusty patina to the old zinc planters in the garden



*'The house was in a terrible state of disrepair – but despite the chaos, it felt like an opportunity'*



Furnishings are kept to a minimum and windows are left undressed in order to draw in the surrounding seascapes. Sea holly collected from the beach is used decoratively throughout the house

In the sitting room the antique clock was a salvage find by Marta's father and the leather chair is from Alex MacArthur Interiors in nearby Rye



ABOVE An old wooden bowl and worn tablet, reminiscent of driftwood, host a collection of shells and stones found on the beach. The wooden tablet was sourced by Marta from a souk in Marrakech BELOW The industrial-style stainless steel kitchen from Ikea is a nod to the utilitarian history of Coastguard's Cottage

refreshingly pleasing. Two further bedrooms are accessed down time-worn, red and green painted treads to the lower ground floor – making five bedrooms in total.

### VINTAGE CHARACTER

Throughout, the fireplace surrounds were removed and exposed original brickwork cavities now connect the interior to its more rugged surroundings. 'The cottage is set amongst a constantly changing landscape of extremes,' Marta says. 'We have a wonderful microclimate, but when the weather turns and the wind howls the whole house moves and creaks, as if in the eye of the storm. In the midst of winter, the sitting room comes into its own and we enjoy panoramic views out to sea, comforted by the warmth of an open fire.' The slightly battered aesthetic feels lived in and includes many favourite pieces: a leather chair from Alex MacArthur Interiors, an old salvaged clock, French antique shutters and a treasured 1950s wicker chair and table set – one of Marta's first ever antique finds.

Spaces are hard-wearing and have been thoughtfully designed to minimise upkeep. The industrial-style, stainless steel kitchen from Ikea is a nod to the cottage's utilitarian history. Completed on a tight budget, open kitchen shelves are full of inherited pieces and treasured gifts, ➤➤➤





including a collection of Marta's father's fishing, hunting and mushroom-collecting baskets. 'My late father left me a small amount of money that I put towards purchasing the cottage – the design is a tribute to his eclectic style,' she says. Marta's father was Leszek Nowicki, one of the main architects on the design team at Ronald Ward who worked on London's iconic Millbank complex, and throughout the house are several key pieces of his that remind Marta of her childhood – the rustic, medieval dining table a particular favourite. Surrounded by pale pink plaster walls, the dining room is home to lively suppers, under the soft light of a striking chandelier, that previously graced the Bloomsbury offices of *The Spectator*. The limited-edition, Bridget Riley artwork, commissioned for the London 2012 Olympics, is reminiscent of nostalgic seaside deckchairs; while the Antelope chairs are Ernest Race originals, designed in 1951 for the Festival of Britain.

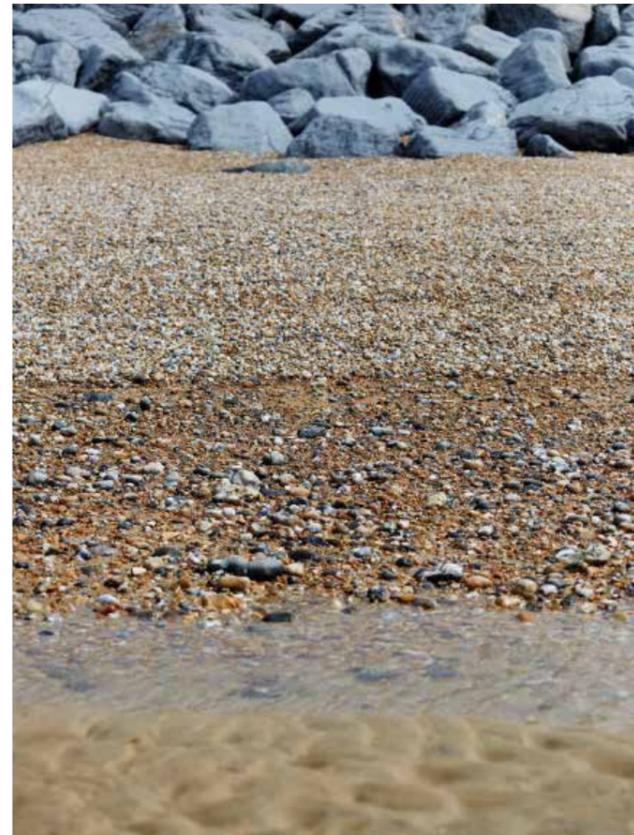
### GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

'When I am in London I am head down with work. When we arrive here, there are so many reasons to be out enjoying nature – it helps reset the balance,' says Marta, smiling. 'Voytek is a keen sailor and, for both of us, the draw of the ocean is strong. Last November I shared my daily sunset swim with a playful seal – she was



ABOVE LEFT & ABOVE Marta has scraped back layers of paint and wallpaper to reveal original, soft pink plaster walls. The time-worn medieval dining table was given to Marta's father by a client, and the glamorous chandelier once graced the Bloomsbury offices of *The Spectator* magazine OPPOSITE The Antelope chairs are originals from Ernest Race and were designed in 1951 for the Festival of Britain BELOW The original paint and weathered patina of the red and green basement staircase was left as it was by Marta to reflect the passing of time





LEFT The design of Coastguard's Cottage is a tribute to Marta's architect father's eclectic style, she says. Throughout, the fireplace surrounds were removed and exposed original brickwork cavities now connect the interior to its rugged surroundings ABOVE The tongue-and-groove clad master bedroom, designed by Marta in the former eaves of the cottage, enjoys views of both sunrise and sunset from the new Velux windows as well as views out to the beach BELOW The family love to escape to the coast for some rest and relaxation. 'The draw of the ocean is strong,' says Marta

really curious and swam so close I could see her eyes and whiskers. It was a very magical experience. Our days are spent outdoors fishing, paddle-boarding, kayaking, collecting natural finds and enjoying evocative moonlit beach walks. We are all big foodies and love to go shrimping and clamming – nothing beats homemade bouillabaisse. Foraged samphire is delicious with local saltmarsh lamb and regardless of the weather, we are always barbecuing on the deck.' Transformed with old railway sleepers and oversized rusty planters, Marta has created an enchanting deck and herb garden that is soon to be extended, following the purchase of some neighbouring land.

The family love to walk from the house along the beach to Camber, across the estuary and through the sheep fields to Rye. Knoop's Chocolate is a favourite stop-off for Lucas, and Marta is always drawn to Rye's many furniture haunts, including Wishbarn Antiques, Pale &

Interesting, McCully & Crane and Alex MacArthur Interiors. Slightly further afield, they visit the Dungeness Snack Shack for lobster rolls or crab salad, and follow that with a look around Derek Jarman's iconic garden at Prospect Cottage on the beach.

In the past 20 years, Marta has built up an impressive personal portfolio of beautifully renovated properties including St John's in Rye, Old Street in London, and the renovation of a Dalston garage into a family home. Her much sought-after homes are all available to rent online at DOM Stay and Live – a unique boutique property rental company that also includes a collection of covetable spaces by other leading architects, interior architects and designers. For Marta though, her own coastal cottage in a quiet corner of rural East Sussex is the most beguiling.

**To rent Coastguard's Cottage or to commission Marta Nowicka for bespoke interior architecture projects, visit [domstayandlive.com](http://domstayandlive.com).**

