

DENTURES,
DANCING AND
DEBAUCHERY

THE RISE OF
THE OAP PARTY
MONSTERS

MOTHER'S
RUIN

WHEN MATERNAL
TIES TURN TOXIC

BEACH SPECIAL

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

STYLE

5 AUGUST 2012

"I'm drawn to the ridiculous," says the lighting designer Philip Oakley. "I find it hard to say no, so I end up in bizarre situations."

And that is how he went from designing high-end retail interiors to the flamboyant installations and kitsch lighting that adorn his new home near Hastings, West Sussex.

The Victorian coaching inn, which Oakley converted with his girlfriend, Olivia, is home to some unusual pieces, including original Blackpool illuminations. He's an avid collector, with magpie tendencies and a love of the OTT, and when he visited the seaside town and discovered the local council was scrapping the "dated" lights of the 1960s and 1970s, he couldn't say no. "I'd been collecting fairy lights for years and was already buying larger pieces," he says, "so I started buying the illuminations. Then the council asked me to work with them on a new project, so I moved up there and bought even more."

Sadly, the idea stalled, and within the year he was back in his London flat, with a garage full of retro disco balls, flashing palm trees and illuminated snowmen to add to his already burgeoning collection of curios. Barely able to move, he decided it was time to realise his dream. "I'd always wanted a big property filled with furniture and junk – and space to create," he says.

He found a run-down pub on the south coast online and bought it through a sealed-bid auction. "We had to view it with a torch as the windows were boarded up," Oakley says. The scene was shocking: beer-stained carpets, overflowing ashtrays and fridges full of rotten food. "We didn't really want it – it was too scary a proposition," he says. "So we put in a crazily low bid. I thought if we got it, it would be such a bargain, we could face the work ahead."

Fast-forward three years, much hard graft and some clever ideas: the result is a beautifully eccentric home-cum-showroom and workshop, set over three floors. Oakley finally has his space to create and, since moving in, has turned his hand to designing and crafting huge funfair-inspired lights and illuminated installations. "My aim is to capture the fun of the fair, so you can have a touch of it in your home," he says. He also loans out his eccentric collections as props for parties and shoots. The upstairs living quarters have been reconfigured to their original 1833 layout and painted throughout in British standard grey – a nod to the pub's original name, the Yorkshire Grey.

"I found out a lot of its history at the local museum," Oakley says. The neutral palette also provides the perfect backdrop for the couple's quirky furniture, eccentric finds and Oakley's kitsch creations. "Buying and renovating this place was a nerve-wracking experience. But there's a creative community here that we love being part of." Perhaps it wasn't so ridiculous after all. ●



Fairground ATTRACTION

USING SALVAGED BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS AND QUIRKY LAMPS AND PENDANTS, ONE DESIGNER HAS TRANSFORMED A DINGY PUB INTO AN UNUSUAL, LIGHT-FILLED HAVEN.
JACKY PARKER REPORTS



LIGHT touches



Main picture, left Oakley has transformed the former pub near Hastings into a home-cum-showroom and workshop. The house is painted in grey throughout; for a similar shade, try Frigate by Leyland Paints

Top The dressing room-style mirror is another of Oakley's creations. The art-deco washbasin is from a salvage yard. For similar tiles, try crinson.com

Above The lighting in the hallway is an original Blackpool illumination. For reclaimed parquet, try retrouvius.com

Above right Eero Saarinen-style chairs, an eBay find, surround an operating table, picked up from a military base. Glass was cut to fit the surface

ST See how to re-create the lighting look with our gallery guide at thesundaytimes.co.uk/style

1 Type 75 lamp, £72, by Anglepoise; amazon.co.uk. **2** Eich pendant, £765; tomdixon.net. **3** Natasha chandelier, £995, from Heal's. **4** Crystal bulb pendant, 189; leebroom.com. **5** Nasturtium lamp shade, from £48; wintersmoon.co.uk