

Town and country

Do people recreate their urban style in their rural retreats? **Lisa Freedman** reports on the difference between country homes and London town houses

Portraits by James Winspear



Opposite from left: Interior designer Juliette Byrne, by her Fulham fireplace; her London drawing room was planned around paintings by her mother, using sharp splashes of warm colour. A gilded, wrought-iron sunburst mirror in her town house is used to sculptural effect above Juliette's desk
This page: A view into the open-plan kitchen-dining room of her fisherman's cottage by the sea. The boat-themed décor was inspired by the American East Coast.

Photographs (this page): Dan Duchars



For those fortunate enough to own a second home, Friday evenings can mark the start of a weekly adventure to another world, somewhere to enjoy not only fresh air and long walks, but an alternative aspect of their taste and personality.

Juliette Byrne is one of London's most successful interior designers, but she's always had a passion for mucking about in boats. For several years she and her daughters – Celia, 19, and Bonnie, 16 – lived on a barge on the Thames. But even when Juliette decided she needed a more conventional mooring, she was unprepared to relinquish her love affair with water. Now, weekdays are spent at her busy Chelsea practice and Fulham terrace house, weekends at a cottage near the Sussex coast.

With her designer's hat on, Juliette feels her town house is an expression of the new mood

in urban interior design. "Five years ago everything was neutral, with natural linens and shades of white. Now everyone is yearning for something more punchy and invigorating. In a recession, you need to come home to somewhere that will lift your spirits."

In the drawing room of her town home, she's used strong accent colours of turquoise and lime to complement the paintings by her mother which ornament the walls; while in the master bedroom the palette is slightly more gentle, but equally upbeat.

Elsewhere, the house is designed to meet the demands of the urban teenager. "My daughters have hundreds of friends, so I created a number of spaces for entertaining: a big kitchen, a chill-out area and a more formal space. In their bedrooms, I've used strong, funky colours – bold florals and zebra prints – which are quite edgy. It's all light-hearted and fun."

The mood at her tiny fisherman's cottage, on the other hand, is relaxed, social and shipshape, with white painted floorboards, leather sofas and vintage flags: "It's quite a naïve style, like the East Coast of America."

In the country, the Byrne family enjoys off-duty time that combines the best of British village life with plenty of activity on the ocean waves. "Our cottage is in the centre of the village and people are constantly coming and going," says Juliette. "I love the informality, but one of my main considerations when designing a second home was maintenance. This house is completely lock-up-and-leave."

American-born literary agent and publisher Mary Hare spent some years living in Sydney with her husband and young daughter, before resettling in the UK in a red-brick mansion block in South Kensington. Although the return to the capital undoubtedly provided