

# GO TO WORK ON AN EGG

Almost stepping on a wild gull's nest in the Beaulieu Estuary gave artist Stephen Turner the inspiration for a small but perfectly formed *floating artist's residence*...

WORDS **Caroline Ednie** PHOTOGRAPHS **Nigel Rigden**

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Architect Wendy Perring cleaning the roof light; the Egg being transported from the build site to Lymington Yacht Haven; the exterior is made up of circular plywood ribs and unvarnished western red cedar strips; moving the Egg to its mooring for the night



An egg is crucial as a way of expressing connection – everything living comes from either a seed or an egg and it is such an archetypal form that I felt people would connect with it, wherever in the world they hail from,' explains artist Stephen Turner, who is currently, and will be, until July 2014, living in a floating timber Egg on the River Beaulieu. 'Though when I announced I wanted to live in an egg, the architects did raise a metaphorical eyebrow and told me that they'd never designed something without at least one straight edge before!'

Yet Turner is no crackpot or egg-centric (and there endeth the egg punnery). And this is no whimsical adventure. In fact, Turner's year-long residency in the Egg, which is effectively tethered to a tree in the River Beaulieu's Estuary, is at its heart an artistic exploration into the increasingly palpable effects of climate change on our environment. In this case Turner's concern is with the shoreline and established saltmarsh around the Egg, which is being eroded by rising sea levels.

Buoyed on the Beaulieu, the Egg will take on the ebb and flow patterns – and barnacles – of the lapping estuary water on its 'hull', texturally recording and reflecting these changing tides. Inside

the Egg, Turner will take the flotsam and jetsam that he aims to accumulate over the year and decorate the interior 'shell'. What's more, the watery Solent edge is also providing Turner not only with sustenance, as fishing and foraging are very much part of his new coastal life, but also a regular constitutional swim.

#### HOW THE EGG BEGAN ITS LIFE

The Exbury Egg project emerged in 2009 out of an environmental awareness-raising initiative conceived by the SPUD (Space, Place-making, and Urban Design). 'We had the idea of putting together artists, architects and engineers and creating three teams to come up with a sustainable low-tech, off-grid structure that could be used as an artist's residence. It also had to be located in a sensitive area, such as a National Park or National Trust Property,' explains Mark Drury, one of the founders of SPUD. 'The Egg idea by Stephen Turner, in collaboration with PAD Architects and EDP Engineers, caught people's imagination, and from there on my partner Phil Smith and I raised the funds and put the blocks in place to make it happen.'

The idea for the Egg occurred to Turner

## THE FUTURE OF THE EXBURY EGG

• **The sensitive nature of the site** and the commitment to minimising environmental impact means that direct visits to the Egg will rarely happen. However, electronic media such as webcams will enable work to be monitored and allow Stephen to talk to the outside world. Follow Stephen's blog on [exburyegg.me](http://exburyegg.me) or visit [exburyegg.org](http://exburyegg.org).

• **An educational programme,** which began during the construction, will continue throughout Stephen's period of occupation. At the end of the project (July 2014) the Egg will be removed from the river. Mark Drury, of SPUD, explains: 'We're planning a strategic tour, potentially to coastal galleries. It would be fascinating to place the Egg in a gallery alongside

the body of work Stephen has produced whilst he was living inside.'

• **There are also discussions underway about the Exbury Egg going to the Venice Biennale.** 'The more likely option is the Arts Festival in 2015, although we would need a significant sponsor to come on board. It would be our ultimate goal to feature the Egg

on the Venetian canal during the Biennale. It makes so much sense because if you think about Venice, as a city, it's struggling with climate change.'

• **The Egg will eventually need a home.** Mark says: 'We've had some interest from the Exbury Estate in terms of featuring it in their gardens. Ultimately, we don't want to break it down to firewood!'



