

RURAL RECLAMATION

IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES, DEBORAH TALBOT LOOKS AT HOW RENOVATING AND RECLAIMING IS HELPING TO REGENERATE THE COUNTRYSIDE. HERE, ON HER HOME TURF OF NORTH ESSEX, SHE FINDS ARTISTS, STUDIOS, CAFES AND DESIGNERS USING THE LOCAL BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE AND MATERIALS TO CREATE A NEW COMMUNITY THAT BENEFITS ALL

View from
Wivenhoe
marshes



North Essex is a place of extremes, where rural marshland and deserted beaches meet four-by-fours, tired commuters and a glut of housing development. Here, among the abundant greenery, the idea of recycling or reclaiming should be hugely influential. Yet the trappings of consumerism often maintain their allure. Could that be about to change?

Increasingly, north Essex is looking to the old in a manner that's very of-the-moment and akin to our more forward-thinking cities; those urban communities that celebrate nature, arts and crafts, love salvaged interiors, vintage and reclaimed materials, and aspire to 'hygge' – Scandinavian-inspired charm that works so comfortably in a multitude of settings. The area has seen a growth of artist studios, creative businesses and arts events, all of which point to new possibilities for rural production.

City to Country

So what has inspired this surge of creativity? For a start, there's a slow drift of people moving out from London, says Ella Johnston, who with her partner Martin Bewick founded the independent publisher Dunlin Press, based in Wivenhoe. 'When I used to go into town previously, and mentioned I lived outside London, I'd get the "you're dead to us now" look. Now people ask me where I live, how long it takes, travel



Kay Prestney
in the upcycled
Kinship office

Kinship Creative Design Consultancy

Kinship was founded in June 2016 by director Kay Prestney (pictured), who is on a mission to change how we think about interiors, with a design model based on reclaiming, upcycling and using foraged botanical materials. Kay also runs creative workshops and 'Kinship Gatherings' – network events for creative businesses in north Essex.

'A lot of people think that interior design is out of their reach,' Kay says, 'but our consultancy rates are affordable, and we look to rethink rather than replace people's possessions. Making a house a home is often more about reducing than accumulating. We encourage clients to get creative – for example, fitting a wine crate with castors to make modern, rustic under-bed storage.'

She is optimistic about trends in north Essex. 'There is a growing creative community who are all determined to make a positive impact on the area. Pop-up vintage markets, reclamation yards, vintage sellers, antique barns and salvage companies are becoming better known and more widely visited.' KCDC is very busy leading the way in promoting reclamation, upcycling and low-cost interior design to a growing and enthusiastic audience. Kinship Creative Design Consultancy, Station Road, Ardleigh, Essex CO7 Facebook @kinshipcreativcdc Instagram @kinship_creativedc

Trinovante Trading

Mark Barratt's Trinovante Trading is a reclamation yard with a difference. Located in the former hospital of a WWII airfield near Kelvedon, it specialises in bottles, clay pots and other historic artefacts – think Victorian irons and branded glass jars. Mark's been in the reclamation business for years but, with the arrival of Ikea, there was less interest in antique pine. So four years ago he changed his focus, setting up Trinovante Trading.

'My market now is wedding planners, florists, interior designers, stylists and prop buyers. One TV company needed a bread oven for a staging of the Great Fire of London – we had one,' he says.



He believes that reclaiming is steadily catching on in north Essex. 'There's more enthusiasm everywhere. Old furniture is so well made compared to flatpack, and when it gets sent to landfill it's our loss. I also believe its uniqueness provides a talking point in anyone's home.' Trinovante Trading, Unit 1, Allshots Enterprises, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9DF, trinovantetrading.co.uk tel: 07903 061027

fares, whether we have working space...'

The proximity to London also provides fertile ground for selling creative products, says Mark Barratt of Trinovante Trading. 'We're not isolated; we're connected to major roads. Most of our customers are buyers from London. We meet them at Kempton Market in southwest London, and then they come up to see us at the warehouse in Kelvedon. We're very near to the city – it's only an hour and 15 minutes' drive from east London.'

Warehouse Space

It's not just a city sensibility that's encouraging north Essex to blossom. 'I've seen artists flourish when they get here,' explains Joanna Hughes, founder of Mother Studios, an ⇨

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Duck Duck Goose!

The café and craft workshop space opened in January 2017 and is unique to the area. Housed in a traditional north Essex black boarded barn, the inside is all rustic Scandi chic, using repurposed and recycled materials whenever possible. And that matters to owner Joanna Harmsworth.

'I have a real issue with waste and landfill, so right from the start it was vital to reclaim as much as possible from the barn,' Joanna says. 'The majority of our furniture, as well as the serving area, was either reclaimed, bought from charity shops or built using materials from a local reclamation yard.'

Recycling is key to how the enterprise works, Joanna explains. 'I try and produce as little waste as possible when running the café, recycling as much as I can and also using it for the children's craft activities.'

Joanna describes what she does as 'niche' for north Essex. But Duck Duck Goose! has grown in popularity as a place to be creative, offering activities from lamp making, lino printing and craft meet-ups for adults to music and movement classes for children. And the food, managed by chef Esther Brunning (Instagram @ esthersbest) is pretty ace too.

Duck Duck Goose!, Pump Farm, Tendring Road, Little Bentley, Colchester, Essex CO7 8SH, duckduckgoosecoffee.co.uk tel: 07796 591290

'The region is full of beautiful old abandoned industrial and agricultural buildings not yet claimed for new uses.'

artist-run organisation that originated in Hackney Wick. Building on their success in east London, Mother Studios (motherstudios.co.uk) have expanded to the Essex countryside, renovating a Victorian former malt brewery into a studio complex near the old railway station in Ardleigh. They're also part of the thriving Open Studios events organised by the Essex Network of Artist Studios.

It's often the case that artists exhibit in London but actually produce their work in the spacious surrounds of rural

Essex. The region is full of beautiful old abandoned industrial and agricultural buildings not yet claimed for new uses. It's as though New York style artists' lofts have come around for another pass.

From Marsh to Field Margin

The landscape of this corner of East Anglia has its own distinctive character which pervades the work of its artists and makers. This is flat country with open skies, patchworked fields and marshland down to the shore. An awareness of nature and rural life are integral to the artistic sensibility of those who settle and create here.

Take Lucy Tiffney (lucytiffneyshop.com), who designs wallpaper, prints and fabrics in the style of William Morris and whose freestyle aesthetic is influential across the UK. Or Pru Green of the Sentinel Gallery in Wivenhoe (thesentinelgallery.co.uk), who exhibits designers, artists and artisans from across the region as well as her own botanical-inspired pottery. There can be no doubt that north Essex is coming of age as a distinctive place to fuel creative production and reclaiming. 