

Homes: the lighthouse

Luke Matthews says that as soon as he saw the lighthouse he wanted to live in it.

"I was looking for a place in the country where I could concentrate on my writing without any disturbances. Having become a successful novelist I was getting fed up with people ringing the doorbell, so the lighthouse was the perfect answer."



It definitely prevents passers by from popping in - the lighthouse is in a remote part of the country. There's a rough track from it that leads to the main road, and the nearest village is a 15-minute drive away so it's certainly secluded. Does Luke feel isolated or lonely?

"Not at all, I work much better alone and enjoy my own company. I prefer to work with the phone switched off too - I just don't want anything to disrupt my train of thought. If I feel the need for some company I can always drive to the local pub or pop back to London for the weekend. Besides, the views from the lighthouse are inspirational. I get up early to see the dawn and love watching the sun setting over the sea too. Of course I have a 360-degree view so whenever I look up from my work there's a beautiful scene. I especially love watching the thunderstorms and lightening, luckily the lighthouse is very solidly built because it can get very windy at times!"

In fact the walls of the lighthouse are made from granite and the glass in the windows is one inch thick, enabling it to have stood for over one hundred years.

"People think I live in a quiet place but this isn't true. Not only is the wind quite noisy but there are also lots of sea birds like gulls that squawk and screech all day. The waves crashing on the rocks can be deafening too but I like that. When it's calmer I scramble down and do a bit of fishing - there's nothing nicer than eating freshly caught lobster and crab. I sometimes see whales, occasionally dolphins and quite often seals playing near the rocks. I love all this and I'm finding it increasingly difficult to return to London - I just want to be here with the smell of the sea and the wind in my hair."

Inside the lighthouse it is surprisingly comfortable, and a lot quieter too. The front door leads into the largest of the circular rooms - the kitchen cum dining room. Luke explains that the gas stove is on because he's baking some bread. We climb the spiral staircase and reach the living room which has a number of large armchairs, hundreds of books and no TV. "I didn't see the point in hanging any pictures - the wonderful views are enough to look at!" Next floor up is a bedroom and small bathroom, and right at the top is the study. Here there are a lot more books, a computer sitting on a small table and, of course, the same wonderful views west across the sea and east towards the countryside.

"My only regret is that it's too windy to grow vegetables, but the rabbits would eat everything anyway. Otherwise for me this is simply the best place in the world!"

Homes: the narrowboat

Nicole Fayolle has been living on her narrowboat for almost five years now. She bought it in Belgium and has been travelling around the canals and waterways of Europe ever since.



"I love travelling so when a friend suggested I bought a narrowboat it seemed such a good idea - to be able to see lots of different places without having to leave home!" It also means that Nicole can take all her painting equipment with her wherever she goes. "Before, most of my baggage was taken up with my easel and paints and brushes but now I have everything at hand all the time. I love sitting on the deck and painting - and then popping downstairs for a cup of coffee!"

Most of the time Nicole stays overnight in official moorings where water and electricity are provided. Sometimes however, if she finds a nice spot, she'll tie the boat up to a tree. "The countryside in France for example can be very beautiful. There are usually lots of river birds, including herons, and it's wonderfully peaceful. For me it's the perfect place to sit and paint for hours and it's especially nice knowing that I don't have to leave."

The narrowboat, which is called Liberté, is just over 20 metres long and inside the rooms are low and narrow. The small kitchen has a boiler that heats up the radiators ("It can get very cold in the winter so good heating is essential.") and lots of jars of homemade marmalade. There's a small bedroom and a tiny bathroom. Nicole has put most effort into making the living room a nice place to be in. "There are many days when it's just too cold to be outside so I wanted to feel ok about being inside a small space for a long time. Luckily the windows are quite large so there's plenty of light. Otherwise I prefer sitting up on the deck here with Candy." At the mention of its name a small dog appears, wagging its tail. Does she need the dog for company?

"Not really, the narrowboat community is very sociable - it's rather like a moving village. We keep in touch either by phone or email. When it starts getting colder we arrange to meet in the same place and then book ahead because most of the winter ports all have waiting lists. We then stay there together until the spring. I would say that most of us stay about five or six months, it adds some continuity to my life and also helps to make and keep friends. However, I do like dogs and having Candy means never feeling alone. She loves the water and is a good swimmer so I never worry about that."

Nicole doesn't spend all day and night on her boat. She has a bicycle and often rides to the nearest villages for provisions. "Coming back with warm, fresh bread is great, and fresh coffee too. I usually cook for myself and love using home grown herbs but it's been difficult growing things on the boat - there really isn't too much space for many pots unfortunately."

Otherwise Nicole is more than happy with her nomadic lifestyle. "My only regret is that I didn't start to do this earlier!"