



# THE LIVING IS BREEZY

THEIR HOME is a rambling converted cow-barn and they spend their time picnicking in the dunes and working in their airy studio. Do metalwork artists MIKE ABBOTT and KIM ELLWOOD miss London much? *What do you think?*

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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE **Finlay, Mike and Kim** often stroll along Porth Kidney Sands near St Ives, looking for treasures; the workshop took six months to build four years ago; the front courtyard was bare when they moved in, so they laid some gravel and added chrome planters and beachcombs

Metaltwork artists Mike Abbott and Kim Ellwood live little more than two miles outside the scenic tourist honey pot of St Ives in Cornwall and are within walking distance of their nearest rocky shore. Munching a picnic lunch with only frolicking seals for company wasn't an option at their previous home in Crouch End, north London.

The couple made the move nine years ago, pleasantly 'shocked' to discover they could swap their tiny one-bedroomed garden flat for a four-bed converted cow-barn with a large garden in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – and pocket some change.

What sold it to them was the view over the fields from the back door. 'The dip between the hills is such a welcoming shape,' Mike says. 'You know the sea is there, so not seeing it doesn't matter.' That said, he confesses to Kim that he has his own vantage point. 'You know how often I'm up on the chimney, "readjusting the aerial"? Sitting there, you can see the sea.'

Their home is a granite single-storey former farm building built in 1870, part of which they

have now turned into a holiday let. The doors and sash-window frames have been painted a lovely duck-egg blue, typical of the soft colours in their work, and they've built a huge timber and glass workshop in the garden, which is filled with beach and boot-sale finds.

Style-wise, the couple favour pale, textured, natural materials, with splashes of colour in the accessories. 'We're real magpies,' Kim says. 'We have a lot of things in our home that either friends or we have made. We like pieces that tell a story through their making rather than anything that's mass-produced.'

In the sitting room, they have laid floorboards reclaimed from an old gym – a laborious task that involved sanding off the original court markings. The granite fireplace was already there but the striking knobby hearth was Kim and Mike's creation. They collected white pebbles from a beach on the south Cornwall coast and set them in a lime mix. There has been controversy over the removal of stones from beaches lately but, as Kim points out, 'From time immemorial,



■ Spare time  
 is spent walking  
 the coastal  
 paths with their  
 lurcher Willow

people have used local materials to build. We live here and these are local to us.'

The couple were 'seduced' by the western tip of Cornwall after taking regular holidays in the area. Although they loved London, both grew up by the sea – Kim in Torbay, Mike in Hull – and they found themselves taking more and more out-of-town breaks. They realised that they could work anywhere and that the birth of their son Finlay, now 11, wasn't compatible with enjoying the round-the-clock pleasures of the capital anyway.

Kim and Mike met while making jewellery at a shared workshop in London. Kim graduated from Middlesex Polytechnic and Mike from the Royal College of Art, so both soon became well known to gallery buyers. They have been collaborating on stylised figurative metalwork since 1991 and were quickly selected for the Crafts Council's

index of makers. There are two strands to their work: to pay the mortgage, there's a 'production range' of silk-screen-printed metal brooches, which sell in galleries all over the world for £35-£40; then there are 'purely self-indulgent', handmade, one-off sculptures that can be commissioned. A large piece called *The Collectors* sold at the V&A recently for £5,000.

Humour is a key component of the wonderfully imaginative, long-faced figures they make: 'We like playing with people's expectations,' Kim says. Maritime elements inevitably creep into their work as well because much of their spare time is spent walking along the coastal paths and beaches with their lurcher Willow.

Mike also loves paragliding. 'I can walk out the door and be flying in 15 minutes. It's a great stress reliever. You get an

## KIM AND MIKE'S GUIDE TO BEACHCOMBING

☀️ 'Go expecting to find nothing – then it's exciting when something turns up. And be open-minded about what you pick up to take home – it could look fantastic. We made a bird table from bits of tin and plastic.'

☀️ 'You need to go somewhere remote that doesn't have a lot of footfall or go immediately after the high tide. We find more in the winter, when it tends to be more stormy.'

☀️ 'Sandy beaches aren't brilliant because things drift out again on the tide. The more interesting finds are on pebbly beaches where they get snagged on rocks.'

