

Garden room trends for summer 2022

Chic cabins, pimped pods and the shepherd's hut 2.0 — how the customisation trend is redefining our outside spaces. By Jayne Dowle

Are you still journaling in a humble shepherd's hut like it's 2017, or have you upgraded to a post-Covid "artistic and emotional escape room"?

The all-weather outdoor living room/annexe/shed (delete according to your aesthetic or budget) took a great leap forward in the pandemic. A garden room was the answer to all of life's problems, along with a fire pit or brazier on the patio, an outdoor sofa and blankets. This summer, however, outdoor rooms are being tweaked to suit a new definition of luxury.

"What was once a pod is now a redefined space," says Tristen Read, the owner of Read Garden Rooms, who has seen a surge in requests for "artistic and emotional escape rooms". "It's going beyond garden offices and stepping into rooms that ground you, surrounded by nature where distractions are minimised and concentration boosted," he says.

Martin Orton was ahead of the curve. He built a rustic retreat in his Winchester garden during the first lockdown. "I like the pioneering American vibe," says the entrepreneur, 49. "My wife had bought me a book called *Your Cabin in the Woods* [a 1940s classic by Conrad E Meinecke], and that gave me the idea for the A-frame."

The £50,000 result, called "the Climbers Cabin" (Orton is



Garden furniture by King, from £2,800, in a bespoke garden room

an avid rock climber), built from Douglas fir, sits in woodland by a chalk stream that runs through his one-acre garden. Orton dug 1.5m into the riverbed to create a cold plunge pool boxed in by oak frames.

"It's my Wim Hof plunge pool," he says, referring to the ice-water evangelist. "The stream is spring fed so the water stays at 7C. I go in every other morning and it's lovely. I can do two or three minutes in the winter, and about six minutes in the summer. It's good for the immune system."

It is possible to get a basic timber summerhouse for less than £1,000, but Orton opted for a more designer approach. The architects AR Design Studio drew up the plans for a 376 sq ft dwelling that sleeps four — and

planners gave it the green light because, even though it's in the South Downs National Park, it looks natural and hovers above the ground, leaving plants and wildlife alone. But Orton built it himself, spending eight months over weekends and evenings, aided by friends and relatives. The 150mm roof insulation keeps things warm, boosted by a mirror that doubles as an infrared heater, designed by Surya Heating. For sustenance, there's an outdoor kitchen with a wood fire on the wraparound deck.

Now that it's finished, they use it for WFH, writing and hosting house guests, and plan to let it on Airbnb — it's ideal for hikers on the South Downs. "We sit there on the deck in the evening, and have meals out

there,” Orton says. “When you sleep there, you can hear the river outside. It’s lovely.”

All over the UK, sheds are getting swanky makeovers and pods are being pimped. Today, a shepherd’s hut like the one owned by the former prime minister David Cameron — who spent £25,000 on one for his Cotswolds garden — is all about the upgrade. “For ultimate appeal, choose double doors on the long side of the hut like French doors or double stable doors,” says Paul Bennett, founder and director at Red Sky Shepherd’s Huts. “This makes the shepherd’s hut feel more like a summer garden room. Also, not having a door on the end allows for a pull-out sofa bed at one end of the hut and an office space at the other end.”

Kitchenettes, shower rooms, cloakrooms, soundproofing for music rooms and cinema rooms, remote control for lighting, climate control, strengthened floors for high-tech gym equipment, internal spa facilities such as hot tubs, saunas and plunge pools, and impressive energy-efficient specification such as air-tightness, super-insulation and sedum living roofs are all on the lengthy wish list for ambitious clients. So says Martin Lawson, founder and director of Swift Garden Rooms.

The Cheshire-based family company offers an anthracite-clad option using SIP (structurally insulated panel) technology. “We’re seeing increasing demand for garden room projects with a budget of over £50,000 and often in

Is your pad a post-pandemic cliché?

● **Micro-organising your pantry** Transferring all your dry goods from packets into hand-labelled boxes and jars was something to do in lockdown. Now it’s beginning to look more like a neurosis than a new leaf.

● **Pot plants** There’s no shame in admitting you went too far. Stuck at home, you had time to pamper these princessy little parasites. Now you need to go on holiday. Wave bye bye to your fiddle-leaf fig family and tell them Darwin knows best.

● **Too many cushions** The signature living room zhuzh of the past couple of years has been to add another frilly pillow. You “shopped the drop” as new ones were posted on the cool Instagram accounts. Now your couch looks like a super-comfy Covid trope. Chuck them out.

● **Online shopping disasters** The pineapple/flamingo print looked fantastic when you were shopping online; it cheered you right up and worked brilliantly as a backdrop to your 2021 Teams meetings. Now it screams Covid deco . . . and it must go.

● **The puppy** Cockapoo or labradoodle or perhaps a shihpoo . . . it’s changed your life for the better, while filling your kitchen with chewed Nylabones and cheap grey blankets from the online pet superstores. Keep the canine, buy better toys and throws.

● **Homemade candles/pots/quilts/macramé** For craft, the pandemic was the best of times and led to the worst of design crimes. Take an honest look at your handiwork. Are you due a trip to the tip?

● **The multitasking spare room** It’s time to extract the Peloton, dismantle the makeshift workstation, put the sewing machine in the attic, and get it ready for guests again.

● **The pandemic kitchen garden** You got into growing your own. New shoots were an uplifting reminder of the natural world, and the prospect of feeding the family with cut-and-come-again salad leaves was heartwarming. Yes it’s a cliché, but one to nurture.

excess of £100,000,” Lawson says. He’s finding that clients want their outdoor living space to work well with natural features and alongside specific planting schemes, ponds and swimming pools.

The garden building you eventually choose will speak volumes, not only about your

financial clout but your levels of taste and discernment. Do you really want to know what an oval Farmer’s Cottage Summerhouse Pod, yours for £13,995 from John Lewis, says about you?

Additional reporting by Hugh Graham ■

