

# The dizzying rise of cabin fever

Twinkly lights, log piles and faux furs: as we seek winter comforts, why cabincore is the hot new look. By Hugh Graham

The flight to the countryside has been the property story of the pandemic, but for those of us still trapped in cities there is still a decorative escape route: the rustic, cabin-in-the-woods aesthetic.

First known as “cabin porn”, it gained buzz in 2009 when a city-slicker tech executive who longed for the simple life started posting images of rugged wilderness shacks on a Tumblr account that gained a mass following. In 2015 he followed up with *Cabin Porn*, a coffee-table book that fetishised back-to-the-land photographs. It was aimed at urban hipsters, aka lumbersexuals, who took to donning checked flannel shirts and beards, chopping firewood and spending weekends in faux-woodsy splendour at Soho Farmhouse.

*Cabin Porn*'s successor movement, #cottagecore, took off in 2020 during the pandemic (more than 1.15 million posts on Instagram so far). It has a similar aesthetic, but is gentler and more feminine: cottages as opposed to log cabins, baked goods, wildflowers in ceramic jugs, floral prints, crafts, embroidery, quilts, knitted



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jumpers, twig baskets and berry picking. Its popularity was fuelled in the summer by the pop star Taylor Swift, who released an album called *Folklore* accompanied by images of her in a forest and cable-knit jumper (one track was called *Cardigan*). But the pandemic was the biggest spreader of the trend: in America every time the Centre for Disease Control reported spikes in Covid, #cottagecore activity soared on Tumblr.

As winter closes in and the pandemic gets worse, the appeal of hunkering down, battenning the hatches and getting cosy has never been stronger. But the #cottagecore look feels a bit summery and whimsical for this dark winter, and *Cabin Porn* feels a bit 2015. Enter the latest back-to-basics hashtag: #cabincore (9,900 posts and

growing). Whatever the name, this comforting aesthetic is now front and centre in popular culture: ITV2 launched a reality dating show this week called *The Cabins*. A pandemic replacement for *Love Island* (the reality show set in sun-drenched luxury villas in Spain or South Africa) the new show takes place in the woods near Carlisle, Cumbria, with couples trying to find their soulmates in timber chalets with names like Beaver's Burrow, Otter's Pocket and Stag's Mount. Decor includes checked red and black blankets, tartan wallpaper, stacked log piles, woodburners, fake-fur throws, sheepskin rugs and lots of candles.

Over on Netflix the backwoods romance *Virgin River* is trending; on Instagram David Beckham is frequently posing in flat cap and shepherd's





## Get the cabincore look

**The throws**

Your secluded hut in the woods may speak of the simple life but you will not need to rough it. Make the rustic interior cosy with blankets in natural fibres such as lambswool or alpaca. Throw in a cashmere or two from [de Le Cuona](#) if you feel flush. Choose a natural colour palette and avoid jazzy patterns. Traditional weaves work well, such as [Mourne Textiles](#)' sumptuous throws in plaid, herringbone or flecked tweed.

Tolly McRae's [merino herringbone](#) throws come in a palette of natural colours and start at £65, 148cm x 190cm. The Chalk Check Luxury Alpaca Merino Mix costs £145.

Bronte by Moon's [National Trust](#) collection is inspired by country houses including Snowhill and Montacute. In Shetland wool, 140cm x 185cm, £85.

[Reversible lambswool check](#)

throws from [Johnstons of Elgin's Heritage Collection](#) are available in 12 muted colourways, 190cm x 140cm, £245.

**The lights**

Steer away from anything too delicate or decorative. Avoid a blast of illumination from overhead, and focus on creating pools of light that dwell on the delicious textures of your timber cabin. The best lighting style for a log cabin is "soft industrial". Think designs with a professional purpose, reinvented in more opulent materials. In a compact space keep surfaces as free as possible, so consider substituting small pendants for bedside lamps. And use outdoor lights indoors — their sturdiness and simplicity are spot on for cabin chic.

Original BTC's [bone china Hector medium dome wall light](#), in white, casts a gentle

glow and contrasts beautifully with timber walls, £135.

Robust and handsome, this die cast [brass bulkhead light](#) is from [Davey's](#) marine-inspired range, £245.

**The sheepskin**

Fantasies of self sufficiency in the wilds must feature hunting and gathering — even if it's only tracking down a nice rug on the internet. Those who are doing Veganuary, look away now, because sheepskin is the perfect partner to the cabincore look, whether a fleece-covered hot water bottle or a Mongolian lambskin cushion. Good fake fur alternatives include [Oka's Grizzly](#) throws, or the [Relaxwell](#) faux fur heated throw from [Dreamland](#). Available in [zebra](#), [leopard print](#) and [Alaskan husky](#), 160cm x 120cm, £99.99.

crook. And it seemed fitting that *Last Christmas*, the 1984 Wham! single, with a video filmed by the fire in a snowbound Alpine chalet, finally made number one in the charts last week, the ultimate security blanket in bleak times.

"It feels like *The Cabins* is very well timed," says Paul Houston, the programme's production designer. "We will be settling down. I can't imagine anyone going anywhere for the next six to eight weeks. I think people will warm to the interiors.



Huts built by [British Log Cabins](#) have underfloor heating

Bringing in lots of textures and patterns was key, furs and rugs you can wrap yourself in and feel cosy. Lighting is important too: layering and depth. Lots of

twinkle has to be involved. We used Tungsten lighting and fairy lights to help set a mood at night. It is really visually aspirational."

So why in the 21st century does the world suddenly want to pretend they live in *Little House on the Prairie*? Escapism is the most obvious answer — from technology, cities, pollution and stress. Cabins also represent a flight to safety, with their sturdy walls and crackling fire. There is a nostalgia for a simpler time in a world that is increasingly





dystopian, and a craving for authenticity in the age of the virtual. The aesthetic also ties in with environmentalism (living in a cabin reduces your carbon footprint); self-sufficiency (the grow-your-own movement is on the rise); and a backlash against materialism: all you need to be happy is a cabin in the woods. Cabincore is nothing new, of course: the natural leanings of the Arts and Crafts movement, the naturalist Henry David Thoreau and the romantic poets were all a reaction against industrialisation and modernity. The only difference is that now we are using modern technology to consume our primeval fantasies through Instagram and online shopping.

And these days rustic cabins are not always so rustic: British Log Cabins, a Shropshire-based company, builds handcrafted chunky timber dwellings out of Douglas fir and western red cedar logs for £200,000 to £300,000, complete with underfloor heating, triple glazing and full connectivity, as well as log home offices from £12,000. “We are busier than ever with Brexit and the pandemic driving the staycation movement,” says Daniel Waring, its director, who says sales have tripled since 2015, when the *Cabin Porn* book came out, and inquiries have risen 24 per cent since the pandemic. “Being in and around nature, in a natural log building, is calming for people. Timber buildings, the aroma and feel, are sensual. The log-home movement of late is in step with the rural escapism



Reclaimed beams and cladding from Indigenous  
CHRIS TERRY

trends of the past decade: pods, yurts, Scottish bothies.” In reality, few of us would last long if our hardcore cabin fantasies became a reality. Yes, the rustling trees and birdsong would be soothing, but cabincore life is lonely — and a hassle. In 1846 Thoreau waxed lyrical about roughing it in the bush in his book *Walden: Life in the Woods*, but it turns out he

was only a 20-minute walk from the family home, where his mother would sometimes do his laundry and give him food.

For modern-day log cabin fans inspired by Instagram, retreating to the wilderness during a pandemic without broadband and Ocado might be a step too far. Here is how to embrace the backwoods look without having to go off grid. ■

