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# A VERY BRITISH HYGGE

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by  
SIMON SINCLAIR

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Published by  
EVEREST HOME IMPROVEMENTS



A VERY  
BRITISH  
HYGGE

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A GUIDE TO LIFE AND  
HOME IMPROVEMENT

by

SIMON SINCLAIR

# A VERY BRITISH HYGGE

How to achieve happiness,  
peace and security without  
changing very much at all.

by

Simon Sinclair

Book design by Chris Stokes

Published by

Everest Home Improvements



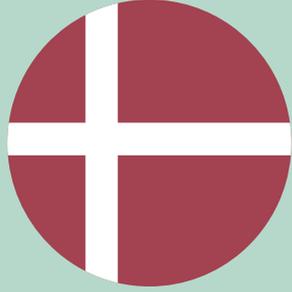
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## **PART ONE:** CAN WE BRITISH TAKE HAPPY LESSONS FROM THE DANES?

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The Danes have come on a lot since they were leaping off longboats to terrorise us Brits a thousandish years ago. Nowadays, rather than horned helmets and wolfskins, they seem happier in their own skins.

In fact, they're regularly named in surveys as the happiest nation on earth. Which is going some for a people who pay the highest taxes in Europe, have one of the highest costs of living and spend almost 50% of their time in the dark.

But of course, they don't think about it like that. And that's the key.



## THINK YOURSELF HAPPY

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Scientists have long recognised a link between being thankful for what you have and being happy. You can't enjoy the view if you're always reaching for the fruit on the next branch up.

And the Danes have always been good at this. Not being particularly materialistic, they've learnt to be happy with the simple things in life. Hygge is more about getting pleasure from experiences than owning "stuff". Those wonderful little micro-pleasures that allow you to shut out the outside world for a time and just... enjoy.

There's no truth in the rumour that they created it to offset the frustrations created by the Swedish - of making the rest of us shuffle around room sets in a five-hundred-strong herd of people in order to buy bookcases and bunkbeds that have names like *Hnøfr* or *Værsnot* and more screws than drill-holes.

Hygge is said to come from living in a cold, dark land with weather that can kill you - and the word was originally coined as that feeling one gets when one finds warmth, safety and shelter from a storm.

But nowadays it's come to have a deeper meaning than that.

## CAN HYGGE EVER BE BRITISH?

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It's not all drinking cocoa by candlelight in alpaca wool socks with a Scandi box set on telly, you know. Yes, it all looks lovely – those pictures of bicycles leaning against walls, hands cupping warm mugs under faux fur throws, enough candles to land an aircraft. But when do you actually do that kind of thing? The Danes do it all the time, because that's the kind of thing they like to do. Copy them if you want to, of course, but as they'll tell you, there are no rules about finding hygge.

We're actually very good at it in Britain. We've been doing it for centuries. We just haven't given a name to it. But which of us hasn't sat in front of a roaring log fire and thought, "This is nice!"

An evening with friends in the garden with a glass of chilled white wine. A lovely cup of tea and a catch-up with your mum. They're all very hygge.

At this point, most guides to hygge will pompously instruct you on how to pronounce it. And of course, you could spend the next hour trying to enunciate the first syllable to rhyme with 'Hugh' and the second with "get", minus the 't' on the end, but d'you know what? Why does it matter? We don't tie our tongues in knots trying to match the original Persian pronunciation of the word "pyjamas" (pai jamaahs) and we're quite happy to appropriate the French words "vin blanc" into good old English "plonk", so while we'll raise a gratified glass to the Danes for coining the word, it's ours now.

So you can pronounce it however you like.



## THE JOY OF SMALL PLEASURES

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Hygge has been described as “the absence of anything annoying or emotionally overwhelming; taking pleasure from the presence of gentle, soothing things”.

Finding warmth and joy inside when it’s miserable outside.

It’s not a thing that can be bought or held onto. It’s an approach to life – it’s about creating an atmosphere or environment that promotes warmth, peace, security, togetherness, tranquility and contentment.

