

IMPROVE

Why we all want a party barn

From ageing wannabe DJs to Cheshire socialites, everyone is creating a purpose-built place to boogie this summer

Hayley Karseras and her family in their open-air party barn
VICKI COUCHMAN

Hugh Graham | Sunday August 08 2021, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

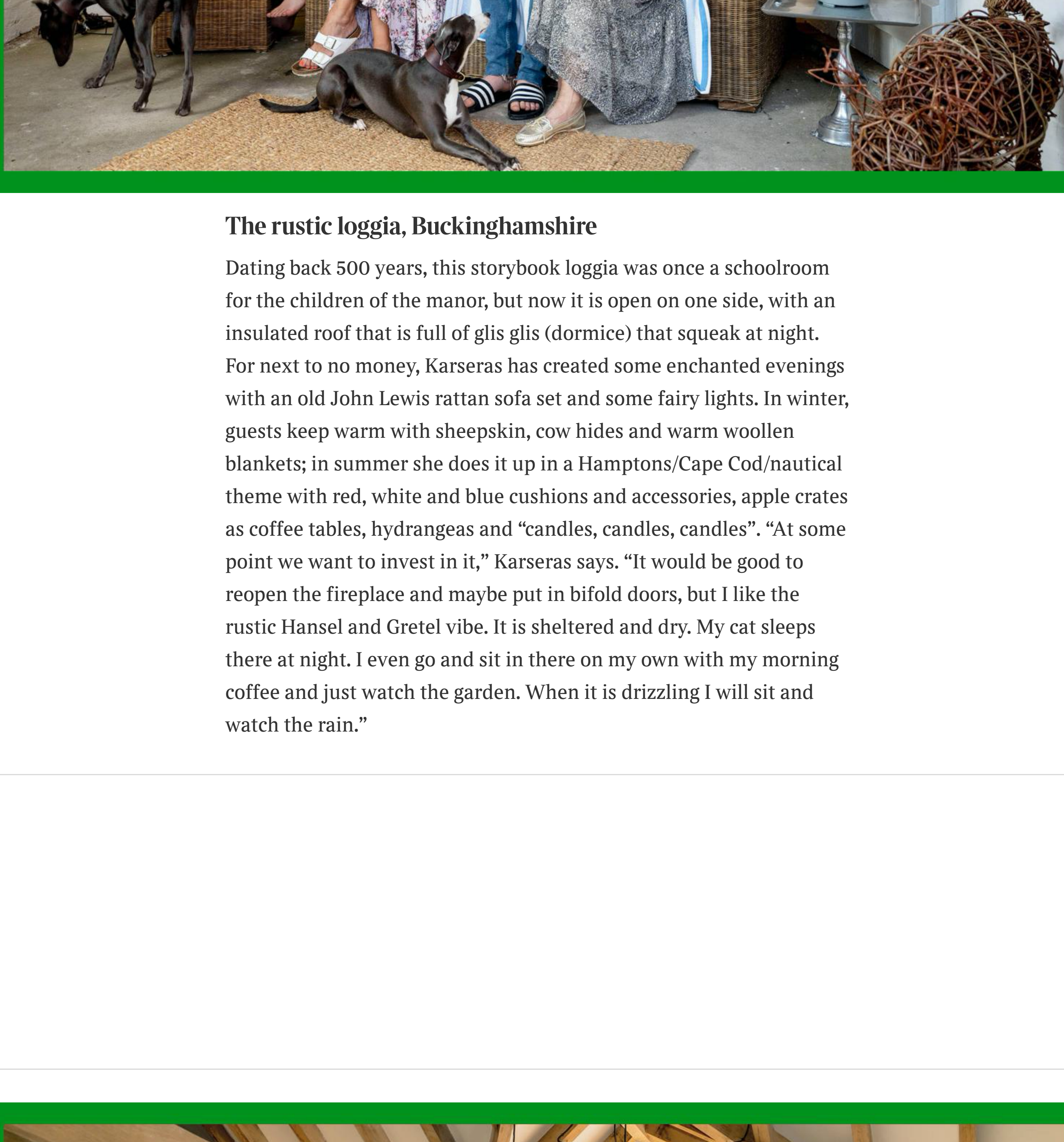
The pubs and clubs may be open again, but not everyone is ready to mix with the great unwashed – or more specifically, the unjabbed. It's all very well if you're 21, invincible and get your medical advice from Facebook: go ahead and paint the town red. But for older pubbers and clubbers who long for a night out without the prospect of long Covid, the pandemic has spawned a new way of socialising: the party barn. Whether it is a pimped-up shed or a purpose-built outbuilding, the party barn is where you can bring the nightlife to your back garden and socialise with doors or walls open, before staggering a few steps home to bed.

