



...ket for £6.25 million (Knight Frank)



i 'I haven't made any friends in the country'

The first thing I realised when I moved to the country was that I had to change how I greeted people. In the early weeks I would find myself at the bank launching into business just as the clerk asked how I was, prompting an awkward back-peddalling to make space for pleasantries.

Over the next months I adjusted to small-town life, and soon grew smug about leaving London. My partner, Peter, and I had yearned for a better quality of life. We remortgaged our tiny flat to fund a move to Richmond, a charming market town on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

We found what we were looking for: a cottage with wooden beams, a cobbled street that leads to a river, and neighbours who leave fresh rocket on our doorstep and, occasionally, warm cheese scones.

On Tuesdays I take horse riding lessons. I work in a room with a view of a castle. I eat local produce and go hiking in the glorious Dales. Life, in many ways, is perfect.

There's only one thing wrong: we haven't made a single friend. I thought it would happen naturally, but six months slipped to a year, which slipped to nearly two. My partner and I work from home and have no colleagues to fashion into friends. Neither do we have children, which, I'm told, is a good way to meet new people.

It has been hard to meet people our own age. I notice anyone under 40 like a magpie does with something shiny. I rushed home one day in boundless joy after spotting a thirtysomething couple on our road — interracial like us, no less — but soon realised they were only visiting.

Our retired neighbours ask us over for dinner or drinks — we accept with an eagerness that verges on embarrassment. At these dinners I find myself talking with unnatural speed, desperate to get my words out.

These evenings remind me how fiercely I miss my friends and family. I realise the things I dismissed as distraction — the glut of restaurants, endless literary events, the heft and hustle of London life — aren't inane, but something like a heartbeat.

Richmond offers a kinder, but lonelier existence and, as I begin another quiet evening, I fear my wooden beams and cobbled street may no longer be enough.

Kia Abdullah, left, is the author of *Take It Back* (Harper Collins, £8.99)



Decor decoded Home office

Pallavi Dean is a workplace design expert, so knew exactly how she wanted to WFH

Pallavi Dean is the founder of Roar, a design studio that focuses on workplaces. She is based in Dubai and has kitted out the Delano Dubai hotel and the United Arab Emirates' prime minister's office, but also works on residential projects. Dean has more experience of WFH than most — before she set up Roar she spent three years freelancing from her spare room.

"Because I've done this before I'm a bit more practised," she says. "The secret is getting a routine, then it's easy, but it can be hard not to keep working throughout." She talks us through her home office, a 21st-century version of a classic library.

1 When we bought this house, this space was meant to be a guest

bedroom. I'm an avid reader and I've always had the idea of having a floor-to-ceiling library. When you think of old-world libraries, you think of Persian rugs. I didn't want a rug on the floor because it's a hot country. I wanted cool, large-format tiles, so when I found this Mey Meh wallpaper from House of Hackney I thought: "Why don't I cover the ceiling and create a feature?"

2 What I love about this light by Ingo Maurer is that it grows as our family and memories grow — it features little sketches, poetry written to my husband and funny notes and drawings by the children from our weekend art classes.

3 The red chairs are by the Dutch designers Moooi. My clients in this case are my sons and husband, so I had to get buy-in from them. These chairs have little eyes on them, and my boys fell in love with them as soon as they saw them.

4 Agility is important — you have to have a variety of things to do while you're working. I'll often prop my laptop on the shelf behind me and it becomes a stand-up desk station (especially for Zoom).

5 The first thing we specify in workplaces is an antimicrobial desk. After lockdown, I don't think people will be compromising on

things like this. I have this desk — it's a synth... I always wanted a mar... being a porous materi... germs, but Laminam d...

6 When it comes to... there are two scho... thought. The purists w... books filling their she... more curated look an... co-ordinated my book... my shelves with objet... memorabilia from my...

7 Biophilia is a the... and work. It's imp... that connection with... window seat has wo... looking out into natu... productivity, so it's a...

8 When we bought... the windows had... window frames. The... was gut the façade a... very large picture w... two little pugs who... cats — they love to... on that window sea...

will also perch here... me while I'm worki... working in a space... light, try to sideligh... screen. It's nice to... direct light. If you... light, it will tire yo...

Interview by Victo...

Save&Splurge Rainbows

Compiled by Ka...



▲ Linen tablecloth, 165cm x 250cm, £250, summerilandbishop.com



▲ Paul Smith striped rug, from £4,242, therugcompany.com



▲ Rainbow bead... £995, uk.jonathar...

For more options v...