It’s about appreciating those little nano-nirvanas that let you put the outside world on hold while you take some you-time. It’s often achieved (although not always) in having shared experiences with friends. It can be just using something that’s so well-designed that it puts a smile on your face each time you see it.

When you’re in the mood, a pizza, a bottle of wine and bawling out 80s tunes with your best friends in the kitchen is hygge. But so is the moment when you take your shoes off at the end of the day and the dog rests his head on your lap. It’s just that moment when everything just falls into place and all’s right with the world.

You’ll know it next time you get the feeling. And when you do, just take your time and enjoy it.

Dr Mark Williamson,  
Director of Action for Happiness,  
a think-tank and social change  
movement, says:

*“The most important contributor  
to our psychological wellbeing  
is the strength of our relationships,  
and hygge definitely tends to  
encourage more close and intimate  
time with loved ones.”*

## THE HIERARCHY OF HYGGE

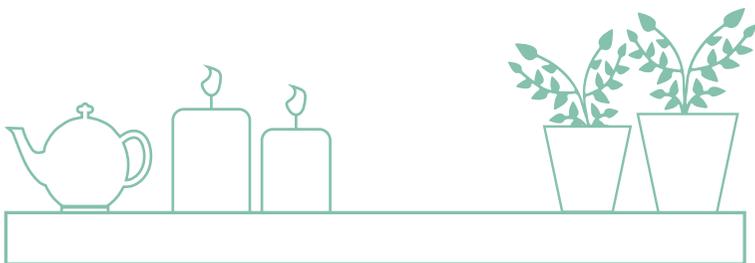
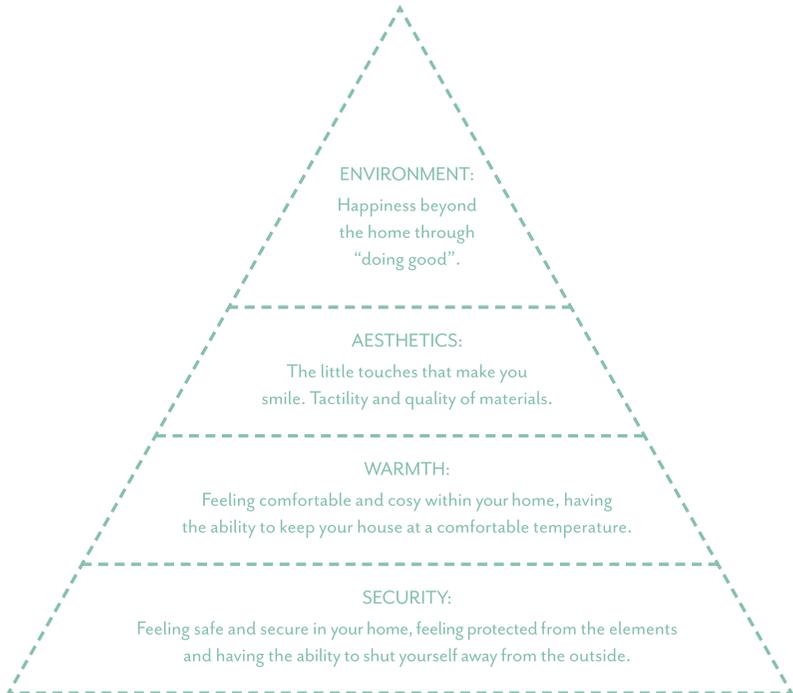
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Achieving a good state of hygge has a lot to do with how you arrange your home to satisfy your needs, in the order they need to be satisfied.

The most fundamental need for your home to feel hygge is a feeling of security. To have a feeling of total protection from the elements and intruders. Perhaps that's one reason why Everest were keen to help me produce this book. They're so keen on security that their doors and windows surpass the British Standard for security by 100%, with reinforced steel hinges and frame and the astonishingly secure new GrabLock, which has triple the locking surface area of the standard British lock, stands up to weather of Arctic extremes and takes so long to break into that it's really not worth a burglar's time trying.

On the subject of bad weather, a feeling of cosiness and warmth is hugely important in making your home feel like home, so it's worth investing in modern, draught-free and thermally-efficient windows if you want to feel as snugly hygge as possible.

