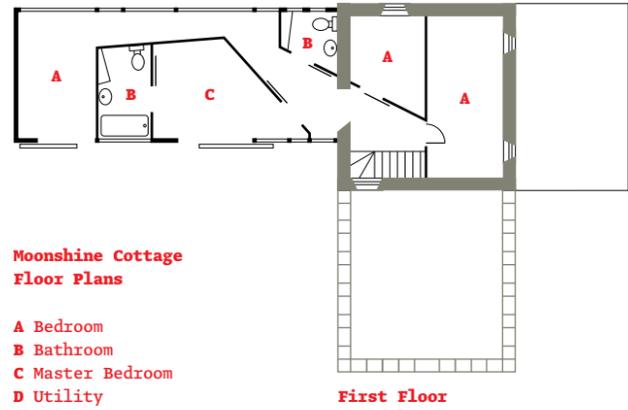
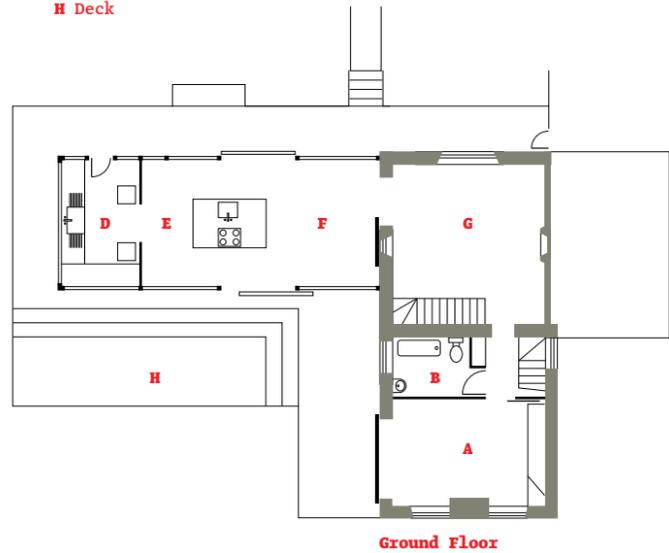


Taylor Made Project: Moonshine Cottage Location: Somerset, England Architect: Piers Taylor

Story by Dominic Bradbury
Photos by Ben Anders
Additional photos by Peter Cook and Chris Tubbs



- A Bedroom
- B Bathroom
- C Master Bedroom
- D Utility
- E Kitchen
- F Dining
- G Living
- H Deck



Architect Piers Taylor's renovation of an old gameskeeper's cottage, complete with a castellated roof and sweeping meadow below, is an exercise in dramatic modernization, one that takes advantage of everything its storybook setting has to offer.

Moonshine is beautifully set in an isolated spot in the English countryside outside of Bath. The dramatic juxtaposition of a stone gamekeeper's cottage and a modern timber framed addition gives the home a quaint, pastoral feel while capitalizing on the dramatic view of St. Catherine's Valley.



