

# SAGA PROPERTY

Edited by David Allsop



## INFRA DIGS

*Often derided and much maligned, many proud owners wouldn't swap them if they won the lottery. Andrea Watson and Zoe Dare Hall consider the merits of three types of property which leave many of the rest of us distinctly underwhelmed*



**Michael and Anne Purcer adapted to a minimalist lifestyle when they moved to their new home**

### THE MOBILE HOME

*It used to suffer from the stigma of 'trailer-trash' lifestyle, but the mobile home is now gaining popularity fast*

With its light vaulted living area and wall-mounted plasma TV above a bespoke linear fire the "Lighthouse" hardly conforms to the common image of a mobile home as, dare we say, a glorified caravan.

"Mobile homes are so far away from that image, and with everyone talking about energy-efficient, low-cost living, it's amazing that more people and councils don't consider them," says the Lighthouse's interior designer Jill Withers, of Wessex Park & Leisure Homes.

"It takes just one week from transporting the home from the factory to making it ready to move into on site. They are timber-framed, so incredibly well-insulated, and the big expanses of window let in lots of light, reducing the need for artificial lighting."

It has taken five decades, and hasn't been helped by the "trailer trash" label applied to people who live on trailer parks in the US (where 8.8 million people live in mobile homes). But the stigma of park homes is diminishing.

"Mobile homes first appeared in this country in the Fifties as a response to the post-war housing shortage, so they started out as distressed housing – which they still are, largely, in the US for migrant

workers," says Louise Wood from the National Caravan Council.

"In the UK, park homes now mainly attract a retirement market and there is growing demand for resale homes, with their appreciation in value tending to follow local house prices – though bearing in mind the fact that you don't own the land, only the home," adds Wood. "So you can pay as little as £40,000 for a park home in some locations, but you'll pay a significant amount more in prime locations in the South East or South West."

Michael and Anne Purcer recently moved into their £280,000 Lighthouse at Warfield Park in Bracknell, Berkshire,

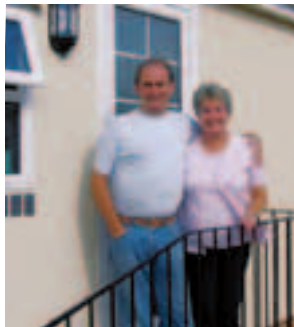
### 'WE WERE STRUCK BY THE AMAZING DESIGN AND THE SENSE OF SPACE'

having downsized from a three-bedroom house nearby, which they sold for £400,000.

"We wanted to live somewhere quieter and liked the feel of Warfield Park having visited a friend there in a more conventional mobile home," says Mr Purcer, 75, a former electronics engineer. "We found a sizeable plot we liked and were struck by the amazing design and sense of space and light in these homes. Several of our friends have moved into modern homes on the park now, all pretty wealthy people who drive expensive cars. The image of mobile homes is certainly changing."

The Purcers have quickly adapted to living in the 52ft by 20ft park home with its 700sq ft garden, having bought it fully furnished and ditched all their





### A mobile home suited the Browns' plan to retire early

◀ old possessions. "We used to have lots of nice paintings, photos and vases, but you can't have any of that now as it's such a modern design that you have to be minimalist," says Mr Purcer.

"It's a very friendly set-up here," he adds. "Most people are quite elderly and take good care of their gardens. There's a community centre on site with jazz evenings and we're within walking distance of the nearest shops."

Some 300,000 people (a figure that is rising by about 20% a year) live full-time in mobile homes – the "mobile" meaning that they are transported in two pieces to the site and fitted together – on the UK's 2,700 parks that belong to the British Holiday & Home Parks Association (BH&HPA).

Some parks are privately run, others are managed by large companies such as Haulfryn or Avondale. While residents own their homes, they pay ground rent for the site.

The Purcers pay £158 a month, a cost that balances out, they say, as the council tax falls within the lowest band.

The typical mobile home-owner is over 50, with some parks setting that as its lower age limit and disallowing children. "It's difficult to get

mortgages on mobile homes so most of the homes we build are for the retirement market," says Wessex's Jill Withers.

"Some people are downsizing into mobile homes, but others upgrade, depending on the location. Upton Glen in Weymouth is a fabulous new park on the cliffs near a beach so a Lighthouse home there costs £285,000."

Heather and Michael Brown downsized from their £250,000 house in Cheltenham to a £160,000 Langdale Plus mobile home, made by Homeseekers Homes, at Cheltenham's Harthurfield Park. They pay £1,500 a year in management and maintenance fees.

"We wanted to move to something smaller so that we can retire before we are 60 and possibly buy something abroad," says Mr Brown, 54, a financial consultant.

"Many retirement flats in specialist developments insist

### 'OUR FRIENDS ARE AMAZED BY THE VALUE FOR MONEY'

that you are at least 55 and conventional houses were escalating in price, so we looked at park homes and were impressed by the setting, with views over open fields, and top-class interior design of the homes.

"Our friends are amazed by the value for money," adds Mr Brown. "There's a stigma that may unfortunately hold people back from considering park homes, but it's a safe, very sociable environment and there is now a buoyant resale market for park homes, with many appreciating in value." ZDH

## THE BUNGALOW

*There may not be much going on upstairs, but the bungalow is a lot smarter than it looks*



### Rhoda McEwan has lived in the same bungalow for 43 years

Bungalows have received a strangely bad press. Those who pass by them on the arterial roads out of town see row upon row of similar-looking low rooflines. What they don't realise is that those who live in them see not roofs but greenery. They look out on to large and mature gardens that they can call their own. They are well separated from their neighbours, with no noisy party walls through which an irksome TV can blare. With space for a garage at the side, and a shed at the bottom of that long sheltered garden, an Englishman's bungalow is his one-storey castle. As a place to move to for retirement – or, let's face it, at any age – the bungalow has a lot to offer.

The single storey means no noisy patter of feet overhead in the day from children or grandchildren, and no creaking floorboards at night. There are no endless trips up and down stairs; no need to leave piles of sheets and towels at the bottom; no risk of falling down them.

Rhoda McEwan has experienced one-level living both as a parent and now as a pensioner. For 43 years she and her husband George

have lived in the same bungalow in a conservation area in Glasgow's South Side, which consists entirely of single-storey buildings. Far from dreary uniformity, almost all are different in design.

"When the children were young, it was great not to have to hike upstairs 10 times a day," says Rhoda. "We also felt it was easier to keep an eye on them – there is definitely a feeling of being safe and secure in a bungalow.

"Now that we are in our sixties we enjoy the low maintenance – it's easier to clean, especially the windows. We're happy that we won't have to consider moving home. If either of us becomes ill we know we can cope because the bathroom and bedrooms are on one level."

From a construction point of view, bungalows also have many advantages. Utilities are easier to install than in multi-storey homes. Safety features are also excellent – fire presents a much lesser threat if you can escape from a window.

Bungalow-dwellers know these things – and so do property professionals.

Dean Markall, marketing director of Hillreed Homes, says: "Brand-new bungalows are well insulated, which means that heating bills are lower, they are very secure and, because the number of pensioners is rising, they are particularly in demand.

"Developers would like to build more of them but the Government's planning policy guidance prevents them – mainly because bungalows take up a fair amount of land. You can provide more housing on a given plot if putting up

## INFORMATION

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