And while good design may not feel like a necessity, in winter, you particularly begin to realise why the Danes appreciate it so much. When you're indoors as much as they are, looking at the same things, those small, well-designed details (such as Everest's monkey-tail window handles - or the way they design windows around you, where the handle is placed at exactly the right height so that you can reach it easily even when you're leaning over a worktop) have the power to make you smile every day. That's the kind of hygge touch you notice when you don't have it. And it's a lovely feeling to know someone has designed something thinking of you.



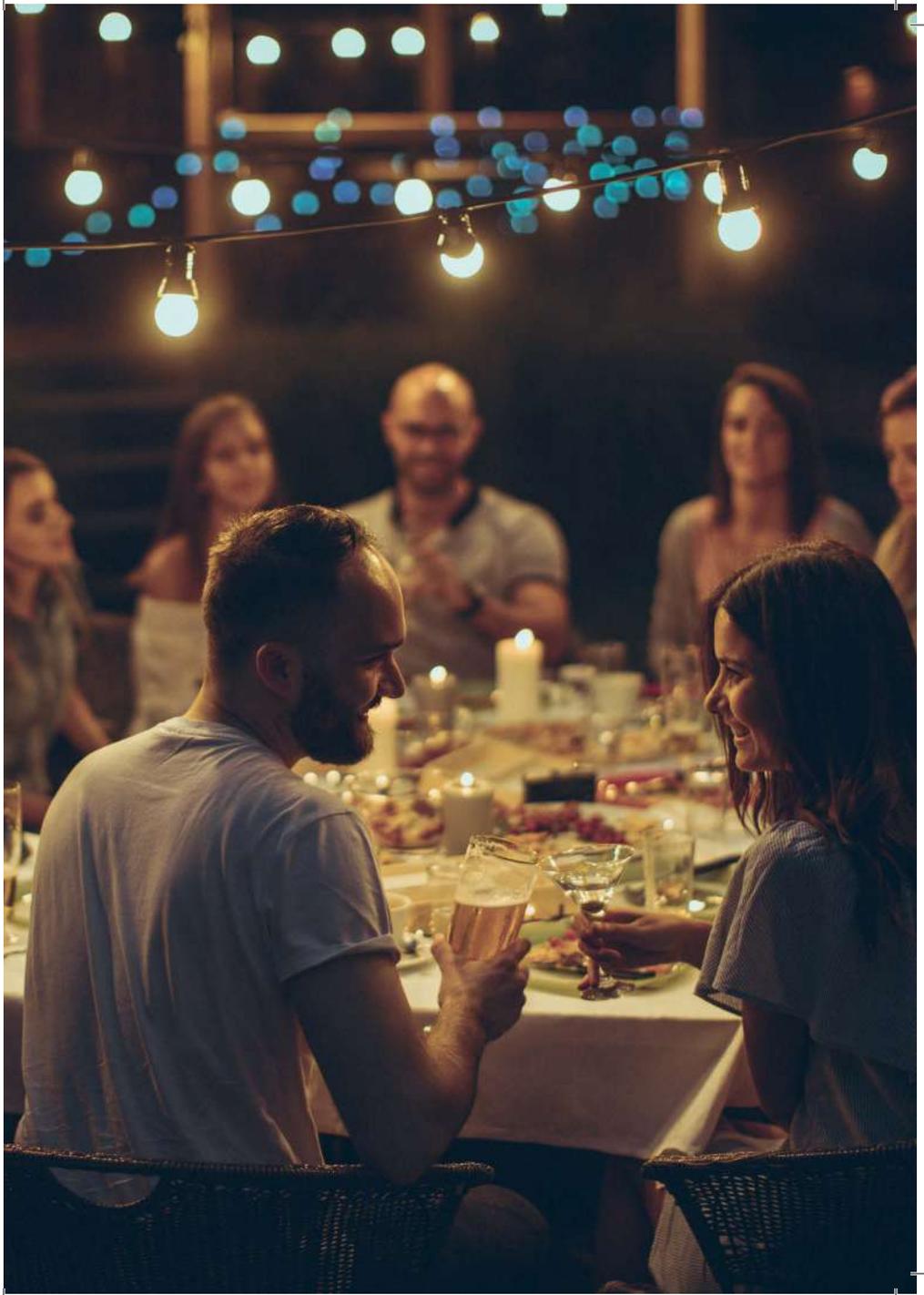
## IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING NO CARES. IT'S ABOUT PUTTING THEM ASIDE

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It's about taking the time to appreciate it. Being conscious of it. Taking the time to understand that you're enjoying it. And not to feel guilty about locking the door, turning your phone off and leaving the ironing for another day.