LEFT Artist Stephen Turner inside the Egg. He says: 'I don't have any distractions and the experience has an intensity missing in everyday life, where it's so easy to switch off and go watch a movie as opposed to potentially making one'



when he and project architect Wendy Perring were exploring the River Beaulieu for a suitable berth site. 'When Stephen decided that he wanted to be on the watery edge, we hired a boat and went up to Beaulieu for the day and looked all around the Solent for a site. The Lymington saltmarshes are being eroded, in fact, it's estimated that in 20 years' time there won't be any marshes left, so Stephen was very keen on the idea of documenting this changing coastline. We honed in on this stretch of water with an old sluice gate, which had been built to collect salt during the industrial revolution. While walking around this manmade bank, which is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Stephen almost stood on a gull's nest. That gave him the idea for the egg form, highlighting the fragile relationship that exists between man and the environment.'

### COMPLEX FLOATING CREATION

However, the practical aspects of bringing the Egg to life were infinitely more complex, as Wendy Perring explains. 'Our original thought was to locate the Egg on a permanent post on the water, but this raised issues with planning as there may have been

a potential for damage to the riverbed, as a pile driver would have been required. So we decided to redesign the Egg as a river craft using traditional boatbuilding technology, in this case a series of circular plywood ribs – in the same way that you would cut up your boiled egg and come up with perfect circles. We then clad this framework in untreated, unvarnished western red cedar strips, that will absorb and reflect the salty currents and weather patterns over the course of the year.'

Naval architect Stephen Payne, who helped design the Cunard Ocean Liner *RMS Queen Mary 2*, assisted Wendy with the buoyancy calculations to make sure that the structure was stable in the water. Local boatbuilder Paul Baker got to work building the Egg, which was then set afloat on the Lymington River and towed to its current berth in Exbury.

The streamlined simplicity of the structure is also writ large in the interiors that are formed from recycled timber (including an old garage and wooden gates). Additional features include: a locally sourced charcoal burner; recycled paraffin stove from a neighbouring boat; and a handmade English naval hammock, which Stephen can store

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The shower has a hand-pumped garden spray; Stephen and Wendy looking out the Egg's window; the handmade English naval hammock can be stored away so that Stephen has room to make art; cruising on the River Beaulieu



away through the day in order to create more room to work. Stephen's computer, which includes a live camera feed, is powered by solar PV panels located in a neighbouring field.

Effectively Stephen, who moved into the floating Egg in July, will be something of an egg-exile, as he explains. 'I don't have any distractions and the experience has an intensity missing in everyday life, where it is so easy to switch off and go watch a movie as opposed to potentially making one. I have an alter ego – the 'Beaulieu Beadle' – who plans to come out now and then as a guardian of this beautiful place. Fashion students from Solent University have already made me a collection of 'egg-wear' for this role and I am very fond of my new cape!'

He says: 'I also want to tune into a more natural timetable where my day begins at dawn and ends with sunset. I want to swim in the creek on a regular basis, to feel the current and meander wherever the river takes me and report whatever it shows me.'

### COLD COMFORT

But this unique experience isn't without its challenges, admits Stephen, who is, amongst other

things, adjusting to life without perishables due to his fridge-less environment. 'During the summer heatwave it could get poaching hot inside and to keep cool I was in the habit of hosing myself down outside on the dock, but the newly installed webcams sadly called a halt to these once-private ablutions. I shall be forced indoors to the shower tray with its hand-pumped garden spray, which has adapted well to its new and unexpected purpose!'

Yet there are aspects of living in the Egg that are utterly beguiling to Stephen, such as the lapping water on the 'Egg shell'. 'In bed at night I can look up through the circular window at passing moon-lit clouds and more distant stars and feel suitably small in the overall scheme of things.'

Ultimately, the 'Beaulieu Beadle' admits that his metaphorical and, to a great degree, literal immersion in the Exbury Egg is an experience that he is relishing recording. 'All life around our shores is interdependent and precious,' says Turner. 'I'd like to think of myself as a keeper or curator of the work of the river.'

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