



NCE upon a time (actually, at midday on 6th October 1990), I stepped into a three-bedroomed, semi-detached, ex-council house in Essex and started a personal journey that has grown into a twenty-five year project: To take a standard English dwelling and transform it into a wonderland of inspirational locations, each set in a different time and place.

The process to deconstruct each room back to the brickwork and rebuild from scratch, so that upon completion not one square centimetre of the original house remains (that's inside and out) has taken every penny I have earned, over 35,000 hours (a conservative estimate) and brought 1,821 items from 27 different countries (all personally visited) into this little house. Using only those tradesmen essential to compliance with building regulations (structural, electric and gas), the rest of the skills (from carpentry, bricklaying and garden landscaping to the more esoteric like basket weaving, gold leafing and treehouse construction) have been

learned during its lifecycle. During the project, we've also welcomed over 138 other craftspeople, artists, architects and volunteers who have become immersed into what is now a veritable community.

It was quite a brave undertaking, but made more so because the person who started this quarter-century journey – ie. me – could at the start not even wire a household plug. It has been an oft-repeated supposition that the only reason I began this endeavour was because this lack of knowledge meant I had not the faintest of ideas how impossible the task ahead actually was!

#### Escaping the ordinary

If there is one inquiry that crops up amongst the endless rounds of 'what do the neighbours think?' and 'who does all the dusting?' and that is the question of: 'Why?' This is a difficult one, as it seems to assume that there's a reason to art. I mean, why did Leonardo da Vinci paint the Mona Lisa? But art does have a message, and here I can help a





little. If the project says anything it is that the extraordinary lies within the ordinary – that we can achieve anything our mind's imagine.

But I wasn't sure that this was a completely satisfactory answer. And then I was on a plane to New York and found myself watching Edward Norton and Naomi Watts in *The Painted Veil* (a story of a doctor swapping aspidistras and velvet drapes for the cholera-infested backwaters in 1920s China). And in the opening, while Naomi was explaining how she dislikes being given cut flowers as why would anyone give her dead things), there was the same question: Why place so much effort into something that is going to die? Why put so much effort into something I am going to lose? Why spend so much time? So much money? And for what purpose? It is the question that I have asked myself many times, and know what I'm really asking is: "What is life?"

Everyone should ask themselves this question, and know that there are no wrong answers, that everyone will respond differently. What matters is not what the answer is but that the question is asked. For me, Talliston asks: "Why cannot the whole world be like this?" What's so strange about trying to create a life that is wonderful, that is magnificent and excellent, before the time comes when I must say my farewells. Why place so much effort? Why cut flowers, why scent each area, why travel hundreds of thousands of miles to fetch objects for the house... Why? Why? WHY!

Here is the why. The what and the how. Because that, to me, *is* life. And here only a few days from finishing Talliston, life has never felt more rich, more wonderful – or for me, so alive.

## The Phases of each Room

Phase I: Design, planning, sourcing and gutting room ready for building work.

Phase II: Major building work and structural.

Phase III: Primary furniture and fittings.

Phase IV: Secondary furniture and fittings.

Phase V: Details and hard-to-find objects.



## My Talliston

### MY FAVOURITE ROOM

There are two answers to this, as it depends on how you frame the question in your mind. The favourite in terms of achievement is the Haunted Bedroom, as the woodwork and construction, the plasterwork and fabrics were easily the most complex of the rooms. In terms of the location I love the most it is The Office as I have written three novels in this space and embodies the feeling of escape that Talliston represents to so many people.

### MOST PRECIOUS OBJECT

The first object that I bought that still resides in the house is a pottery wizard in blue clothing and grey hat carrying book. It was one of only a handful I brought from my parents' house into Talliston at the beginning of the project and still own. I must also mention the daily journal I have written for every one of the 9,132 days spent constructing the house and gardens.