It's not about burying your head in the sand – but having the ability to be kind to yourself, recognise that chores, worries and so on can be made to wait, because you'll be better able to face them when you've taken some well-deserved time out

As Dr. Williamson says, *“Research shows that people who are able to be kind to themselves rather than harshly self-critical tend to have better mental health and higher life satisfaction”*.



## FINDING YOUR OWN BRITISH HYGGE MOMENT

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We've all had a moment of British hygge. That feeling you get when you have a lovely walk on the beach with friends and eat fish and chips on the pier. Or when you ask a neighbour round for a nice cup of tea and a slice of cake. Being first to walk down a country lane in the morning, walking through the glistening, gossamer spider's threads and feeling like you're breaking the seal on a new day.

And who doesn't know the wonderfully agreeable sensation when you walk into a warm pub out of the pouring rain, find a couple of seats by the crackling fire and take the first sip of your drink? This was why the Tan Hill pub in Richmond, Yorkshire – being the highest pub in Britain - famously fitted Everest double glazing, and the ensuing Ted Moulton "feather dropping" TV ad, captured the imagination of the nation.

One very British hygge moment stands out in my life, which I'll never forget...

When I was about fourteen, I'd been on a long boat trip with my father and a couple of friends, and while it was wonderful to catch, cook and eat our own fish as we went, we were getting a bit fed up of eating nothing but a maritime diet.

So as soon as we tied up in the marina, we all, with one mind, walked up to the harbour café and every one of us had beans on toast with brick red tea and thick wedges of chocolate cake. Then we had seconds. (I think I even had thirds.) I can honestly say, it stands out as one of the best meals I've ever had.

A very British hygge space, with plenty of room for everyone to get together in the same room, whatever they're doing, plenty of light and the ability to open it up in summer and feel part of the outdoors while you're indoors.







## PART TWO: THE HYGGE HOME

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Making your home feel more hygge is, again, a matter for you. Naturally, it needs to be a place in which you feel safe and secure. And of course, it needs to feel cosy and free of draughts.

It's very hygge to invest in a good, solid front and back door made bespoke to fit your home without gaps - and modern, A+15 rated double glazing (or even triple glazing for a bit of extra-hyggely soundproofing and cosiness); secure, modern locks that enable you to shut out the outside world and enjoy time for yourself.



## SOMEWHERE TO RELAX

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Whether you want to just curl up by yourself or entertain a few friends, you want everyone to feel totally relaxed. So make sure your living area gives off those vibes. Give it lots of cushions and throws so that people can make their own nests. And make sure the food and drink is easy to reach so that they can top themselves up and keep the hygge feeling seamless.

You might like to create what the Danes call a hygge-krog – literally a “nook”, but essentially a comfy space where you feel relaxed, secure and happy. Perhaps with a faux fur rug or two, a scattering of cushions and a little lamp to read by. It could be in a softly-lit corner by the fire, or next to a big, bright window in a sunlit bedroom, a cosy recess in the kitchen with some cookbooks or a conservatory flooded with sunshine.

## TURN THE BIG LIGHT OFF...

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Striplights and big bulbs don't do anything for hygge. Lamps focus on a purpose, an area that you've set apart for a reason. They naturally generate intimacy.

Candlelight in particular creates a wonderful feeling of hygge when you're settled in for the evening with friends.

They create an intimate, shared light that means you just have to get close to each other.

The Danes are particularly drawn to it, burning something like 13lbs of candles per person per year. But then, that may be partly because they don't have as much natural light to draw on as we do. Given the chance, they love to be outside and feeling the sun on their faces, because sunshine is also very Hygge.

