

A home for Hardy types

Having turned his back on couture, the Queen's former dressmaker is now to be found living in a pared-down but picturesque prefab on a Norwegian fjord. And he couldn't be happier, as he tells JACKY PARKER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL RAESIDE



After the harshest winter on record we might like to think ourselves inured to extreme cold, but how many of us would cope with life on Hardanger fjord, on the south-west coast of Norway, where temperatures can drop as low as -25°C for months on end? Well, the artist Ian Garland for one. 'I have been coming here since I was six months old,' he says. 'I sound typically English but my mother is Norwegian and I have a very Norwegian aesthetic.'

Garlant, the former creative director at the couture house Hardy Amies, came to this remote part of Norway to turn what had been a lifelong

hobby into a new career - creating art from the detritus of its magnificent landscape. In his fashion life Garland designed exquisite red-carpet outfits and his couture creations were exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts and the V&A. 'It was a wonderful achievement but I had begun to sense that something was adrift, of not being in the right place for me anymore,' he explains.

As a child Garland spent long family holidays in Hardanger in the summer house built by his grandfather, a teacher, who had fled German-occupied Bergen during the Second World War



Clockwise from left: the prefab on stilts overlooks Hardanger fjord; a pair of brocade-covered wing-back chairs, handed down from Garland's grandparents, with reindeer-skin rug in front of the stove; a view of the fjord; Garland's clothes are stored on top of the wooden bed frame in a trunk (storage-trunks.co.uk) along with a neat row of books; an artwork that he named Lu Chi after a Chinese philosopher



after refusing to teach Nazi ideology. The simplicity of the life appealed to the young Garland and was in stark contrast to the rigid public-school rules back home in England. Later the place served as a retreat from the stresses of work, and Garland returned to paint every summer, before deciding to build somewhere that would be habitable all year round. 'Winter here is far more interesting than summer,

when it's picture-postcard pretty,' he says. 'The architecture of the landscape in snow is beautiful. You can't always tell what you're looking at. You think, "Is it water, is it rock, is it ice? Is that snow or a cloud?"'

The home Garland designed was inspired by a traditional fisherman's house. 'It's basically a prefab, one room put together in Finland and built on to stilts.' The entire build took just six weeks.

Inside is sparse - the epitome of pared-back living - which Garland says allows him to think. 'I wanted a live-work space where I could stay engaged 24/7. With a mind like mine, which leaps around, I have a need for order and symmetry.' Slightly battered wing chairs and smart reading lamps sit either side of the wood-burner. Behind them heavy canvas is draped in front of the sleeping area, providing protection from draughts. Natural materials and muted colours ensure nothing jags. It all feels very calm and ordered, comfortable but functional.

Garland is also constructing a semi-outdoor studio, to house his Mid-Summer Project exhibition, using a technique called *grindbygg*. 'It's a building method that was used before man had invented nails. It's extraordinary; we go out into the woods and select the best trees, as they have to fit together like a jigsaw.' (After showing in Norway, the exhibition - studio and all - will be shipped to Britain for the London Design Festival



Clockwise from above: Garland uses a blow-torch to begin the transformation process for one of his artworks; clouds over the mountains; the wood-lined kitchen is simple but beautiful

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in September. A solo show at the Andipa Gallery in London will follow in November.)

Garland is passionate about this place - and uses its fruits, soil and wood to create his sculptural works. He burns, melts and scrapes found materials, sometimes leaving them to weather for months, then combines them with lacquers and finishes used in boat-building, to wonderful effect. His aim, he says, 'is to encapsulate the landscape without copying it'. Local boatbuilders and carpenters who 'wouldn't consider themselves interested in art have been enthusiastic about my work and are constantly throwing ideas at me. Maybe that's why my work has been well received here - there's a part of them in it.'

It's not just Norwegians who 'get' Garland's work. His first London exhibition, *UnEarth*, curated by Kay Saatchi and Meredith Gunderson in March 2010, saw his work snapped up by an international audience. 'All of my work now has a home,' he says modestly. Garland clearly enjoys being part of the natural world. 'It's just so beautiful and so much fun,' he exclaims. 'I get extremely muddy and messy when I'm working. I feel like I've gone full circle, from making mud pies here as a child, to couture, and back to the mud.' ●

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