

The Studio Shipping Container Project

Words: Pascoe Interiors



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When you work in a creative industry, and in a world where it takes seven seconds to make a first impression, where you work says a lot about you.

After qualifying as an Interior Designer in 2000, I quickly realised that there was a negative connotation to working from home – as if in some way it watered down your professional ability and threw you into the arena of ‘hobbyist decorators’; which is a thoroughly respected profession, but one that those who are furnished with degrees, professional qualifications and years of experience strive to separate ourselves from.

During my London days, a large part of my business included exclusively importing a designer range of kitchens from Italy, for my private design clients. The scale of displays that come with such a territory, and the desire to present a professional front encouraged me to establish my company (at that time Molten UK) in a Studio/ Showroom space in Fulham.

Fast forward a decade, and we’re in the grips of recession. Molten became a casualty of the economic climate due to its reliance in products from the Euro Zone, and Pascoe Interiors was born. Coinciding with a move out of the Capital, to West Sussex, the company took on a new direction focusing on Mid Century Contemporary interiors; the niche style that I have become synonymous with and won several awards and accolades for. Kitchens took a back seat, and I was finally able to explore sustainable interior design solutions within my increasingly highly desirable style genre. A farm based business unit was the perfect solution for many years. However, lovely as it was to work in a rustic converted cow barn, on a farm between the South Downs & beaches of the South Coast, as my style became more pronounced by blending commercial solutions within domestic interiors I needed to find another solution. Additionally – part of my self-imposed sustainable design policy refers to my fee structure; hence I strive to source back to base and to strip back layers of business running cost in order to remain highly competitive.

The economic solution was to work from home, however, I was hesitant to go down that route for the reasons stated above. So, while my husband and I had identified a strip of scrubland down the side of our property (within which we could barely see the fence hiding amongst the brambles), we needed to come up with a design for a stand-alone building that would represent my mid-century, urban/industrial, interior design style. After researching wooden buildings; prefabricated structures or traditional brick builds in keeping with our Victorian house, I latched upon shipping containers – structures that I’ve always yearned after. The idea of the juxtaposition an industrial metal box, beside a traditional double fronted Victorian house on the outskirts of a pretty Sussex village was thoroughly exciting. The more we researched it, the more excited we became.

There are many firms who offer shipping container conversions, and most who are easy to locate via a simple internet search offer



design, build and install packages. I wasn't interested in anyone else designing the space – this is a project I wanted to grab by the scruff and design myself. After weeks obsessing about the details with research, cost analysis, material considerations and reams of designs, we settled on '1st Containers' to carry out the conversion. While they aren't the first to come up in a search, and seem little known for design and conversion work, they have an impressive, unsung back catalogue if you ask. They had the know-how, the kit and the workshop within which to create our Studio; and they were more than willing to use the materials we wanted, without loading layers of costs simply for stepping laterally from the norm. Their no-nonsense, practical, can-do attitude made for a pleasurable project; and the team – from back office to manufacture and installation – were faultless in their efforts and attitude. Plus, they didn't load their prices to reflect the growing popularity of container conversions; they simply charged fairly what it cost!

The final design is a dual shipping container space, with French windows and full height side-lights along one side, and a huge pivoting picture window looking down over the driveway. The exterior has been sprayed my favourite colour – RAL5008, and the interior is clad in birch-faced plywood and the flooring is Marmoleum Walton linoleum.

The lighting is a key feature of the interior. Installed by my husband's firm, MAP Electrical in Chichester, I sourced brushed aluminium bulk head lights and a brass Mid Century pendant, which are all powered via surface mounted metal conduit to further underscore the industrial nature of the Studio.

The project wasn't all plain sailing however. While we were clearing the land, our neighbours knocked on the door to inform us that the boundary between our properties isn't where the dilapidated,

overgrown fence has languished for 30-years; but is instead several feet closer to our house. This was a disaster! Suddenly we didn't have the space to fit our – now commissioned – conversion! Upon inspection of our deeds, we kicked ourselves for not checking the archives, and instead trusting the rusty old fence; and our neighbours were hugely apologetic for not reinstating the party line following the departure of their old neighbour, to whom they loaned the land many years before.

With a large garden, there were certainly other places we could put our Studio; and while we ascertained that the Hiab delivery truck / crane combo could physically reach the new location – we would have to wait until late summer when the ground was firm enough not to leave us with a churned up, ruined lawn. But the main problem with the new location was that it was away from view of the driveway and some way down our garden. Suddenly the Studio didn't feel like a cool, stand-alone location, but an alien box encroaching work life into our private space....and I felt we were tip toeing back towards 'working from home' too much. But we are fortunate to have an amazing relationship with our neighbours, who offered to sell the strip of scrub land to us. So while this was a cost we hadn't factored in, once all was considered, it was the best option in order to retain a degree of separation between our home and our Studio.

Trials and tribulations aside, we have no regrets about the extra cost or stress encountered along the way. Everyone who comes to visit – friends, family, clients – love the conversion; and agree that against all logic, the alien metal box, in deep blue is entirely at home nestled under the trees on the outskirts of Oving.

It's difficult to pin point my favourite aspects of the build, as it's the overall 'feel' of an industrial solution within a domestic setting that I love; and every detail, choice and selection was carefully (and

obsessively) considered. From the sealed up, original cargo doors; to the blue RAL5008 exterior and the birch ply interior, there is no aspect I don't love. But if I had to pick out one thing to top the list, It would be the exposed conduit lighting. Expertly installed by Matt's team, it really is an art installation of its' own. My own urban Pompidou Centre in the sticks!

Since 2000, Clare Pascoe has offered a comprehensive interior design service from her design studio in Oving, West Sussex.

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Championing British suppliers and makers, ranging from traditionally hand made sofas, fabrics woven in mills across the UK and paints innovatively recycled in West Sussex, Clare offers clients a sustainable interior design solution that celebrates the Best of British skilled industries, without incurring the over inflated price tag usually associated with Eco Design Solutions.

Working directly for a home owner, or in collaboration with an architects practice, Clare brings a wealth of knowledge and an award winning eclectic mix of inspirations to each project, be it the redesign of a single room or a full house re-design and redecoration project.

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