

INSIDE STORY

Call of the Sea

For Derek Frost, each tide can bring a new wave of irresistible flotsam. Far End Cottage, on the south coast, is the result

Words **Jackie Cole**
Photographs **Clive Frost**



Blue moves: the recently decorated bathroom, left, with a striking tile mural. Above: a mantelpiece with wave-worn red bricks and a Banksia seed pod

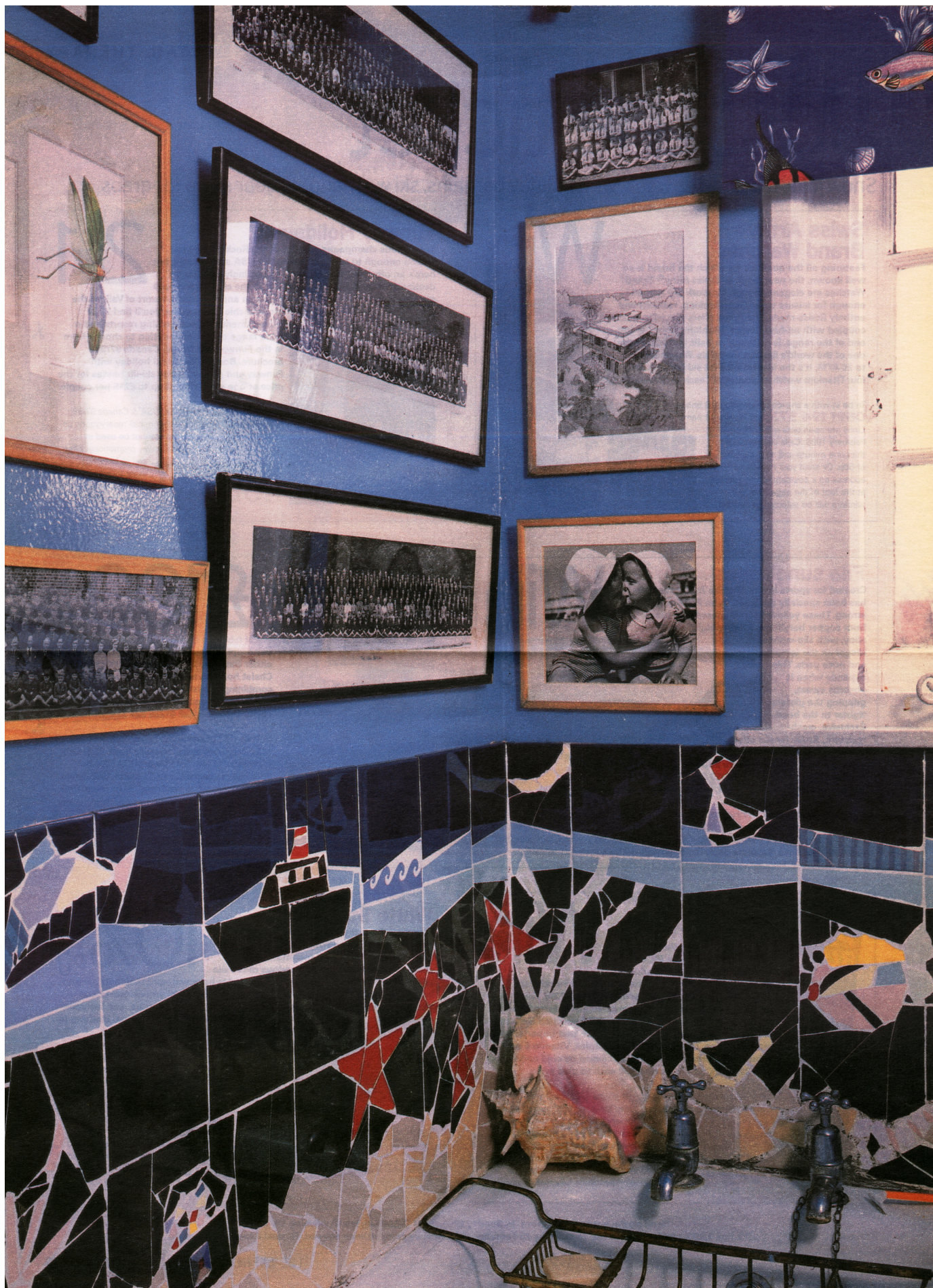
The first time Derek Frost saw Far End Cottage, an empty coastguard's house on the south coast, he was less than impressed. "Living on a tidal mud flat didn't appeal at all," he recalls. He spent much of his childhood in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Far East, so it is not difficult to understand his reaction. For Derek's idea of a beach was not a pebbly shore backed by salt marshes, but a crescent of silver-white sand. That was 20 years ago, though, and he is now well and truly converted.

"If I had to get rid of everything, the cottage would be the very last thing to go," he says firmly.

