

I put Goldfinger's house into my book

Annie Muir talks to a debut author who took inspiration from the Hampstead home of modernist architect Erno Goldfinger in a novel that deals with a child who's snatched by her survivalist father and secreted in a woodland hut for nine years

The Hampstead house of an architect whose name was borrowed for a psychopathic Bond villain, is the inspiration for the family home in Claire Fuller's debut novel.

Our *Endless Numbered Days* is partly set in a property very much like National Trust-owned 2, Willow Road.

Designed in 1939 by Hungarian modernist Erno Goldfinger for his family, it still contains much of their furniture, possessions and individual design features such as the kitchen table - held up by a machine tool base - which was set low so they could not see the road while dining.

In Fuller's book, marital breakdown pushes Peggy Hillcoat's survivalist father to flee with her to a remote hut in the German woods and tell her the rest of the world has perished.

After nine years Peggy finally makes it back home to her mother and the brother she didn't know she had.

"Although it's changed a lot in the novel, in my mind the house is 2 Willow Road," says Fuller. "I went to visit it as I was writing and it just stuck in my mind. I've tried to transfer the feel of the house into the book, those different levels, all the wood and that modernist period of interior design which I just absolutely love."

At the time she visited the house with her husband, she was 40-years-old, working at a marketing company, with two teenage kids.

"I had only just started writing, so although it became the house



■ The interior at 2, Willow Road picture: PA

in my book, I didn't know that I was researching yet."

Published in February by Figtree/Penguin Fuller's novel has already been long listed for the Desmond Elliott Prize.

"You write your first book without any sort of anticipation that it will ever get published," she says, "So for that to happen is just wonderful."

This is not the first time that Goldfinger has made an impression on a fiction-writer. Born in Budapest he arrived in London with his new wife, the artist Ursula Blackwell in 1931, and his first architectural project was a contemporary interpretation of the Georgian terrace at 1-3 Willow Road.

The project to bulldoze existing old buildings and replace them with ultra modern concrete framed buildings caused a stir with local residents and Conservative members of London County Council including author Ian Fleming, who supposedly borrowed the name of the architect for the villain of his seventh Bond novel.

The other house in Fuller's novel is a hut in a German forest, which she describes as "just a tumbledown hut, almost uninhabitable really."

This though didn't require much research at all.

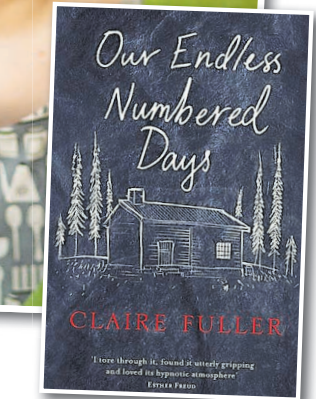
Fuller admits: "I wanted to spend the night in the woods on



■ Author Claire Fuller

my own, but I was too scared."

■ An Evening with Claire Fuller at 2 Willow Road on May 28 is the first of a series of Thursday evening lates when guests can explore the



property after hours with a drink, and hear a talk. Tickets for next Thursday's event are £18 bookings on 0844 2491895 or online at nationaltrust.org.uk

Savagely powerful play takes us inside dementia

THE FATHER
TRICYCLE THEATRE
★★★★★

At its best, theatre doesn't just communicate ideas or invite distanced empathy. It completely immerses us in the experience of another human being. Florian Zeller won France's top drama prize, the Molière Award, for his 2014 play, and Christopher Hampton's meticulous translation retains its savage power to plunge audiences into the world of a dementia sufferer.

Octogenarian André gets a visit from daughter Anne, who announces she's moving to London with a new boyfriend. Moments later, Anne is played by a different actress and she's married. Then she's alone. In fact, this isn't André's Paris apartment - it's Anne's. The

faces of family members and carers blur, while the rhythms of domestic life skip and stutter like the fractured piano music played between scenes. André can no longer be certain of anything, and neither can we.

This disorientation is made all the more chilling by James Macdonald's measured naturalism. The tragedy is everyday, mundane, all too familiar. There's no escape through melodrama or sentimentalising, and stylistic tricks are used for greater understanding, not broadcasting creative cleverness. Miriam Buether's chic, increasingly minimalist set becomes a devastating visual metaphor for André's loss.

Kenneth Cranham's contemporary Lear does not go gently. In a performance of great emotional intelligence, he

counters encroaching darkness with wit, cunning, fury and finally desperate supplication. Claire Skinner is subtly moving as the dutiful daughter he subjects to casual cruelty, and there's perfectly pitched support from Jade Williams, Rebecca Charles, Jim Sturgeon and Colin Tierney - the latter pair embodying Pinteresque ambiguous menace.

The master's influence is apparent, too, in the elusive memories and stark role reversals, the authoritarian patriarch regressing to sobbing child. But the haunting power of this piece is Zeller's own, bringing cold horror disturbingly close to home.

Marianka Swain

■ Kenneth Cranham as Andre
picture: Simon Annand