It has been a saving grace for Hayley Karseras, 44, who has used the loggia in the garden of her home in Little Missenden, Buckinghamshire, to socialise outdoors during the various lockdowns. "It has totally kept us sane. I would sit there with friends and just chat and catch up," says the lifestyle influencer @ladyofthemanor77, who also used it for sundowners with her bubbled couples (always prosecco and champagne) and let her children use it for safe gatherings (she serves them mugs of hot chocolate with marshmallows and cream). "It is ironic now that everything is back open, we have just carried on socialising here because it is such a nice space. I think people are still being really careful. People are still happier to be in an outdoor party barn than in somebody's living room."

There has been a discernable rise in inquiries for party barns since the pandemic started, according to the Cheshire-based interior designer Jojo Bradley. Indeed, whether it is all those Real Housewives or stir-crazy footballers and their WAGs, Cheshire seems to be a party-barn hotspot. Bradley says converting existing barns into pleasure palaces typically costs between £25,000 to £100,000. To build one from scratch might cost £216,000 for 1,700 sq ft, plus £100,000 for fittings, says David Handley, commercial director of Julius Bahn Oak Buildings, who can build them under permitted development with no planning permission required. Must-haves include loos (so guests don't sully your own bathroom), bars, kitchens, pizza ovens, giant TVs for watching the football, pool tables, covered outdoor areas and fancy sound systems.

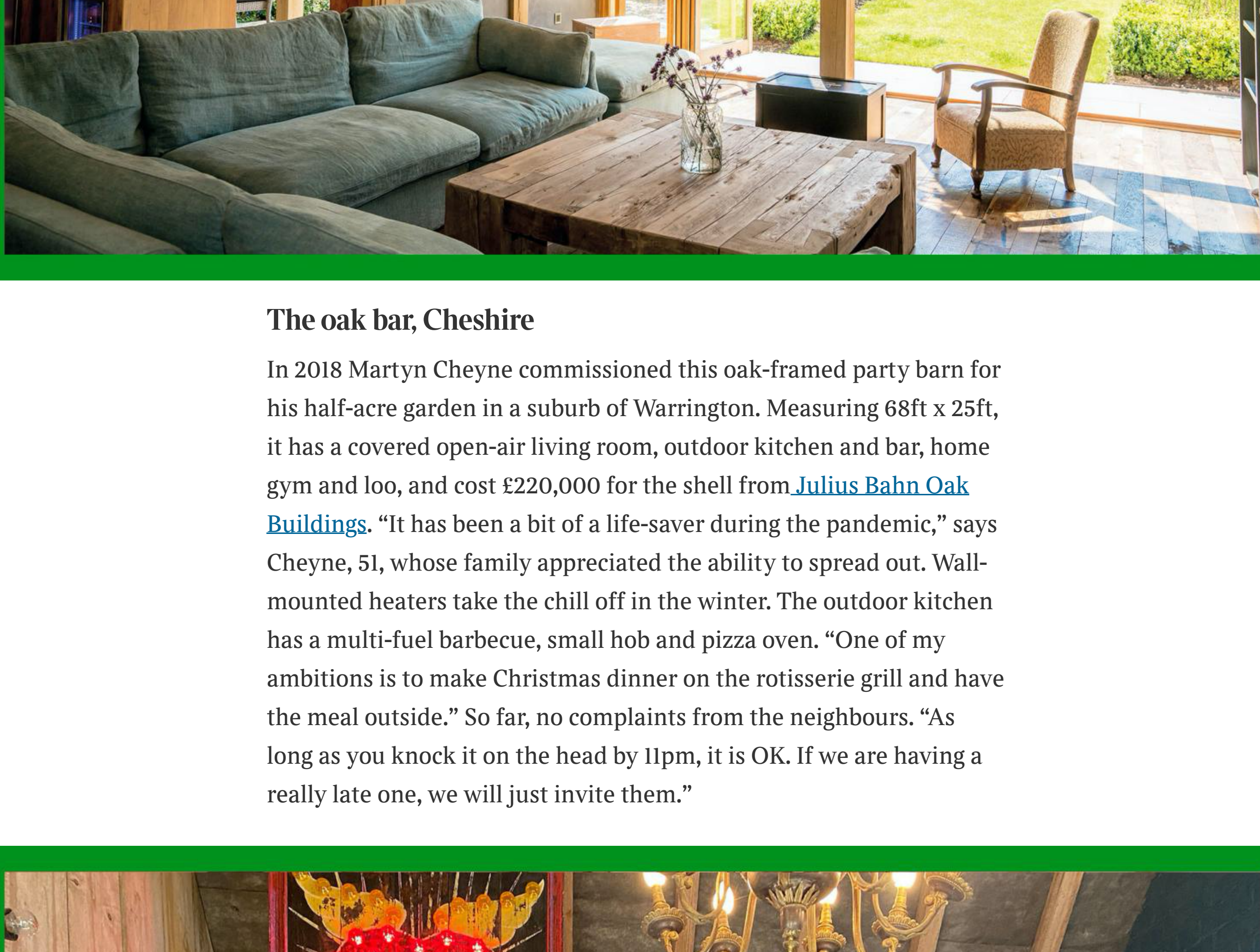
Party barns are particularly in demand from ageing ravers who aren't able to make it to Ibiza this year and want to bring Pacha to their back door, according to Angus Wilson, business consultant for AV Sound Design, which fits professional sound systems, mirrorballs, laser light shows and stage set-ups, and says inquiries have doubled since before the pandemic. "We have a lot of men and women who have had grown-up careers who are now learning to be DJs. We put in the decks for vinyl and USBs, and the next thing is they are getting DJ lessons. We have also done particularly well with men in their fifties who have had fantastic careers but think they are Eric Clapton or Jimmy Page, and they buy Fender Stratocasters and put together a bit of a live band to perform at parties in their barn."

