



# TARDIS DESIGN

On a beautiful permaculture farm in Dorset is a well-designed and attractive mobile home, complete with decking and an edible container garden. Aranya describes the evolution of his home.

**W**hen I moved into my mobile home in Dorset in December 2000, it was surrounded by nothing more than pasture. There was a stack of pallets by the door acting as a fairly unsafe set of steps and that was all. I spent the first couple of months just observing and starting to make plans. My first job was to clarify my wants and needs from the garden I wanted to make. My main ones were: food, beauty, exercise, relaxation, wildlife and a place to inspire visitors.

## OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE GARDEN

My initial observations about the site enabled me to draw up a rough design. It incorporated what I had learned about the prevailing wind – the way it funnels in between the shed and the caravan; and the movement of the sun – where it falls within the garden.

*Above:*  
Aranya in his surprisingly spacious mobile home.

*Right:*  
Herbs beds flank the steps up to the new deck.



I also became aware of the natural flows through the space – where I walked, where vehicles would need to pass and what I looked out upon through my windows.

The site has an excellent southerly aspect with a high hedge to protect it from north winds. The east side of the caravan gets the morning sun and, sheltered from the wind, it is an early morning suntrap. The hedge contains a good diversity of species – holly, hawthorn, field maple, blackthorn, bramble, elder, hazel, even willow which had grown from pegs used to lay the hedge a few years previously and now towers above the rest.

The caravan has good guttering and provided an excellent opportunity for water catchment. The soil in the field has a high clay content (great for fertility), but doesn't drain easily. The boundaries to the site were defined by the shed, hedge, mobile home and the need for vehicular access into the field through the gateway on the south side.

Of the non-physical boundaries, the main one was financial, though this was a good incentive to use all of the



available resources creatively. These included things lying around on the farm and waste from local businesses. I also had plenty of seeds that I had brought with me, friends who gave me surplus plants and my own ideas, energy and enthusiasm. With these resources I was able to create new beds (by using cardboard, compost, manure, sand and gravel), compost bins, water collection and to grow plenty of young plants.

#### IMPLEMENTING THE DESIGN

My first big job though was to build decking and a pergola around the mobile home using some new timber for the main

*Left:*  
The plan for the decking and gardens, a fine example of permaculture design.

*Below:*  
What a difference, the mobile home now and as it was before (*inset*).

structure and used pallets for the floor. Once built, it enabled me to successfully grow more vulnerable plants, such as salads and half-hardy perennials in tubs and also make good use of the vertical space. It is now a place for people to sit and relax or eat outside (or both!) and effectively doubles the caravan's floor space in the summer months. It also stabilises the caravan in high winds and makes the doorway (a couple of feet off the ground) much safer too.

I used the heavily shaded space behind the caravan to site the water butts and compost bins, where I could access them from either side of the garden. The damp area between the caravan and the shed proved an ideal spot for a pond, where it now reflects low winter sunlight up onto the shed, making it a particularly good growing spot. I then used the diggings from the pond and stones from a collapsed wall to make a rockery, which also afforded

some wind shelter to the plants behind. The pond provided new habitats; both in and around it, to tempt more wildlife into the garden and it has certainly done that.

The metal surfaces of the shed and the caravan are both good growing sites, because of their heat retentive properties and I improved this further by painting them dark green, which also had the effect of blending them much more into their surroundings. Additionally, the plant growth now on the outside of the caravan has a cooling effect inside on hot days, by reducing the sunlight reaching the walls. It goes some way to softening its sharp corners too.

Mulching the paths with woodchip has helped to prevent the grass from invading the beds and makes them less muddy in the winter months. The shed is now used for storing garden tools, right where they are needed. Growing strong plants in front of the

hedges has helped to keep them from 'invading' the garden.

It is a joy to look out of my window now and see birds bathing in the pond, dragonflies hovering, pheasants on the decking and this summer to be visited by a hummingbird hawkmoth which was amazing. I have learned much from this last three years and whilst the garden continues to evolve through the cycle of observing, thinking, designing and doing, it is now fulfilling all the needs and wants that I set out with on this design process.

#### SOLAR LIGHTING

Although my home has mains electricity, I am at least partly supplied by a solar panel that I use on my yurt in the summer and in the caravan in winter. The panel sits nicely in the window and although it is not angled for optimum light, the low winter sun can still give me up to two amps of current for a few hours on a sunny day... not bad when I can light my





space well with just a one amp lamp. Although it hasn't so far powered all my lighting it has gone some way towards it and my recent discovery of good LED bulbs may soon change that completely.

As usual I looked around for resources when I installed the panel and found a second-hand bread bin (for 30p) to house the charge controller, current meters and power connections (I used standard audio phono jack plugs for these). Inside the bin I can keep all my loose cabling and my inverter when they are not in use and the whole unit is as portable as the panel, should I wish to use it elsewhere.

*Top:*  
Wine bottles edge the beds.

*Centre:*  
Part of the recording studio.

*Right:*  
A sunny spot on the deck.

#### THE RECORDING STUDIO

Inside the mobile home I have two small bedrooms and I started using one of them 2x1.5m (7x5ft) as my office. This worked fine until I bought myself a music keyboard and some recording equipment too and had to find somewhere to house it all. This prompted a redesign of the space that occurred in three phases. I first realised that the desk I had on the side wall was taking up a lot of space, so after a bit of thought I rebuilt it in a way that it could be placed against the back wall instead. This immediately made a great difference and by folding down the bunk bed above and laying an old kitchen worktop upon it, I had a huge shelf there too. I then rearranged my two chest-of-drawers side by side under the window and placed another board from an old kitchen larder unit over them both. This way I was able to

accommodate all my computer equipment, plus my music key-board, recording equipment and speakers and it still felt more spacious!

This worked until I needed further room for extra equipment, so I then used more boards to raise the music keyboard up and created shelving space for it all underneath. This too was fine until I bought a small mixer, at which point the desk needed a further rebuild. This time I included pull-out shelves to accommodate computer keyboards and the mixer and to make access to cabling behind the equipment easier.

The finishing touches included a shallow, tall second-hand shelving unit bought for just a few pounds, which makes the very most of the side wall. The cost of materials to date? £26.50. What I have been able to fit into the room by using design principles and a few 'waste' items is amazing and it works really well... but only until I get more equipment perhaps? 🌱

Full details of these two design processes and more photos can be found as part of Aranya's online Diploma Portfolio at: [www.aranyagardens.co.uk/Diploma%20Portfolio/Designs.htm](http://www.aranyagardens.co.uk/Diploma%20Portfolio/Designs.htm)

*Aranya lives on a permaculture smallholding in Dorset. He has recently completed his Diploma in Applied Permaculture Design and has been a trustee of the Permaculture Association for the last three years. He is in the process of developing a self-employed right livelihood based upon a poly-income stream from teaching, producing teaching aids on CDROM, web design and Diploma support tutoring work. He currently co-ordinates the Sustainability And Permaculture Group (SAG) in Dorset, east Devon and south Somerset. Amongst various other projects, he is also working with many musicians to hopefully produce a CD of permaculture songs later this summer.*