So the more of it you can get into your home, the better.





## ...BUT LET IN THE SUN

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Lots of scientific studies have shown that sunlight really does make you feel happier. It releases hormones to give you more energy, help ease aches and pains, lower cholesterol and reduce blood pressure.

So the more natural light in your home, the better. So think about whether your windows let in enough light. If not why not think about an even sunnier place in your home, like a conservatory?

If you've already got a conservatory, think about how you use it, and whether you can make it into a more hygge place to be.

If you haven't, why not consider what you could do with one? An airy, hygge space to relax. To socialise. To stretch out. To breathe. To feel uncluttered. Or to make a mess.

To feel warm and safe, but where you can dine with the stars above you. Let the sunshine in, and the hygge will follow.

## HOW TO DECLUTTER WITHOUT LOSING YOUR HOME COMFORTS

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Decluttering is very Danish. After all, mess makes stress.

They know that simplifying your life and not placing too much importance on possessions naturally helps to reduce tension – there's less to tidy, more space for you – and it's not as easy to lose things. But let's not go too mad here.

You want to live in a home, not a whitewashed Scandi prison cell.

And let's face it, it's not exactly very hygge when someone pops round and you haven't got a spare mug. Hygge is about feeling relaxed and at ease, and open to other people. When visitors come round, you don't want them to feel like they daren't put their keys down for fear of making a mess.

But this is where the Swedes come to save us.

One of their favourite words is "*lagom*" which means, "*just the right amount*".



## DOES YOUR HOME TELL YOUR STORY?

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Your home is all about you and no-one else. It tells your story. It makes you feel good about being you. So the key to British decluttering is to understand the value of everything to you.

Every object in your home has been invited into your life, by you, at some point or another. Some things will be simply useful. Some things will hold valuable memories, others will drag up less pleasant times. Most, I'll wager, will do nothing for you now. So you know you can be happier if you just say goodbye to the things that don't match the picture you have now of your ideal life.

So go through your home room by room with a bin bag – pick up every object and say, "What do you do for me? How do you tell my story? When did I last need you? Can I live without you?"

If there isn't a good enough answer, out it goes.



## BE FIRM ON YOURSELF

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An object may have had a special place in your life once, but have you moved on? If an item no longer has usefulness or 'heart value', you're no longer of benefit to each other, and if it's not being used or loved, it's past its expiry date.

If you really don't like the idea of throwing things out, why not ask a different question, like, "Wouldn't you do more good in a different home?". Name a friend you'd like to give it to, who would appreciate it more. And if you can't, then it can go to a charity shop, where you know it will have a useful second life.

As you put it in the bag to go to its new home, why not say, "Goodbye, and thank you for the time I had with you."?  
It somehow feels more hygge that way.