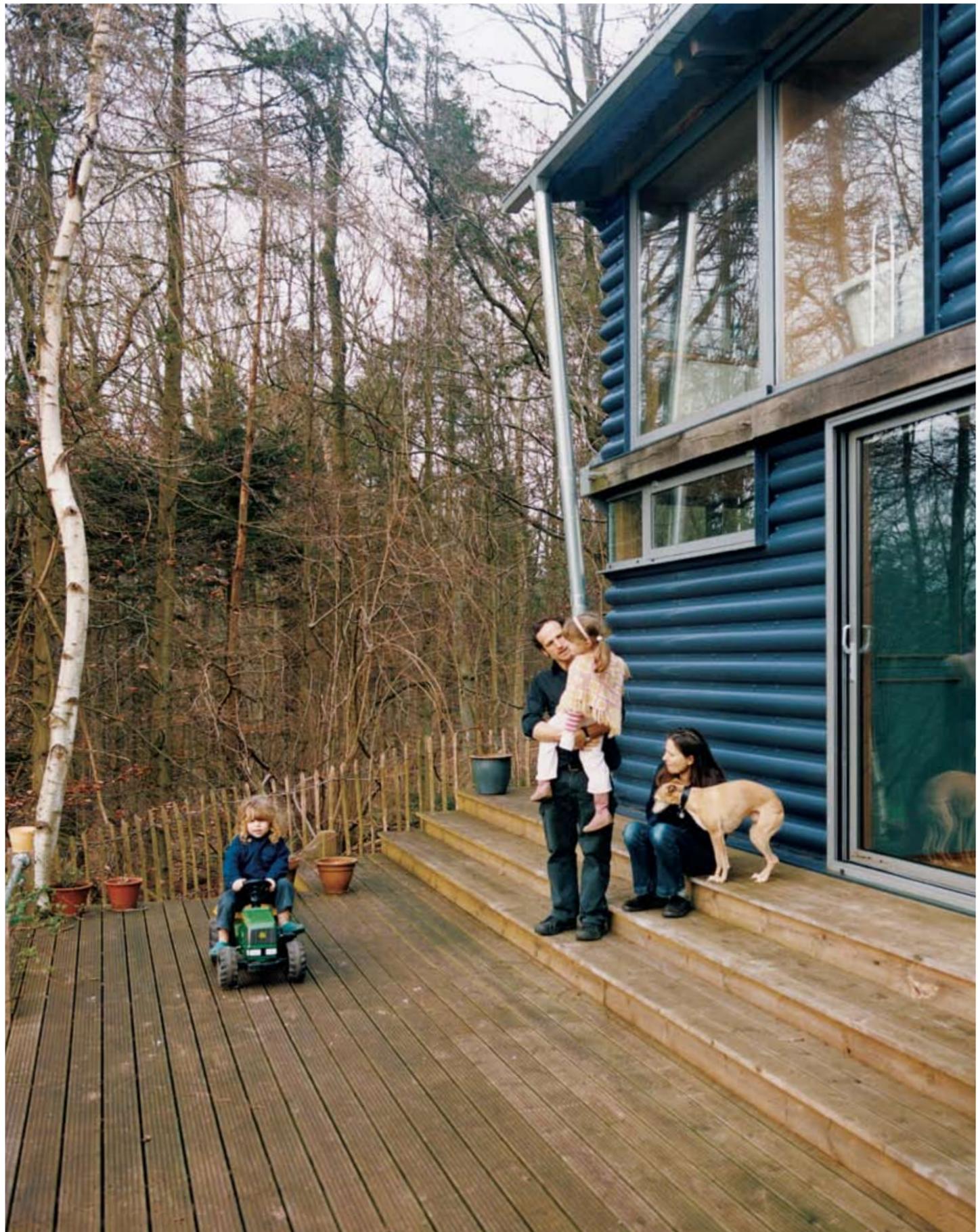
Photo by Peter Cook

The Bath stone of the original building and the timber and glass of the addition form a powerful contrast, yet the combination of natural textures softens the junction. The new part of the house has a transparent quality on

the ground floor which allows light and the eye to pass right through and across the valley beyond. The addition includes a large timber deck at the front (opposite), where the family can lounge and enjoy the lush scenery.



Photos by Ben Anders



“It’s very much a simple, direct way of building that responds to the site, weather patterns, orientation, and the desire to spill outside easily.”

Architect Piers Taylor had always wanted to live off the beaten track. For many years he thought he would end up taking his family from England to Australia—where he once lived and studied—to find a perfect home in the bush, away from everything. But when he came across Moonshine, a former game-keeper’s cottage tucked away in the woods, four miles outside the city of Bath, he knew a continental shift wouldn’t be necessary. With no direct access from the road, the original stone house with a castellated rooftop is reached via a ten-minute walk along a path through the forest and is graced with sweeping views across the green valley spread out below.

