

I'm house-hunting again – but is it hopeless?

Katie is feeling beaten down by the loss of her farmhouse, until strangers come to the rescue

By Katie Glass 27 February 2021 • 6:00am



Katie Glass: 'In the summer, tens of houses appeared for sale on Rightmove every day. Now the market is dead'
CREDIT: Jooney Woodward

After the house sale falls through I have panicky nights when I feel like I am drowning and don't know what to do next. The Mousehole rental is only short-term and even though it is a substantially discounted holiday let, it is still costing me as much in Cornwall as London did, which tells you how irrational the property market here is.

In the summer, tens of houses appeared for sale on Rightmove every day. Now the market is dead. 'Nothing will come on until Easter,' says my friend Jess, who is trying to buy in rural Yorkshire. We bond over our shared angst about what house prices are doing and whether the stamp-duty holiday will be extended. I worry about whether to buy quickly or rent long-term. At least here I do my worrying while eating saffron buns on clifftop walks.

I start viewing houses again, and it's back to wondering what I want. It's weird, the way we buy houses. If I wanted a dress, or computer, I'd know exactly what I was looking for then go out and buy it. With houses you get what you're given. There's always a compromise: a road, a garden, a

really naff kitchen. What you can buy depends on what's for sale. Do you want one life? Or the next?

I see an elegant rose-covered cottage with lavender borders and uPVC windows that feels too neat a version of the country for me. I view an old barn up a hill, taking the narrow off-road dirt track bumping into farmers with thick beards on strange ancient tractors. Is this the real country? Or perhaps they're just hipsters. As the way becomes wilder, and other houses vanish, I wonder – is this too remote even for me?

A tiny, beautiful theatre comes up for sale in St Ives – with an intimate red velvet lounge and wooden walls built from the shell of old ships. Tanya, Andrew and I indulge a fantasy in which we start a comedy club. 'You could have a flat upstairs and shag the comedians,' Tanya says. 'Buy a campervan,' my friend Martin suggests, 'and live in that while you decide.' My farmhouse fantasy is evaporating. The last thing I need is more options.

I wonder if I could take a more sensible approach to house-hunting? I didn't plan to move to the country just as I was going through a breakup, leaving my job and having a midlife crisis. But the more the viewings go on, the more I notice that we move when our lives are most chaotic. Estate agents whisper: 'They are selling because they're getting divorced.' Houses sell when single people marry, or married people start a family. In one strangely quiet cottage, I realise the sale is because its owner is recently departed. In some ways, moving is grieving. But grieving also means starting again.

I get a bit down about house-hunting. And then an amazing thing happens. People start writing to me. Strangers recount stories about how they left their husbands and ended up moving to Monaco. Couples tell me their listed-building nightmares. Estate agents give me advice. A surveyor from Truro offers to drive down and help me view a house. People speculate about whether prices will fall or stay high. I don't know who is right. But a journey I started alone doesn't feel lonely as it did.

Meanwhile, the Mousehole cottage needs building work, so I have to move on again. This time to a tiny barn, in a valley, near a cove called Penberth...

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