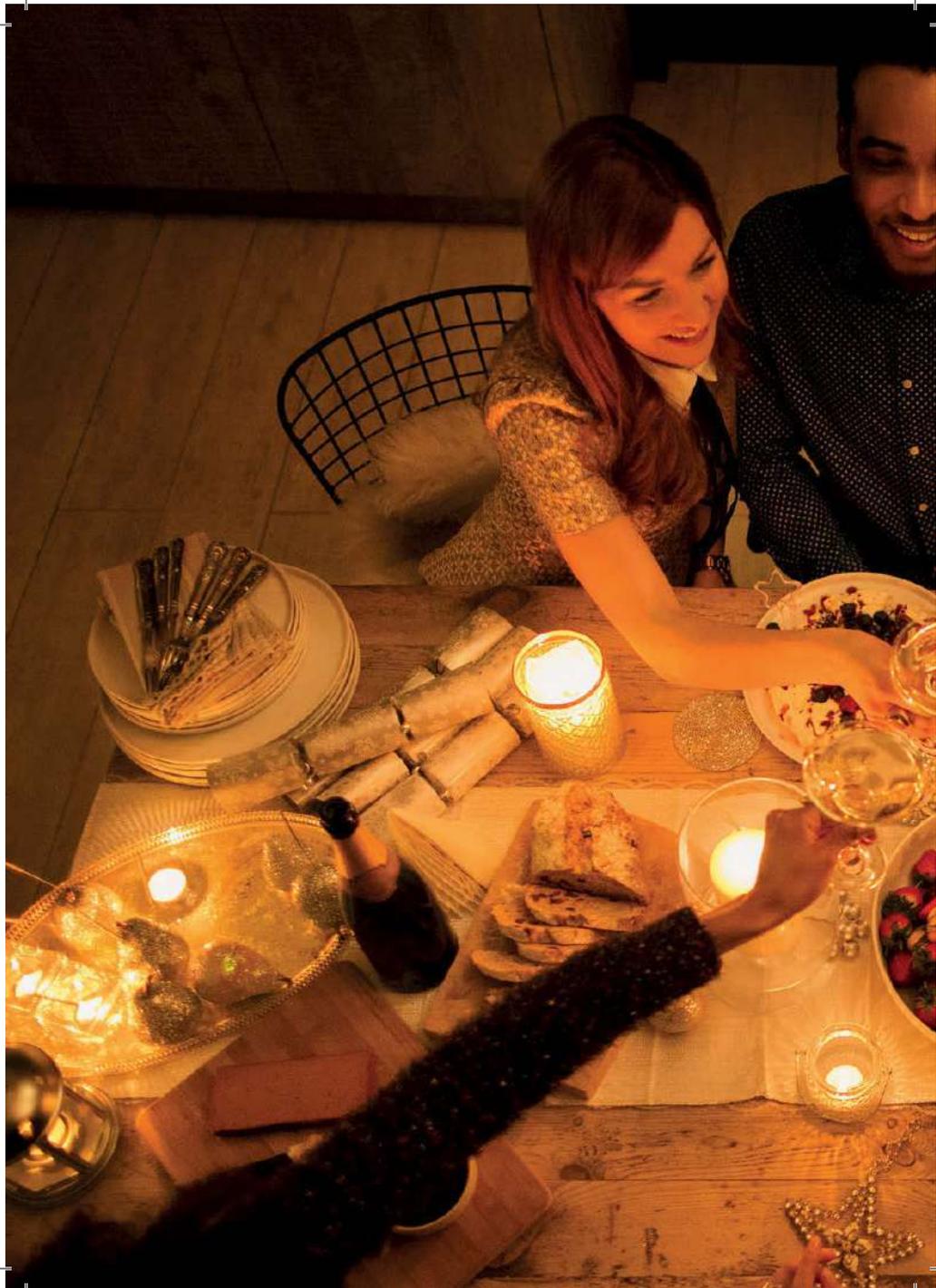
## WHAT TO DO WITH WHAT'S LEFT?

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Everything that remains in your home has been invited to stay for a reason, so it must have a permanent address. So if you like the answer to “What do you do for me?”, the next question must be, “Where do you live?”.

Make sure you go and put it there. If things aren't in their permanent home, they become clutter again.

But don't be afraid to have a messy place. Some things just don't fit into slots. Everybody has a “third drawer down” or a chaos cupboard for things that don't go anywhere else. That place in itself serves a function, allowing you to maintain hygge in the rest of your life – so be forgiving on yourself. You can achieve perfection or happiness, not both. Hygge allows you the space to relax and prepare for the renewed assault on perfection.







## **PART THREE:** **HYGGE THROUGH THE SEASONS**

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Hygge isn't just something you can get in winter. Yes, the Danes love their chunky sweaters and cocoa. But they also love to be out on their bikes and their boats. Fishing or walking in the forest. And if their winters didn't hang around for most of the year, they'd be out there a lot more.

So in Britain, although we moan about our weather, at least we have two more seasons than they do in Denmark. We call them "Spring" and "Autumn".

And while it may not be beach weather, it's also not as dark as Denmark, so there are still loads of hygge experiences to enjoy...

## SPRING

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Spring is such a hygge time of year. A time of bluebells and blossoms, lambs being born and birds building their nests. So don't let winter drag on, invite the outside into your home. Get that bird table up near the window so you can see how many varieties have made it back from their winter jaunts.