Far End, as its name implies, is at the furthest end of a row of sturdy brick-built coastguards' cottages, on the



Shelf life: Derek's many excursions abroad have been a rich source of inspiration



Hampshire coast overlooking the Isle of Wight. The cottages were built by the government in 1869 – the first buildings, as it happens, to be constructed with cavity walls – but for many years they have belonged to a private estate, once occupied by its workers and more recently rented out as weekend and holiday homes. In the past the houses, which sit on the banks of a tidal estuary surrounded by low-lying salt marshes, were often accessible at high tide only by boat. Now, much of the land has been drained and turned into a conservation area for wild birds, and is renowned as a twitcher's paradise.

"I can always tell by the number of birdwatchers when there is something unusual," says Derek. "Last autumn I saw a pair of ospreys and there is a colony of black-headed gulls and little terns that always nest here. I have even seen egrets," he says.

For many years Derek worked as an interior designer, and his clients included Edward Heath, whose Georgian house in Salisbury's Cathedral Close he completely redecorated. Now, he teaches yoga and with his partner Jeremy helps to run two gyms in central London.

With such a background one would expect Far End Cottage to make a strong design statement; it does, but in the most minimalist way, for a decorator has not been anywhere near it at all. The walls and carpets are just as they were 20 years ago when Derek moved in.

"It is the same paint as the day I walked in," says Derek. "It now has a lovely patina, so I am loath to repaint it."

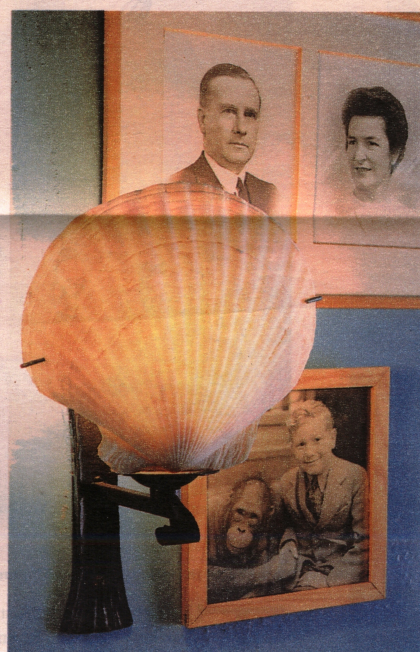
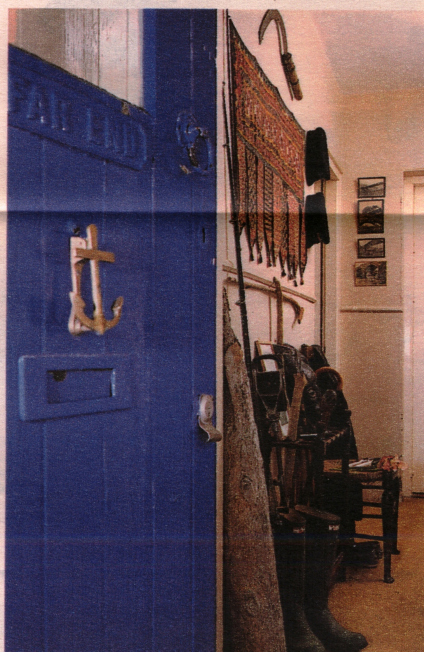
Derek was so fond of the cottage just the way it was that 10 years went by before he changed the curtains in the living room, replacing them eventually with simple beige-coloured linen. He has avoided design for design's sake and the furnishings are extremely simple.

The main living room, which fills most of the ground floor, is dominated at one end by a large fruit-wood table from St Tropez, and old school benches. A neutral background is enlivened with splashes of pattern and colour: sofas are upholstered in beige-coloured madras cotton, there are check cushions in purples and blues and a Balinese ikat sarong has been cut in two, lined and used as a pelmet above the French windows.

A chest made from bleached Douglas fir inset with oyster shells was specially designed for the cottage. There are matching chairs and a table in the small front garden. Upstairs, the three bedrooms are almost monastic with their plain painted walls, striped blinds and Indian cotton bedspreads. Many



Sea world: the living room curtains, above, are linen, and the pelmet is an ikat from Bali, which was simply pinned into place. Below left: Derek's Rajastani textile on the hall wall; right: a word in your shell-like, madam



'The paint on the wall is the same as the day I walked in; it now has a lovely patina'

surfaces are decorated with objects from Derek's many beachcombing expeditions – a wonderfully shaped piece of weathered driftwood or a smooth washed pebble. "They may be of no real value, but I have an emotional attachment to them," says Derek. "I would much rather surround myself with natural objects."

The tiny bathroom has a driftwood frieze by Marc Jennings made entirely from junk objects and scraps of wood washed up from the sea – there is even a green plastic bottle somewhere in it. Every object in the house has a story behind it. Many were found on the

beach; others are souvenirs from Derek's frequent travels abroad. These include a piece of Rajastani mirrored textile that hangs on the hall wall, while the mantelpiece and shelves in the living room are filled with a varied assortment – wooden boxes from Sumatra and a giant seed pod picked from an Australian Banksia tree.

But communing so close with nature can have a down side. "When I unwrapped the Banksia seed pod, it was alive with insects that had hatched on the journey back," laughs Derek. "Heaven knows what I have launched upon the south coast." ■



By: William Pounds 1986