“I first went to see the place holding our daughter Lily in a shopping basket when she was just days

The main living room (below) is an open-plan space with an integrated kitchen and dining area. The table, made by Taylor and shrouded in Marimekko, is outfitted with blue Tripp Trapp adjustable children’s chairs by Stokke; the striped rug is from Ikea. In the master bathroom upstairs (above) the Tokyo roll-top bathtub from victoriaplumb benefits from an epic view. **E** p. 242



old,” says Piers, who now has two children with his wife Sue, along with his first daughter Imogen. “I got more and more excited as I walked down the path to the house, and when I opened the gate and saw the setting and the views, I knew I wanted to live there immediately. I was affected by it like no other place I have ever been to. Within five minutes I had offered near to the asking price.”

The family had been living in an end-of-terrace cottage in a nearby village, which they were fast outgrowing. They were thinking about moving to a quieter area, but needed to be near Bath, where Piers has his practice—Mitchell Taylor Workshop—and also teaches. “He came back from seeing the house and told me he’d put in an offer, which is classic Piers,” says Sue. “He had the vision to see the potential of the site. At the time, the path seemed a very long way from the little hamlet where we park our car, but Piers is very good at persuading people, and I soon realized it was definitely the right thing. We moved in during the summer of 2002, and it felt like home very quickly.”

Today the house looks rather different: a striking contrast between the original 1780s cottage and a large timber-framed addition whose tin cladding and banks of glass give the effect of a semitransparent shed opening up to the landscape. The extension not only succeeds in creating a working home for a family of five, but compellingly combines the old stone cottage with the contemporary belvedere. With the Taylors now putting the final touches on the house, Moonshine represents a journey of six years since Piers first saw the property.

After two years of tidying and fixing up the place, Piers began to feel the pressure to expand: Imogen, now 17, and Lily, now seven, were sharing one of the two bedrooms when Sue found out she was pregnant with Archie, now three. “We thought we just had to have more bedroom space,” says Sue. “We went through lots of different plans and looked at different budgets. We started modestly but then decided that if we were going to build down here then it was going to be challenging in terms

of the logistics and access, and so really we should build as much as we could all at once.”

Piers decided that a lightweight raised structure would best suit the site and get around the problems of building on unsteady land liable to subsidence, and went to work developing plans for a two-story pavilion overlooking the valley below. The extension would include two more bedrooms and two bathrooms upstairs, and a large, open-plan living room, dining area, and kitchen on the ground floor.

The family moved out during construction, and, after a month of dealing with difficult contractors, Piers decided to oversee the construction himself. “It was actually incredibly liberating to say I will build my own house,” says Piers. “It was also a catalyst to resign from my old job with a larger firm and set up my own practice, partly to build my own house. I thought it was really important to get involved in the construction, to be hands-on, and to see that it was done right.”

Although Piers was able to find a local builder and a timber-framing specialist to do most of the work, the house’s relative inaccessibility proved to be the greatest obstacle, as it made transporting materials very difficult. Even his relatively minimal, lightweight design would still require concrete foundations, heavy timbers, and thousands of component parts. The team managed to get a truck up through a neighboring field to lay the foundations and used a crane to help erect the green oak frame, but everything else had to come along the path by wheelbarrow. “The most stressful thing about the whole experience was actually coaxing people down that

Beyond the kitchen island is a secondary room (below) that is a pantry, prep area, utility room, and entrance hall all in one. The standard beech-top counters from Howdens Joinery Co. are doubled up to achieve a three-inch thickness, with the rounded edges cut off. In the master bedroom (above) an original Aalto L leg chair from 1953 offers an idyllic spot to tie shoes.