Five styles to get your garden banging



The rustic loggia, Buckinghamshire

Dating back 500 years, this storybook loggia was once a schoolroom for the children of the manor, but now it is open on one side, with an insulated roof that is full of glis glis (dormice) that squeak at night. For next to no money, Karseras has created some enchanted evenings with an old John Lewis rattan sofa set and some fairy lights. In winter, guests keep warm with sheepskin, cow hides and warm woollen blankets; in summer she does it up in a Hamptons/Cape Cod/naval theme with red, white and blue cushions and accessories, apple crates as coffee tables, hydrangeas and "candles, candles, candles". "At some point we want to invest in it," Karseras says. "It would be good to reopen the fireplace and maybe put in bifold doors, but I like the rustic Hansel and Gretel vibe. It is sheltered and dry. My cat sleeps there at night. I even go and sit in there on my own with my morning coffee and just watch the garden. When it is drizzling I will sit and watch the rain."



The oak bar, Cheshire

In 2018 Martyn Cheyne commissioned this oak-framed party barn for his half-acre garden in a suburb of Warrington. Measuring 68ft x 25ft, it has a covered open-air living room, outdoor kitchen and bar, home gym and loo, and cost £220,000 for the shell from [Julius Bahn Oak Buildings](#). "It has been a bit of a life-saver during the pandemic," says Cheyne, 51, whose family appreciated the ability to spread out. Wall-mounted heaters take the chill off in the winter. The outdoor kitchen has a multi-fuel barbecue, small hob and pizza oven. "One of my ambitions is to make Christmas dinner on the rotisserie grill and have the meal outside." So far, no complaints from the neighbours. "As long as you knock it on the head by 11pm, it is OK. If we are having a really late one, we will just invite them."



LOLLY STREEK/CAMILA ANDREA

Bohemian rhapsody in Norfolk

When Lolly Streek bought a cottage on three acres nine years ago, she turned the 18th-century gamekeeper's lodge into a party barn with a "bohemian fairytale vibe". She painted the walls in Little Greene Confetti pink, and filled it with the kind of shabby-chic furniture that used to fill her vintage shop, along with old coronation mugs, festoon lights hung on old gamekeeper's hooks and accessories from Morocco and India. Streek threw a housewarming party in the barn, then held mini-festivals with her extended family and visiting London friends. Now they hire it out for 12 weddings a season and other do's, and it is a nice little earner: they charge £7,000 for a weekend, and from £1,000 for an afternoon. During the pandemic, the indoor-outdoor set-up allowed her to hold her mother's 80th birthday and her daughter's 21st. "It was a nice safe place for the kids. Teenagers would get told off if they gathered in a local park. They could come here and they weren't breaking the rules as they were outside. And they could escape the problems of being a teenager in the pandemic."

