



THIS PAGE Steve Edge stands in the sitting room of his Shoreditch apartment. The spiral staircase leads to a top-floor family room, added in a recent renovation by local architects Theis & Khan. OPPOSITE Steve and his wife, Sylvie, are pictured at the family bolt-hole (main picture), a Thirties timber cabin in Box Hill, restored by Steve, where he indulges his passion for fishing (top right). The cabin is decorated with things found on trips abroad, such as a collection of pipes hung around a Cuban flag (top, centre right). A collection of colourful ornaments is lined up on a shelf in the London apartment (top left). Steve's daughter, Sophie, holds a field mouse (top, centre left). A Mae West quote hung in Steve's office (top centre) sums up his attitude to life



# LIFESTYLE

Flamboyant graphic designer and brand consultant Steve Edge is an image maker for many of Britain's best-loved products. He lives with his family between a stylish loft apartment in Shoreditch and the Thirties timber cabin he restored in Box Hill. By **Dominic Bradbury**

PHOTOGRAPHS **LUCAS ALLEN**





## ‘From the age of four, as long as I had a bag of glitter and a Magic Marker I was very happy’

In the part of London that Steve Edge loves most, friends and followers call him ‘Lord Shoreditch’. The brand consultant and graphic designer has made his home here for over 20 years, with his office around the corner from the rooftop apartment that he shares with his family. With the dress sense of a dandy, a winning charm and a happy-go-lucky outlook, Lord Shoreditch can’t walk along a street in his homeland without striking up a conversation.

It’s an approach to life that has roots in Steve’s childhood, spent indulging a passion for art and design within a family of ‘outsider artists’ – gifted parents who had to make a living with everyday jobs. From an early age Steve was expressing himself through his art – and his clothes.

He remembers visiting a wealthy aunt, who kept all her china in glass cabinets and told him she only used it on ‘special occasions’. ‘She died a week later without using any of it,’ says Steve. ‘All I had for special occasions was my Sunday best, but I decided I was going to dress for a party every day. You don’t need an event to wear something exciting or colourful. If you wear something like that, the party comes to you and brings a sense of occasion to people around you. If you have a sequin dress or a silver suit, wear it. You may be surprised by what happens to you.’

The apartment’s sitting room (top left) is furnished with a Mies van der Rohe ‘Barcelona’ chair, an Eames lounge and a Vitra sofa. The photograph (above) is by Tim Flach. The top-floor family room opens on to a roof terrace (above left). Sylvie sits on a Matthew Hilton sofa (below). Steve chooses an outfit (right)



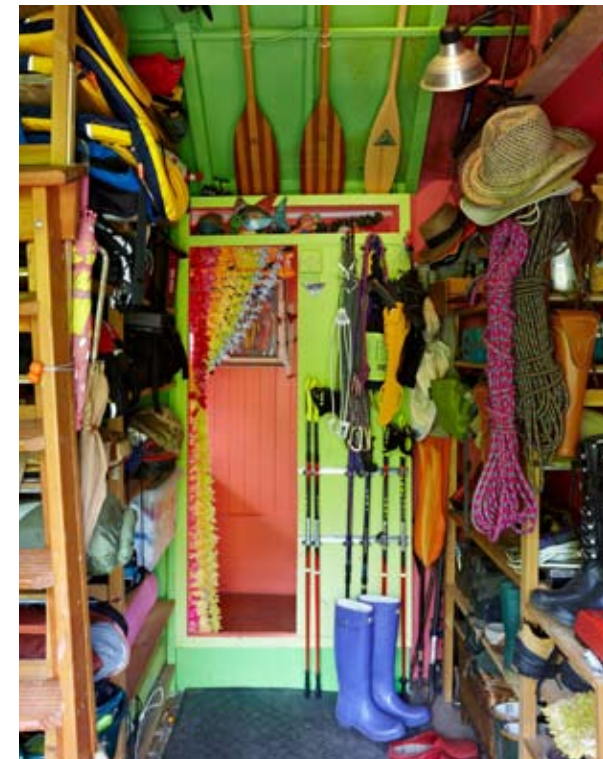
Steve is rich in intelligent advice, which feeds through into his work with some of the best-respected companies in Britain and also further afield. One speciality is helping to bring long-established names such as Fortnum & Mason, Purdey guns and Lock hatters right up to date. The same is true of some of the restaurants and clubs he works with, including Rules, London's oldest restaurant.

'I love history and I love stories, so I love all the old English brands,' says Steve, who also works with architectural practices, construction companies and luxury start-ups. 'People remember those old names for the right reasons.



I think of my work as helping them to evolve, rather than rebranding them; I like to use what has worked for them in the past and bring in new things that people may not have thought about. When a product comes to me, I try to identify the crucial thing about it, bring that back and create a story around it. That's what people buy into.'

Steve grew up dyslexic, and had a bohemian education focused on making things. A great family friend was Dennis Gray, who worked for a magazine company and helped to edit magazines such as *Practical Boatbuilder* and *Practical Woodworker*. Dennis had a home studio and for



LEFT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Sylvie, Sophie and Steve walk on the heath in Box Hill. Sophie and Steve play chess in the dining area. Steve leaps for a butterfly. The kit room is used to store fishing tackle, tools, life jackets, archery bows and more. THIS PICTURE Steve sits on his 'throne', under the tree house in the garden. RIGHT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The cosy living area is warmed by a wood-burning stove. The rustic decoration and bright colours of the cabin are a contrast to the sleek look of the Shoreditch apartment. Steve and Sophie play ping-pong on the deck



every practical 'do this at home' project – making a dinghy, for example – he would have to build from scratch and photograph every step for publication. From the age of eight Steve was helping him in his studio, and delighted in the skill of making by hand.

