

# Windows ON THE world

From inspiring vistas to secret vantage points, four women share their own private views

Words STEPHANIE CLARKSON



Belle Tout lighthouse offers spectacular views across the coast  
RIGHT: Louise in the top-floor lantern room

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY. HAIR AND MAKE-UP SAFFRON POWELL

## 'This is my private window on the world'

LOUISE WINTER, 42, is the housekeeper at Belle Tout, a b&b in a converted lighthouse on Beachy Head. She lives in Seaford, East Sussex, with her partner, Kristian, and daughter, Brooke, four

I FOUND THIS BUILDING, WITH ITS AMAZING vantage point, so seductive I simply *had* to work here. In January 2010, I saw a TV programme about the renovation of an old lighthouse. As the camera swung round this majestic building, teetering on a cliff-edge, with stunning views over the English channel and the South Downs, I thought, 'I want to be there!'. Then I realised it was down the road from where I live. I phoned the next day to see if they had anyone servicing it, met the manager and began work as soon as they opened.

It's an indescribably soulful and uplifting place. My job involves cleaning and making the rooms comfortable for guests, so I get to spend time in all six bedrooms and communal areas. My favourite views are from the breakfast room on the second floor. It has nine windows, which give a series of perfect pictures. I love looking out of one in particular, towards the working lighthouse. The views from the top-floor lantern room are also spectacular.

On a clear day, you can see for miles along the coast, including the Seven Sisters – a series of undulations in the chalk cliffs between Cuckmere Haven and Birling Gap. Then, out to sea, you'll glimpse sailing boats bobbing about.

Of course, English summers can be changeable, but that's all part of the atmosphere. I love the drama of watching storm clouds gather on the horizon. Being on the balcony in such weather can be both exhilarating and scary, especially as you look straight down to the waves crashing on to the rocks. Cleaning the windows of the lantern room each morning is my favourite job. I rarely see birds up that high, but I often find myself at eye-level with rescue helicopters, who wave at me. Sometimes, while I work, I catch glimpses of humanity and intimacy that remind me of the preciousness of life. I've seen people scatter ashes, I've watched others proposing, and some leave messages for loved ones spelt out in chalk stones. >>

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