Hygge things to do in spring include:

- Spend a morning by the window after you've filled the bird table. Keep a journal of how many different types you see when each type of bird arrives in spring, so you can compare year by year.
- Watch the April showers bringing the garden to life from a cosy conservatory. See the colours multiply and watch the blossoms blow away on the breeze.
- Go for a walk in the woods to see the bluebells and smell the wild garlic underfoot. Why not go as early as you can. It's a lovely feeling to be the first to break through the gossamer threads left by the spiders overnight – like breaking the seal on a new day.
- Camp in the garden with the kids and cook bacon wrapped around green sticks over a little fire or disposable barbecue and serve in crusty French bread.
- If you feel it's not yet warm enough for a walk, invite some friends for a gentle bike ride with a pub at the end. You'll feel like summer has come early.



## SUMMER

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If winter hygge is about shutting out the outside world, summer is the time to invite the outdoors into your home. The garden is full of the sounds of songbirds and buzzing bees. The smell of freshly-cut grass and barbecues. Fill the house with lovely cut flowers. You don't have to spend a fortune, just bring a few in from the garden. And now's the perfect time to sit in the conservatory, if you have one.



### Hygge things to do in summer include:

- Take time over breakfast in the conservatory. Buy a few of the Sunday papers. And why not invite a few friends round for bacon butties or make a stack of pancakes?
- Make daisy chains.
- Collect elderflowers and make elderflower cordial.
- Put up a hammock or two in the garden so you can read and snooze in the sunshine. Take a blanket if it's not so warm – it's still lovely to be outside.
- Have snail races with the kids – stick post-it note numbers on their shells and think up crazy names.
- Sit with your feet dangling in a rock pool while you eat an ice cream. With a flake.
- Play football on the beach at midnight with glo-sticks taped to your feet.
- Take the kids on a boat trip to catch their own mackerel and then cook them over a fire on the beach.
- Invite a couple of friends round for strawberries and cream, and perhaps a glass of Pimms.
- Pick your own fruit and make jam.
- Have a picnic in the garden with crusty bread, cheese and wine. You could even make your own Boules set.

# AUTUMN

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As the days get shorter the hygge draws people closer. In Britain, the weather often surprises us with sunny days right through September and October. You can still sit outside with a heater on, or it's a time to share stunning walks to watch the changing colours.

Hygge things to do in autumn include:

- Play board games and drink hot chocolate with floating marshmallows while the rain lashes on the window outside.
- Make a home-made autumn pot pourri.
- Collect pine cones on a walk and bring them home to display in a bowl. Did you know you can use them to predict the weather, too? When the scales on the cone are closed tightly, it's going to be wet, and when they open up, it tells you it's going to be sunny.
- Serve soup in hollowed-out pumpkins with crusty bread.
- Go to the beach and eat fish and chips under a blanket while watching the dog frolic in the waves.
- Go blackberrying, then come home and make jam.
- Instead of apple bobbing, bob for marshmallows in chocolate sauce.
- Get lost in a corn maze.
- Play touch rugby in the garden.

- Collect coloured leaves and make a collage picture with the kids.
- Plant bulbs in the garden ready for spring.
- Bake two apple pies, one for you and one for a neighbour picked at random.
- Collect sloe berries and bottle them in gin to make sloe gin.
- Invite some friends round for a potluck supper and an old-fashioned scary movie.
- Build a bonfire to burn rubbish, but sit around it at the end of the day, bake potatoes in the embers and have a glass of wine.
- Learn to knit, and make a scarf.



## WINTER

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For the Danes, it's in winter that hygge becomes a necessity. With the outside so cold and dark from October to March, they need to be inside, and they need each other's support just to get through it. So winter became all about being good to yourself. Which means that, while we Brits are spending January dieting or detoxing, the Danes are enjoying every second of it. Treating themselves, being sociable and feeling good. Which makes them happier, which makes them nicer to each other, which makes them happier still. So rather than having an austerity January, why not do the opposite, and see if the year works out better for you?