[thekeeperandthedell.com](#)



The Land Rover bar, Cheshire

Before Covid, this rustic mini-party barn was an open garage in the garden of Felicity and Matt Pochin's home in Tarvin, Chester. When the pandemic hit, they moved the car out and the patio furniture in. They installed a wall-mounted infrared heater and a standing heater. They read about in [The Times](#) enclosed the structure on three sides with oak boards and a tarpaulin, and added fairy lights to create a romantic atmosphere, along with a fire pit. The Land Rover's fold-down back door turned into a mini-bar. At Christmas, they upped the cosiness and adorned it with cut-offs from the Christmas tree. During the past year, they used the makeshift barn for a tea party for Granny's 80th birthday, various dinner parties and their daughter Annabel's 18th birthday.



The designer party barn, Cheshire

Party barns are the perfect place to let your inhibitions run wild, both in terms of your behaviour and your design: since the building is separate from the main house, you can be bold or just plain wacky, according to the interior designer Jojo Bradley ([jojobradleyinteriors.co.uk](#)). "It's not going to be seen or used every day," says Bradley, who has done up her own party barn near Farndon, Cheshire, with taxidermy galore (with certificates to say the animals died naturally) and an enormous chandelier inspired by a Ralph Lauren pendant and then blown up to the max. The brick fireplace in the middle breaks up the long room and acts as a focal point. This party barn is indoors, but Bradley suggests always including a lean-to or covered area outside. In the post-pandemic era, "home entertaining will be the new norm. Being separate to the house, party barns are great. You shut the doors after a party and deal with the mess when the hangover has gone."

Related articles



HIDDEN HOUSING SCANDAL
Eight of out ten of Britain's biggest banks still will not lend on fire-risk flats

Freedom, it turns out, is not here for almost two thirds of the three million people trapped in flats they cannot sell. Despite an announcement...

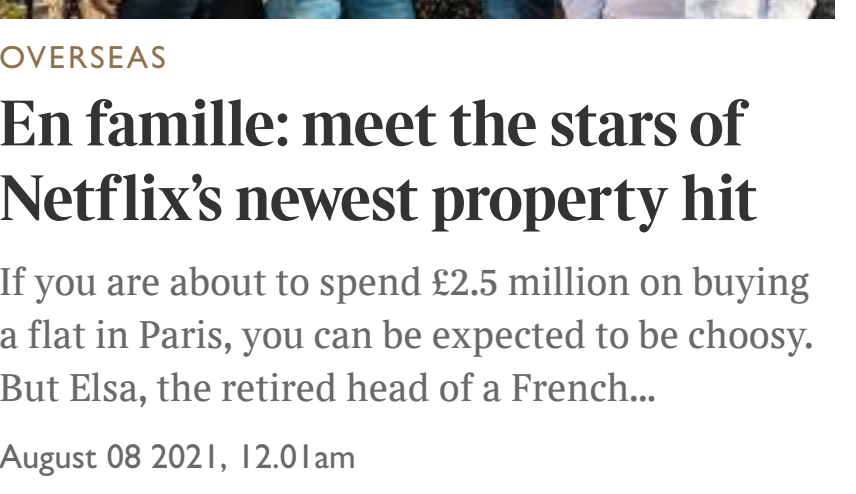
August 08 2021, 12.01am
Marina Lees



MOVIE
Estate agency: the anatomy of Holkham, a very modern stately home

Life on one of Britain's great country estates isn't all servants, dogs and shooting parties. Well, there's a bit of that. But a modern rural...

August 08 2021, 12.01am
Katrina Burroughs



OVERSEAS
En famille: meet the stars of Netflix's newest property hit

If you are about to spend £2.5 million on buying a flat in Paris, you can be expected to be choosy. But Elsa, the retired head of a French...

August 08 2021, 12.01am
Peter Conradi