

THE MODERN HOUSE



Pen Selwood, Somerset
Sold

Coombe Street

This extraordinary Grade II*-listed modern masterpiece, set in 25 acres of gardens and ancient woodland, was designed by Peter Harland in 1935 as a home for the leading British composer Sir Arthur Bliss. Rooted in its peaceful setting, the house was designed for family life, for creating and communing, and as a retreat for self-reflection. The music room where Bliss created some of his most revered works, Grade II*-listed in its own right, is set deep in the ancient woodland; itself a scheduled monument. A four-bedroom guest cottage and its gardens lie due west of the main house. While retaining an overwhelming sense of quiet and seclusion, this remarkable home lies some seven miles south of Bruton and two miles from Stourhead, within easy reach of the open countryside and Somerset's many cultural highlights. For more information, please see the History section below.

The Tour

On the approach, the wildness of the natural landscape sets the stage; an ancient oak and beech woodland, bursting with daffodils and primroses in March and a carpet of bluebells and wild garlic in May.

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There are two driveways; one for the main house and a second for the cottage. The principal driveway, lined with camellias, rhododendron and azaleas, winds through dense woodland and up to the elevated south-facing site. A series of white rendered geometric forms shape the impressive architectural profile, with pops of bold colour adding a playful touch; the primary blue balcony edge, the yellow trim of a ladder, the red steel grid of a window frame.

The main entrance is set modestly on the northerly side, beneath the pale pink canopy of the porch. Internally, Harland executes a masterly command of space, light and a simple material palette. In a careful gridding of the footprint, extending to just over 2,640 sqft, the living space has been appropriately orientated to provide the best natural daylight. The northerly façade, kept cool in warmer months, houses the kitchen, pantry and service areas. The primary living rooms lie on the southerly side, optimising views across the undulating gardens.

Leading off the arterial hallway, the living spaces are cleverly conceived to harbour both individual and communal activity, with timber doors allowing easy division, or an open flow. Facing due south, the dining room is beautifully bright. A handsome curved window frames views to the gardens and an expanse of steel framed windows and doors open onto the terrace, providing a natural transition between the interior and exterior spaces.

Stepping down into arguably the most impressive part of the house, the high, square pitch of the ceilings add dramatic volume through the living room. Full-height, full-length windows ensure a visual connection to the gardens and plenty of light and warmth through the day. Sisal runs underfoot and an original fireplace of red brick and solid oak forms a superlative centrepiece.

The kitchen runs along the northerly aspect; an exercise in function and form, with energising washes of colour. Walls and ceilings are timber-clad or ply-lined, with appliances artfully embedded in lines of hand-crafted joinery. A study and a separate cloakroom are set within the far-easterly section of the house. A sunroom constructed of curved steel and glass projects from the south-westerly façade, completing the ground floor.

Artfully crafted solid oak staircases add to the many original features. A double-height stairwell leads to the landing, from where the bedrooms unfold; each room replete with original detailing. Wall colourings have been sensitively paired, and handmade furniture in-built to add sculptural character and form. In the main bedroom, an internal wall of steel-framed glass panels and doors form an ingenious division from the dressing room, while borrowing light from the external windows.

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Glass doors lead out from the blue bedroom to a large upper terrace overlooking the treetops, with an outdoor shower adding a sense of wellness and retreat, and a ladder leading down to the storey below. The bathrooms are perfectly in-keeping, with a great view across the tree canopies from the bathtub.

Adjacent to main entrance, a self-contained studio room, clad in a pleasing pale yellow, provides a quiet place for study, reading or rest.

Retaining the building's legacy has been integral to its three custodial owners, and the detailing, both internally and externally, has been beautifully preserved. The house remains in much of its original condition, and as such, will need some updating to accommodate a modern lifestyle.

In addition to the main house, the four-bedroom cottage, of around 2,150 sqft, provides a generous space for guests, set in a westerly pocket of the private gardens. Open-plan living and dining areas abut a large kitchen, and the south-facing conservatory is full of light throughout the day. Twin staircases lead to the upper storey, where three bedrooms span the easterly side, and a fourth bedroom and a bathroom lie on the westerly side.