### BEST LOCATION VISITED

When I bought the house my world travel had consisted of one flight to Menorca, with the rest of my holidays spent in Cornwall as a child. Now I have extensively travelled across the UK and around the globe. Of these, here's the highlights:

- Best Location: Tibet
- Best Restaurant: The Witchery, Edinburgh
- Best Hotel: Belle Grove Barns, Westhall, United Kingdom.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After the grand open weekend on 18th October, I am taking a complete break for a couple of months to reorganise life after Talliston. Getting back to writing is top priority (especially the fictional story of the house that I've been planning) and sorting out Talliston's future and financial independence.

TALLISTON TIMES				AN ENTIRE PROJECT OVERVIEW							AUTUMN 2015		
#	Common name	Original room	Element	Season	Almanack	Real World Name	Opposition Room	Opposition Element	The Moment	Real World Location	Room scents		
1	The Labyrinth	Front garden	Earth	Autumn	1st Moon: Hunter's Moon (Of Man)	The Old Rectory	The Fountain Courtyard	EARTH vs WATER	Wednesday 13 October 1852 00:01:11	Great Dummow, Essex, United Kingdom	Floral Notes: Floral		
2	The Hall of Mirrors	Hall & stairs	Water	Autumn	2nd Moon: Blood Moon (Of Man)	Palazzo di Ombre	The Haunted Bedroom	WATER vs FIRE	Tuesday 24 November 1992 02:42:16	Sacro Monte di Varese, Lombardy, Italy	Fresh Notes: Fruity		
3	The Watchtower	Living & dining room	Fire	Autumn	3rd Moon: Raven Moon (Of Birds)	The Mead Hall of T'wr-à-Gân	The Starhouse	FIRE vs AIR	Wednesday 14 December 1887 05:11:23	Snowdonia, Wales, United Kingdom	Woody Notes: Dry Woods		
4	The Voodoo Kitchen	Kitchen extension	Earth	Winter	4th Moon: Wolf Moon (Of Beasts)	Manse L'Estrange	The Room of Dreams	EARTH vs AIR	Tuesday 4 January 1954 07:34:36	Bayou St. John, Louisiana, USA	Floral Notes: Soft Floral		
5	The Boathouse	Bathroom	Water	Winter	5th Moon: Snow Moon (Of Nature: Sea)	The Lightkeeper's House	The Treehouse Sanctuary	WATER vs AIR	Sunday 9 February 1986 08:29:06	Tranøy, Hamarøy, Norway	Fresh Notes: Citrus		
6	The Fountain Courtyard	Back garden	Water	Winter	6th Moon: Eagle Moon (Of Birds)	Tigh Sanbraidh	The Labyrinth	WATER vs EARTH	Sunday 26 March 1933 11:45:21	Boyne Valley, County Meath, Ireland	Woody Notes: Aromatic		
7	The Cabin	Garden shed	Earth	Winter/Spring	7th Moon: Storm (Of Nature: Land)	Wiskedjak Lodge	The Office	EARTH vs FIRE	Friday 9 April 1948 13:07:05	Kingsmere Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada	Woody Notes: Mossy Woods		
8	The Starhouse	Conservatory	Air	Spring	8th Moon: Hare Moon (Of Beasts)	The Waystation at Tzu	The Watchtower	AIR vs FIRE	Monday 8 May 2282 14:59:12	Shiretoko Peninsula, Hokkaido Island, Japan	Oriental Notes: Oriental		
9	The Haunted Bedroom	Master bedroom	Fire	Spring	9th Moon: Thunder Moon (Of Nature: Sky)	Ravensbrae Manor	The Hall of Mirrors	FIRE vs WATER	Monday 26 June 1911 17:23:49	Stonhaven, Scotland, United Kingdom	Fresh Notes: Water		
10	The Room of Dreams	Guest bedroom	Air	Spring	10th Moon: Honey Moon (Of Man)	Eish Al Kamar	The Voodoo Kitchen	AIR vs FIRE	Saturday 16 July 1977 18:56:01	Alhambra, Granada, Spain	Floral Notes: Floral Oriental		
11	The Office	Box-room	Fire	Summer	11th Moon: Owl Moon (Of Birds)	Trevelyan Vein	The Office vs The Cabin	FIRE vs EARTH	Monday 5 August 1929 21:18:09	New York, New York, USA	Floral Notes: Soft Oriental		
12	The Treehouse Sanctuary	Attic	Air	Summer	12th Moon: Stag Moon (Of Beasts)	San Phra Phum	The Boathouse	AIR vs WATER	Saturday 25 September 1965 23:17:51	Kampong Phluk, Tonlé Sap, Cambodia	Fresh Notes: Green		
13	The Tipi	Tent	Shadow	Summer	13th Moon: Oak Moon (Tree of Life/Night)	Bah-Has-T'kih	None	SHADOW	Now	Monument Valley, Arizona, USA	Oriental Notes: Woody Oriental		