'By the time I was 12 I had my own double-page spread in a magazine,' says Steve. 'One month I would be doing a stick-insect light box, and another, a hedgehog hibernation box. The simple things can be the most exciting. From the age of four, as long as I had a bag of glitter and a Magic Marker I was very happy. Things haven't really changed.'

## Steve stretched his practical skills in restoring the family's Thirties timber cabin in Box Hill





Apart from a year working as an apprentice jockey in Newmarket, Steve was soon immersed in the professional world of design. He found the perfect job working in the prop department of EMI Studios, designing and making everything from exhibition stands to props for *The Muppet Show*. While he was at EMI, he and his pet capuchin monkey, Snuff, were called on to the set of Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and even appeared in the film.

'Snuff became a star and one day I also got a phone call from Spielberg asking me if I would have my legs shaved so that I could stand in for the actress Karen Allen's stunt-woman. She wouldn't go into that snakepit in the film because she had a phobia of snakes,' says Steve. 'So I wore Karen's party dress and it was Harrison Ford and me in the snakepit. They were real snakes – none of them were venomous, but I did get bitten.'

Not long after, in 1982, Steve founded his own design studio, working alone. Now he has a dozen people working with him and in recent years has helped to launch new brands such as Linde Werdelin luxury watches and Valde's new range of tilapia-leather belts.

'We do have to believe in the brands we work with,' says Steve. 'We only work with companies that are ethical and that we have a passion for, and we have to trust in the product. That's partly why we work with a lot of the old makes, because we know they deliver what they promise.'

For many years, the home Steve shares with his wife, Sylvie, a photographer, and the youngest of their five children – Sophie, 13, and George, 16 – has been a loft apartment near the office. Sometimes he makes the commute on his quad bike, dressed to the nines.

A few years ago, Steve and Sylvie bought the roof of their Victorian building and worked with architects Theis & Khan to create a new upper level to the apartment, complete with a main bedroom and a spacious family

'I love all the old English companies. People remember those names for the right reasons'



Steve looks at a presentation for Valde belts in his office (top), with [redacted] name [redacted] and [redacted] name [redacted]. The belts (right) are made from tilapia leather. A copy of Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* sits on a filing cabinet (centre right). Steve surveys a wall (far right) hung with logos of brands he has worked with





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Steve uses a quad bike to get around Shoreditch. He has lunch at Rules in Covent Garden – the oldest restaurant in London and one of his clients – with owner John Mayhew. Steve chats outside Present in Shoreditch with owners Eddie Prendergast (centre) and Steve Davies



room opening on to a large roof terrace. A sinuous, sculpted staircase now links the two floors.

‘We are lucky to have such great friends as Patrick Theis and Soraya Khan, who also live nearby,’ says Steve. ‘Our children all went to the same school. We bought an hour’s consultation with Patrick and Soraya at an auction and it turned out to be the most expensive lot I have ever bought. We thought, “Wouldn’t it be great to have a roof terrace and an indoor/outdoor room?” We do love Shoreditch but sometimes you can go a bit stir-crazy.’

The family’s other great escape is a Thirties timber cabin in Box Hill in Surrey. It sits in a quiet, picturesque enclave used as a camping site in the Twenties before the cabins were added a decade later. Steve stretched his practical skills in restoring the cabin, which was in a poor state when they bought it 12 years ago, with rotten floors and ceilings. He worked on it at weekends, also adding a deck large enough for a ping-pong table and a barbecue.

‘It’s been great fun,’ he says. ‘My father, Jed, found the perfect book for me – *Log Cabins and Vacation Homes* by Harry Wharton, from 1958, the year I was born. The book has illustrations on how to repair a roof and how to install a log-burning stove; it’s amazing. It taught me everything I needed to know to restore the cabin.’

While the London apartment is all clean-lined sophistication, the cabin is far more rustic and down to earth, filled with treasures from trips to India, Scandinavia, Cuba and beyond, as well as many pieces of woodcraft by Steve’s father. Then there are all Steve’s fishing rods and tackle, as this is also a place where he can indulge his passion for fishing – he is a member of a syndicate that fishes a nearby river. For the children there are other pleasures – walking on the heath or riding.

‘When the children were small they loved coming down here and the freedom of running around,’ says Sylvie. ‘But we noticed that as they became teenagers we stopped coming here so often as a family. So to tempt Sophie and George we found some great stables nearby. Riding is a great way to see the amazing landscape.’

Sylvie is a photographer who began her career working with Linda McCartney and now often collaborates with her husband on projects. ‘We met at a wedding, where I was taking photographs,’ she says. ‘I saw Steve and asked somebody who he was, and was told he was the best man. It was a great introduction. I called him over and asked him to get the bride’s family in, the groom’s brother... he was directing everybody. We still work a lot like that now.’

Sylvie also collaborates with her husband on some of his more philanthropic projects, which have included his service as an auctioneer at fund-raisers for institutions such as the Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design at London Metropolitan University. It is a creative relationship which has also inspired their children, who all seem set on following a similar path. ‘All of them are into art and design,’ says Sylvie. ‘And for Steve and me, collaborating together is fantastic. Some couples say they would murder each other within five minutes if they worked together, but for us it’s just the opposite’ □

Edge Design: 020-7613 5100; [www.steve-edge.com](http://www.steve-edge.com)