And here's a thought - while conservatories have traditionally been thought of as a summer space, with modern advances in draughtproofing and glass technology they can be a bright, but warm place to be in winter, too. And there are few more hygge pleasures than looking at the frosty shapes on the trees all round you while you're cosy in the conservatory with a sausage butty and a mug of tea.

### Hygge things to do in winter include:

- Have a pyjama day, watching old black and white films back-to-back, with popcorn and hot dogs.
- If you have a fireplace, why not toast marshmallows with the kids and camp overnight by the fireside with them? You could even make your morning toast over the fire with them.

- Go for a walk before breakfast while the crunchy frost is still on the ground. Make doughnuts.
- Make one day a week your regular board game night with friends.
- Shovel snow off someone else's driveway.
- Listen to old music from the forties or fifties – you'll be surprised how jolly songs like "Run, Rabbit, Run" make you feel. And why not scour the second hand shops for an old record turntable, buy some vinyl records and invite your friends round for an old-time singsong!
- Put up mirrors around the room and light candles, so that they're reflected everywhere. Invite friends round for a slow-cooked stew – and ask them to bring a starter or a pudding.
- Pretend it's summer – crank up the heating, put on your swimsuits and flip-flops, put on some Bob Marley and drink cocktails in the conservatory.
- Go ice skating – lots of city centres now have pop-up rinks in winter.
- Go stargazing. Cold nights generally mean clear skies, so take a guide to the most popular constellations and see how many you can spot.
- Go snow-tracking. Get up early when there's snow on the ground and find some tracks – depending on where you live you could find some amazing animal prints. See how far you can follow them.





# CHRISTMAS

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Christmas is THE hygge time of year! When friends and families get together to eat lovely food and be kind to ourselves and others, differences are forgotten (for the time being, at least), we light candles, drink mulled wine and wear chunky sweaters.

Hygge things to do at Christmas include:

Well – unless you’re Mr. Scrooge, you won’t need any lessons on hygge at Christmas. You create hygge every year, just by doing what you’ve always done. Bring the family together, watch old films and let the feeling of goodwill fill your home. But in case you want a handful of ideas on doing something different, here goes:

- Try a goose instead of a turkey. Or even a rib of beef.
- Get a flipchart to play Pictionary.
- Make your own baubles.
- Keep a book of photos from Christmas and add to it each year, so you can look back over the years as the family grows.
- Get each member of the family to write (or record) a review of the highlights of the year, and each read them out after dinner.
- Get the children to write a family play and give everyone a part, to be performed in the evening.

- Instead of just giving Christmas cards, write a letter to each member of the family about what they mean to you, how you've seen them handle the year and what makes you proud of them.
- Invite a lonely or elderly person for Christmas lunch. Buy them a present and let them tell you about their lives – you'll find it just as enjoyable as watching an old film.



You see? It's not that hard to make life a whole lot better without changing very much at all.

Ever since I sat with my Danish friends in an Arctic cabin and they presented me with Chateaubriand and whisky as the weather howled outside, I've been fascinated by how their take on life keeps them buoyant when by rights they should be miserable. And ever since then, I've wanted to enjoy it and share it.

I'd like to thank Everest for their encouragement and assistance in getting this book off the ground. I hope it's helped in some small way. Now it's up to you. Good luck and the best of British hygge to you.



Older windows have character and heritage, but can be draughty and insecure. However, you don't always have to sacrifice them for hygge. Everest will fit unobtrusive secondary glazing, made to measure, to make your home cosier, quieter and more secure and still preserve the original beauty.

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# A VERY BRITISH HYGGE

BY SIMON SINCLAIR

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The Danish concept of hygge - an almost ritualised appreciation of calmness, cosiness and enjoying life's simple pleasures - has taken Britain by storm; partly due to the recognition that the Danes are regularly ranked the "happiest people on earth".

But as this book examines, we Brits are pretty good at hygge ourselves - we've just never had a name for it before. So Simon Sinclair explores the ways in which we can be happier in ourselves by simply enjoying the little things in life. Because when you learn how to do that, they become the big things.

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Book design by Chris Stokes

Published by Everest Home Improvements

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£5.99

ISBN: 978-0-9928398-6-4

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