

'It can be like a scene from Beatrix Potter'

MINETTE WALTERS is the mistress of chill-factor psychological thrillers and England's bestselling female crime writer, with a clutch of prizes for her dark novels – including *The Sculptress* and *The Scold's Bridle*. For the past nine years she has lived in an 18th-century listed house in Dorset with her husband and their chickens, pigs, sheep and dogs. Her writing room overlooks the lily pond and she plans to add a dovecote to the view. Minette's latest novel is *The Chameleon's Shadow* (Pan Macmillan, £18.99).

What can't you possibly work without?

I need my computer, an ashtray and a cup of coffee. I have an old typewriter chair which I sit on to work, and if I wobble around because I'm bored, it squeaks and reminds me that I really ought to get on with things.

Is it a cosy space?

I think it was originally an old dairy, but I don't know if that's completely true. Initially this room was separate from the rest of the house and had no heating, so I sat in here wrapped up in duvets. It has central heating now, but I prefer to work in a slightly cool room, otherwise I go to sleep.

Do you ever get unnerved by your own writing?

My intention is to make the reader worried, alarmed, afraid and fearful. When someone reads one of my books it takes them two or three days – quite a condensed emotional experience. For me it's a year, so it's difficult to retain the same level of fear a reader might have. I'm more frightened by trying to ride horses because I always fall off – I am useless at it. So now I regard horses with some trepidation. Falling off hurts.

Are you pretty much head down when you're writing?

Yes, although my chickens come and peck on the window when they are feeling hungry. And the dogs paw to come in – they are often at my feet while I'm writing. There was a marvellous occasion last summer when the chickens were out there, a couple of wild rabbits came to drink out of the pond and then some doves came to join them. It was like a scene from Beatrix Potter.

What are you working on now?

I have just Googled 'electric lighting for the garden' and I'm also redesigning my kitchen. I'm trying to think of a very good idea for my next book but haven't come up with one so far. So while I'm doing physical work in the kitchen and garden I shall be brewing some thoughts...

