

# A place of play

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**Images courtesy of**  
Hester's Handmade Home

**Confined to home during lockdown, one Ramsgate resident has been inspiring others to love and improve their spaces via her blog. She tells us about her love of upcycling, DIY and affordable updates**

Let's face it, by changing the ways in which we work and socialise, Covid has had a huge impact on what we want from our homes. With competing needs now under one roof and jostling for elbow room, many of us have witnessed our homes grow increasingly chaotic under lockdown. And yet, when we spend so much time there, the need for a comfortable environment has become paramount.

Enter Hester van Overbeek, DIY and interiors author extraordinaire. A long-term Ramsgate resident, her popular blog, *Hester's Handmade Home*, has seen an upsurge of interest during these lockdown times. The blog is full of tutorials designed to be accessible to even the most DIY-averse, from heavier-duty projects to smaller craft ideas. These, says Hester, have been most popular lately, with families struggling to keep young kids entertained. She cites the "mud table" as her favourite - an Ikea hack for messy play, which her two-year-old Kiki plays with every day.

Hester's blog came about by accident. Before making the move to Ramsgate, she and partner Ian lived in Broadstairs eight years ago, where



friends suggested, that Hester might document her creative approach to renovation online. She thought she'd give it a shot. "Try everything once," she laughs, "and if it fails, try again!" Ironically, it appears to be this very absence of pressure to succeed which makes her projects so successful. The couple have now been in the Ramsgate house for five years, and it is filled with the sorts of experiments which many people would not dare for fear of messing up. When she couldn't find bedroom wallpaper to her taste she drew her own, and in Kiki's bedroom she has used doodle paint, which can be drawn over with marker pens and wiped off. Along with Hester's can-do spirit, it is precisely for these sorts of tip-offs that the blog has gained a loyal following.

As an ex-rental, the Ramsgate house was, as Hester puts it, "a nightmare of beige". Fortunately it did not need much heavy-duty work, and apart from knocking through one wall on the ground floor, the rest of the transformation has been cosmetic. So, though the house is now unrecognisable, none of Hester's improvements are out of reach to the ordinary person.

Such an inclusive and empowering philosophy remains relatively rare in the world of building. Hester remembers her shock at finding that so many women in the UK "had never used a drill". In Holland, she says, "women are much more confident about using tools", and if she can't do something, she'll just watch a video and teach herself.

The house is full of marvels: ingenious tricks which Hester documents beautifully on the site and with easy-to-follow YouTube videos. Though it is quite literally her work and living space, for Hester, her home is a playground. She is not scared to try out new things, and she tells me that most of the rooms have now been redone several times over. Every inch of space has been made use of in a simple way which she describes as "very Dutch, quite Scandi" - clean and bright, but not at all devoid of colour. She laughs when I mention shabby chic, saying that she much prefers the minimalist look. Does she like Marie Kondo? As an ethos, yes, she says, but like many real people, people with families and actual possessions, she feels that minimalism is off the cards - it's just not practical.

Of course it's easy to make a place look good when you've got the money, but Hester's blog shows us how we can beautify our homes without much cash. She is firm about using what you already have: when she wants something, the first place she looks is inside her own shed.

She also goes to places like Scotts in Margate to find furniture for upcycling, and "Ikea hacks" are some of her most popular posts. In fact, she does these so well that she has been featured in the Ikea magazine several times over.

Like many people, Hester had her own lockdown project: hers was a do-over of her garden deck, which is

now a serene, lilac-inflected corner of the garden. For however finished the house may look, it seems like Hester never stops dreaming up new projects. She is extraordinarily productive. Now racing to meet the deadline on her seventh book in six years, she confesses that she is currently eyeing up other properties in Ramsgate. Doesn't she ever just want to lie back and enjoy what she's already done? "No," she says, she would get bored. Which sums up Hester's attitude in a nutshell: DIY is not just about getting good looking results, but should be fun to do in its own right.

[hestershandedhome.com](http://hestershandedhome.com)