

To the Lighthouse

— MAGICAL MOMENTS BY THE SEA —



‘Everybody loves that moment when they arrive at a lighthouse,’ says architect Sally Mackereth. ‘The idea of sleeping in a round room in this tower with a view of the sea and the sound of the waves is wonderful. It’s a kind of fantasy.’

Tempted by the idea of working with such a characterful building, but also giving her children a taste of the freedom that she enjoyed as a child, Sally and her family decided to buy this lighthouse in a quiet Norfolk village, where it feels as though time has stood still. The village still has a general store, a post office, a fish and chip shop and a real pub, along with that feeling of liberation that comes only from stepping off the beaten track.

‘We live in London during the week, and urban life can be very restrictive, especially for the children,’ Sally says. ‘When they were little, Julian, their father, and I would bundle them into the car on a Friday night and they would fall asleep on the way to Norfolk as we felt the city peel away. We would all arrive in the dark and then the children would wake up in the morning in the lighthouse. That is really magical.’

Above – A compass dial inside the dome of the lighthouse lantern has been attached to the weather vane on the very top of the tower. This gives not only an internal indication of wind direction but is also an engaging kinetic feature in itself.

Opposite – Sally designed the new lighthouse lantern as an observatory, looking out across the sea. This inviting belvedere features a built-in banquette, concealing a minibar, while the stairs lead up to a sleeping platform on the mezzanine level.





Previous pages – The lighthouse is set back from the beach, with sand dunes helping to protect the tower and the village from the sea. The natural dip in the dunes forms part of a nature reserve and offers shelter when walking and playing outdoors.

Right – The circular sitting room is located on the ground floor in the base of the lighthouse, where the walls, ceilings and sculpted staircase are painted white. Darker elements, such as the banisters and the Jean Prouvé wall-mounted light, stand out all the more against this pale backdrop.

The first lighthouse on this site dates back to the 17th century. It was later rebuilt after a fire and then altered over the years. It stopped serving as a working lighthouse in the Twenties and was turned into a home, while the original lantern was auctioned off and shipped to the Bahamas for fresh service. By the time Sally and her family bought the lighthouse, it had been domesticated, which included the addition of nylon carpets on the stairs, but the original bones were clearly there.

‘It does have a wonderful history going back to Elizabethan times, when there was a wooden tower with a bonfire on the top,’ Sally says. ‘It’s also mentioned in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. We think that originally it was painted red but it was rather a faded, non-colour when we arrived. I think it had been painted white at one point, so we painted the main tower in white with a black base and collar.’

Sally restored the lighthouse in two phases, relishing the opportunity to work on a building so full of stories. She created a ground floor and a single-storey extension holding the combined kitchen and dining room, as well as bathrooms. Warmed by a wood-burning stove, the white-painted dining room flows out onto a deck and into the garden via a set of floor-to-ceiling folding glass doors.

‘I thought that painting things white was a really good starting point here, as it does make it feel like a beach house. There’s something rather beautiful about white floor paint and finishes. Architects do tend to get hung up on the detail of everything but here we just wanted something much more straightforward and needed a home that felt like an easy place to be.’





Opposite & this page – The combined kitchen and dining area sits within the new, single-storey part of the house, which Sally designed. The custom-made kitchen curves around the base of the lighthouse, with white subway tiles forming a suitable backdrop and linking with the whitewashed exterior of the tower above. A substantial skylight draws extra light down onto the worktops. The dining table and chairs are vintage Ercol.



Styling details

— COASTAL LIVING —



CASUAL DINING

The vintage Ercol dining table and chairs in the new part of the lighthouse offer an easy, unpretentious setting for casual suppers. Crisp white china and white napkins make a lovely contrast against the wood and bring a touch of order.



BOARDS & LODGING

In the kitchen, ranks of bread boards double as serving platters and chopping boards. Their organic, textural beauty makes them the perfect choice for the informality of the lighthouse and its coastal location.



COASTAL CRAFT

Part of the pleasure of seaside living is embracing the curiosities and treasures that are a unique part of it. Beach bags, coastal maps and other exclusively maritime delights feel very much at home here.



BEACHCOMBING

Found objects, from rounded pebbles to sculpted shells washed up on the shore, make perfect displays in a lighthouse. Such simple discoveries are a vital ingredient in compositions dependent on a sense of place.



Opposite & above – The master bedroom is located in one of the circular spaces of the lighthouse itself. Pale bed linen complements the white walls and the dramatic steel ceiling, also picked out in white, while simple Venetian blinds dress the windows.

Above right – This small but perfectly formed bathroom sits in the new part of the house. White tongue-and-groove walls bring a coastal aesthetic, while display ledges and shelves help to frame the bathtub. Shaker-style pegs are simple but practical additions.

The round rooms in the tower were updated and converted into a series of family-friendly spaces, beginning with the sitting room on the ground floor. The curving staircase was restored and the banisters stained black, which stand out against the neutral palette used elsewhere. Heading upwards, the children's bedroom features fitted bunk beds, also in white, which lend the space the feel of a ship's cabin. Above the bed in the master bedroom is the sculptural propeller-shaped steel floor plate that helps to support the lighthouse. This, too, is painted white.

'Before we bought the lighthouse, we used to spend family holidays in places like Harbour Island in the Bahamas, where everyone, literally, whitewashes their house at the turn of the season,' says Sally. 'There is such a relaxed and unprecious quality to the beach-house feel and it does have this calm simplicity to it.'



Above & above right – A high shelf placed around the curved wall in the children's bedroom creates a valuable storage and display space for books, seaside treasures and ceramics. A woollen rug adds softness and texture.

Opposite – In a room reminiscent of a ship's cabin, white custom-made bunk beds fit snugly against the curved wall, with storage baskets slotted in underneath, so that not an inch of space is wasted. One of the beds doubles as seating.



Some years after the first phase of work devoted to restoring and extending the lighthouse, Sally decided that she would like to reinstate the lantern at the top of the tower. She designed a steel-framed glass observatory, which manages to feel both authentic and contemporary. Taking inspiration from her children's sketches of the lighthouse, Sally created a new lantern that holds a built-in banquette for best appreciating the open views of the sea. Glasses, cups and a minibar are tucked away within integrated drawers to avoid the long trip back down to ground level.

'The leather banquette has this rather lovely murky green colour that echoes the sea. And then the lantern itself is double-height, so there was also space for a mezzanine at the top with a bed on it, and from there you have a 360-degree view, looking inland as well as across the sea. I always had this burning desire to reinstate the lantern because it did feel, before, as though it was incomplete. Now it's whole again.'