Outdoor Space

Extending 25 acres, the gardens and woodland form an integral part of the overall experience of the home. The topography of the site has been cleverly translated through the architecture, capturing brilliant views, and setting a natural equilibrium between the house and its surroundings. External covered terraces merge the inside and outside, creating inviting outdoor rooms for early suppers, when the main terrace is drenched in golden evening light.

Intended to minimise the intervention of the house on its historic setting, the gardens are a rich curation of native trees, providing soft dappled light and shade through summer. Herbaceous beds and borders have been sensitively developed and tended to over many years, ensuring a constant and diverse colour spectrum throughout the seasons, while the vast swathes of lawns provide plenty of space for games. Winding paths lead through the woodland and up to the music room, the creative cocoon where Bliss composed some of his most eminent pieces.

Historic in their own right, the grounds form part of a period stone quarry, a series of circular pits with bowl-shaped profiles. The quarries were used to acquire Greensand, predominantly for items including quern-stones, mortars and whetstones from as early as the Iron Age and throughout the Roman, early medieval and later periods.

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Area Guide

Coombe Street is a five-minute drive from Bourton village, the northernmost point of Dorset. On the borders of Wiltshire and Somerset, Bourton is characterised by a settlement of traditional stone cottages, with a village hall, church and the River Stour, which runs through the historic Bourton Mill. The popular local pub, The White Lion Inn, is a 20-minute walk away from the home.

Surrounded by rolling fields and open countryside, the area is well-renowned for walking and cycling opportunities, with the National Trust, landscaped gardens at Stourhead, a 10-minute journey by car. While offering the peace of the countryside, the location is also excellent for access to some of north Somerset's most popular cultural highlights.

Bruton's excellent food offerings: the Michelin-starred Osip, The Old Pharmacy, At the Chapel, The Newt and also Hauser and Wirth, can be reached in around 15 minutes by car, and Frome is also close by – around 25-minutes' drive away. Frome's growing community of independent shops, creative businesses and eateries include Rye Bakery, Projects Frome, Moo and Two, Frome Hardware, Eight Stony Street, and Frome Reclamation Yard. The Frome Independent, a monthly market showcasing local artisans and food producers, has also helped put Frome on the map, attracting over 80,000 visitors annually.

North Somerset is well-renowned for its smattering of local produce, independent food producers and growers. Westcombe Dairy is easily reached for award-winning cheese and charcuterie. Landrace Bakery's new outpost is now conveniently on-site, offering a daily dose of sourdough bread made from stoneground UK grains milled at the new Landrace Mill. There is a good selection of farm shops for organic produce, including The Slow Farming Company, a local distillery, and for field-grown flowers and herbs, Re-Rooting is also nearby. In nearby Batcombe, Margot Henderson's recently opened The Three Horseshoes adds to the excellent food offering in the area.

The sought-after villages of Mells and Nunney also lie around 25 minutes north. Nunney is characterised by its historic centre and, most notably, its picturesque moated medieval castle built in the 1370s by a local knight, Sir John de la Mare. The village has a popular local pub, The George Inn. A popular spot for Sunday lunch is The Talbot Inn in Mells or wood-fired pizza from The Walled Garden opposite. Shaftesbury is easily accessed in around 25 minutes by car, and the fantastic coastline around Lyme Regis is around an hour's drive away.

There is a selection of excellent schools in the area, including Sherborne School, Sherborne School for Girls, King's Bruton, and The Gryphon School. There is also a good primary school in nearby Zeals, Whitesheet Church of England Academy.

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With easy access to the A303 and M3, London is reachable in 2 hours and 20 minutes. Rail connections are also very good, with Castle Cary approximately 20 minutes by car. Castle Cary has direct rail services to London Paddington in an hour and a half. Gillingham station is under a 15-minute drive and connects to London Waterloo in two hours.

Main House Council Tax Band: G Cottage Council Tax Band: E

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About

The Modern House is an estate agency that helps people live in more thoughtful and beautiful ways. We believe in design as a powerful force for good. Inspired by the principles of modernism, we represent design-led homes across the UK which celebrate light, space and a truth to materials. Esquire credits The Modern House with “rewriting the rulebook on estate agency” and GQ voted us “one of the best things in the world”.