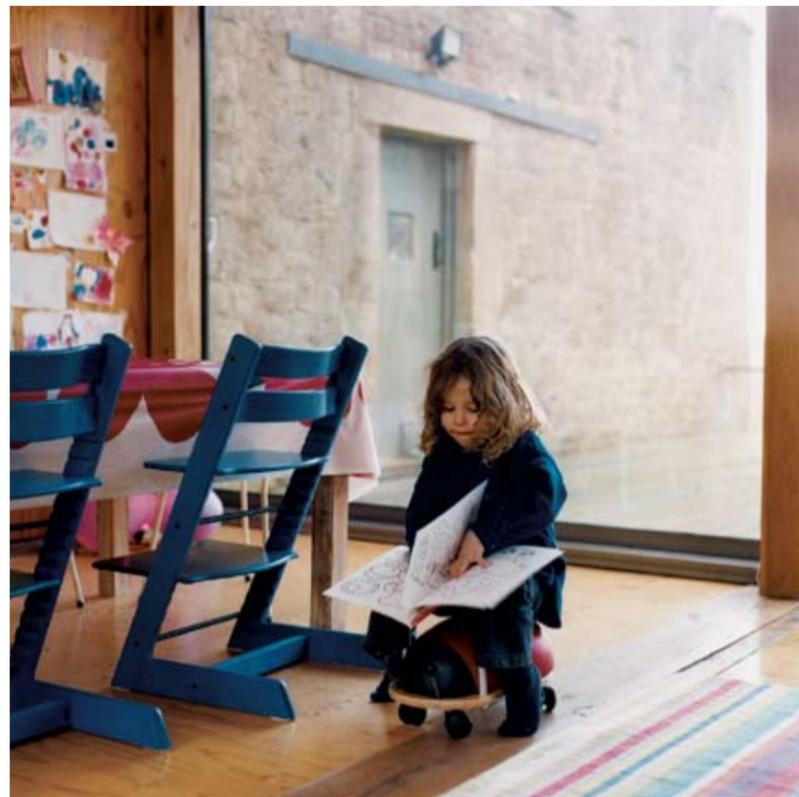
path,” says Piers. “I wouldn’t tell people when we placed orders that we had no proper access because otherwise they just wouldn’t turn up. Getting the oak frame down was the hardest; some sections weigh nearly a ton and had to be brought down on a trolley. It was madness but we managed it.”

After six months in exile, the family moved back into their radically reinvented home on time and on budget. Inside, materials are purposefully raw—echoing the barnlike simplicity of the extension—with plywood sections for the walls and floors and bare plaster ceilings. The whole space is bathed in light upstairs and down, with no need for curtains or shutters given the house’s relative isolation. The family has plenty of space and the world is spread out before them, literally, in the valley below.

“It’s very much a simple, direct way of building that responds to the site, weather patterns, orientation, and the desire to spill outside easily,” says Piers. “It’s also a version of an antipodean pole house, raised up above the ground, which is quite Australian, but here it’s clad in black tin, which is a reference to the black barns down in the valley. It is very rooted in this landscape and the site. I wanted to do a building that was really about this place.”

“The house has become part of our daily rhythm,” says Sue. “It does force you to live according to the daylight hours and the seasons much more than being in a house in the city. You are so close to the elements and nature. We can stand in the kitchen and see deer, minkjack, and woodpeckers and hear the owls at night.”

Even the path has become a positive element of the Taylors’ day-to-day ritual. “There is something magical for us about that walk—every day, through thick or thin, we make that walk,” Piers says. “It feels utterly right to be down in the woods, and [the children] don’t know anything else but Moonshine.” Seamlessly blending the vintage with the modern, Moonshine manages to make the unlikely union seem as natural as its surroundings and—to Piers and his family—nearly as impressive. **►**



Photos by Ben Anders



Piers built the blue cabinetry in the kitchen and living area; the couch is from Ikea. The classic yellow Robin Day chairs from Habitat (opposite) perfectly complement the purple Jack light by Tom Dixon. Piers designed and built the table when he was in architecture school. ■■■
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Photos by Chris Tubbs