☀️ 'Finding plastic fishing buoys is great because they have lovely bleached-out colours. Some are from Spain and Portugal. It's nice to think that they've travelled across the sea.'

☀️ 'Fishermen's rubber gloves can be filled with sand and upturned to create a "buried mariner" for the next explorer. It's a fun thing to do with children.'



THIS PAGE, LEFT, ABOVE AND TOP The mosaic faces in the kitchen and Finlay's feet were made by an artist friend, Cleo Mussi, with whom Kim and Mike often swap work TOP LEFT They bought the original G-Plan sideboard at a design show, then gave it a contemporary lift with yellow Formica OPPOSITE Their lurcher Willow is an RSPCA rescue dog. The granite mantelpiece in the living room was already there but the couple added the pebble hearth. The antique cedar coffer under the window was bought at auction because it had Mike's initials carved on it. The colourful wooden figure was found in a shop in Penzance



## KIM AND MIKE'S SHORE THINGS

### Best place for a fish supper?

'It has to be Beck's on Longstone Hill in Carbis Bay (01736 796241). It's traditional, with amazing fish and chips and 1970s décor. We finish off with a knickerbocker glory.'

### Most exhilarating walk?

'Park at Wicca Farm [a few miles west of St Ives] and walk down the valley to Towednack Quae. There's no beach but you can sit on the rocks and watch the seals. Then walk three miles to Zennor along the cliffs. If there's a storm, it's awe-inspiring.'

### Favourite waste of time?

'Once the tourists drift away, we'll go to St Ives on Saturday morning, grab a takeaway coffee and sit on Porthminster beach reading the paper.'

### Favourite time to be on the beach?

'At Gwynver beach [near Land's End], when you get a classic sunset into the sea. We'll have a barbecue late into the night and sometimes camp there, watching basking sharks and dolphins. Idyllic stuff.'

### Best beach find?

'An old clinker-built rowing boat with a big hole in it. We put wheels on it from an old trolley and placed a mobile bar in it, then took it into St Ives with friends on Millennium Eve.'

### Favourite place to sit in the house?

'The workshop. Half the roof is glass so, whatever the weather, it's lovely and light. Any stress disappears once we walk through the door.'

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT The small red figure is one of their silk-screen-printed metal brooches; Kim at work; the green figurative sculpture is called *One Last Cigarette* and plays a tune; Finlay and Willow have ample space to play on Porth Kidney Sands; the 'curtain' was made by Kim from bleached plastic fishing floats found on the beach  
OPPOSITE The workshop is full of the tools of their trade and items they've made, including a nautically inspired clock (top). The putting-green flags (top right) were a boot-sale buy





amazing view of Godrevy lighthouse from 500 feet up and you can stay in the air like a seagull.' He often lands on the beach to join friends for a barbecue. 'Everyone starts clapping,' Kim laughs. 'A little boy came up to him one day and asked, "Are you Superman?"'

Kim sticks to swimming and kayaking. The three of them often paddle off to find a secluded cove. In September, they found themselves among a group of basking sharks. 'They're curious and when they circle you with their two fins sticking out of the water, you grip the boat. But you feel so privileged to see such a huge creature in the wild.'

Beachcombing is a favourite winter pastime – they are particularly fond of plastic items. 'We really respond to all the washed-out colours and they feed into our colour palette,'

says Kim, who made a fishing-float curtain for Mike's birthday from a box of finds. Gathered materials appear in their work, too. 'We've just done a commission for someone in New York and the figure's hat was a pink bottle top, though you wouldn't recognise it because it was washed by the sea,' Kim says.

Although the pair are happy to re-engage with the city buzz when staying with friends in London, they have become hooked on the laid-back coastal lifestyle. 'We've set a trap for ourselves with this house,' Kim muses. 'It's such a perfect setting. We have the space to work, fantastic views, a wildness that we love and other artistic people around.' **COAST**  
For more information, call 01736 798598 or visit [abbottandellwood.com](http://abbottandellwood.com). Details of their holiday cottage, Bay Tree Barn, can be seen at [classic.co.uk](http://classic.co.uk).

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