Room overviews

The complete overview of each of the thirteen locations of the house and gardens, including the various names, leitmotifs, occupants, clocks, elements and opposition rooms. Each location is both a sacred site and trapped within a moment of history; representing the very last magical places on earth.

Using these tables, touring Talliston can be tailored to the individual's specific interests and allow guests to explore its physical, spiritual and historial pathways – while illustrating the deeper stories and settings at work in constructing the labyrinth of the house and gardens.

#	Common name	Clocks	Oracles	Leitmotif: Butterfly	Leitmotif: Bumblebee	Leitmotif: Oak	Leitmotif: Laburnum	Leitmotif: Ship of Frodo
1	The Labyrinth	Vintage brass astrolabe and hourglass	The Gardener's Almanack	Porch lantern	Yorkstone path	Gothic gate	Earth-fast stone	Garden gate door stop
2	The Hall of Mirrors	Brass domed lantern clock	The Roman Oracle	Moroccan lantern	Bee sickle engraving	Oak leaves on skylight	----	Japanese dragon boat
3	The Watchtower	Victorian Vienna wall clock	Obsidian Mirror	Jacobean panelling rail	Honeycomb floor tiles	Oak ship's beam	----	Model ship in glass case
4	The Voodoo Kitchen	Bakelite kitchen wall clock	Ceramic Palmsistiy Hand	Decorative bridge	Silver bee on curtains	Pottery acorn bowl	----	Steam boat litter rack
5	The Boathouse	Neptune's tide indicator clock	Bag of Runestones	Fishing net	Glass bee ornament	Oak Viking carvings	----	Model yacht
6	The Fountain Courtyard	Mythological sandal clock	Nelross Cup of Fortune	Porch carves	Jardinière steps	Green oak barn	Behind jardinière	Irish boat plaque
7	The Cabin	Black Forest cuckoo clock	Angedkok Spirit Bottle	Mounted horns	White honey pot	Arts & Crafts furniture	----	Carved sideboard
8	The Starhouse	Sumerian star chart tablet	Crystal sentence	Silver birch tree	Honeycomb parquet	Oak bonsai	----	Galleon bonsai on altar
9	The Haunted Bedroom	Waterbury Art Nouveau brass mantle clock	Oujia Board and Planchette	Bed canopy	Lace curtain panels	Oak leaf horse brass	----	Cast iron companion set
10	The Room of Dreams	Elgin travel alarm clock	Crystal Ball	Bronze scales	Jewelled bee necklace	Acorn oval frame	----	Galleon wall hanging
11	The Office	Art Deco walnut mantle clock	Thrift Tinted Desk	Ceiling grille	Bee inkwell	Rolltop desk	----	Ship plaque on shield
12	The Treehouse Sanctuary	Metamorf Doreham mantle clock	Oracle of Kuan Yin	Woven ceiling above altar	Bee Buddha charm	Oak leaf frame	----	Pirate ship lamp
13	The Tipi	Silver and gold pocket watch	Navajo Medicine Bag	----	----	----	----	----