

selfbuilder + homemaker

ISSUE 01 2021

SETTING THE BAR HIGH

A couple turned to Huf Haus to achieve their stringent demands for a substantial, glass-filled home

Some light relief in 2021

Self-builders' questions on decorative lighting answered

Getting organised in the bedroom

Why it could be the 'year of the fitted wardrobe'

Climb every mountain

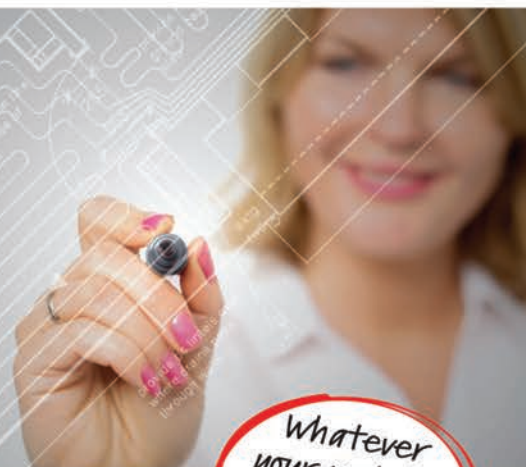
How the Dobsons managed to finally realise their off-grid alpine chalet after 20 years' planning



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FROM THE EDITOR...

You don't need me to tell you that the new year hasn't exactly brought a refreshed sense of optimism to the UK, more a resigned sense of acceptance that further tough measures are needed to battle Covid's rampant rise. There is a silver lining for many on the way, in that the vaccines are slowly being 'rolled out' across the country. Often it seems that an actual steamroller may be involved, given the sluggish nature of the progress.

If your experience is like much of the construction industry, your build will have managed to make faltering progress, with trades staggering their arrival on site much more carefully than ever before.

There have been a couple of helpful bits of news for the sector recently to keep the self-build dream alive however. In November, the Chancellor announced a Help to Build loan scheme for self- and custom-builders. However, possibly for predictable reasons, namely the Government being expected to fund 20 per cent of those loans, no further details have been released on how they will be allocated, or any timeline. Let's hope it doesn't become one of those initiatives which are quietly sidelined, as other pressing problems take centre stage.

The potential Help to Buy-style equity loans (which the National Custom & Self Build Association is working closely with the Government to try and push for within the initiative), could help democratise self-building in the UK.

Arguably, the inspiring self-builds we feature are still something of a pursuit reserved for those who have access to a considerable amount of capital. However many millennials don't expect to own a home, never mind build one. They need solid, realistic support for that to change, enabling future generations to experience the joy of self-build.

JAMES PARKER



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www.livingnorth.com/northeast/events

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www.selfbuildanddesignshow.com/east

IDEAL HOME SHOW

26 MARCH, LONDON
www.idealhomeshow.co.uk



ON THE COVER...
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Printed in England



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After a couple of frustrating years spent hunting for a new home, Paul and Sarka embarked on a self-build journey with Huf Haus to realise a property that met their high expectations

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SPACE TO RELAX

Megan Baker of My Fitted Bedroom says that getting organisation and storage right are top of the agenda for bedrooms in 2021

The events of 2020 have seen a surge in people organising their homes – re-evaluating what they really need and maximising every inch of space with clever storage. As a result, demand for fitted bedroom furniture soared towards the end of the year, and 2021 looks set to be the year of the fitted wardrobe.

For homeowners with space to spare – walk-in wardrobes and designated dressing areas are high on the agenda as people look to create tranquil, organised spaces that offer a little bit of luxury, completely freeing up sleeping areas from any form of clutter.

As a result, central islands within walk-in wardrobes are a popular must-have. The benefits here are that wall space can be fully maximised for hanging and shelving configurations, and the central space – often dominated by a bed – is used for additional storage.

The beauty of a walk-in wardrobe is that you have ample space to play with, but it is important to take time to consider the design and configuration is best suited for your needs. For example, do you want a door-free fitting or would you prefer everything to be sleek and

tidied away? Are you looking to create an impact with bold colours, or do you want a more pared down, tranquil finish? Would you like to make a feature of statement pieces? For example, open shoe storage (which is proving to be very popular within walk-in wardrobes) and shelving to display handbags and jewellery.

Of course, a walk-in wardrobe is a luxury that might not be an option for many self-builders, but that's not to say that you can't create the same effect in the bedroom itself.

FURNITURE

Increasingly, fitted furniture is being used to zone bedrooms, fulfilling two key design criteria. It provides plenty of space for the organisation and storage that people are demanding, while helping a larger room feel cosier and more relaxing.

Creating purposeful vignettes, i.e. groupings of furniture within a bigger space will give the room a luxe feel, but will also help break it down into individual zones, creating a mix of focal points and helping to draw the space in without making it feel small.

In zoning a space, layout is key. Pay attention to where natural light is coming from and position all furniture around the bed. Where a room can accommodate big, statement furniture, go for it, and feature it front and centre. Include a bed as big as the room allows, ideally positioned lengthways, and pick an oversized headboard in a lush fabric or print, to make a dramatic statement.

Small rooms can also benefit greatly from fitted furniture. With a blank canvas to work with at the design stage, you can really maximise the use of space by thinking vertically and designing in all of



the key pieces that a room could need – such as hanging space, overbed storage and a desk or dressing table.

COLOUR EXPERIMENTS

Another key bedroom trend that we have seen come into play this year is people's willingness to experiment more with colour – stepping away with playing it safe with white and wood-effect furniture.

Greys – in all shades – are proving very popular, as too is cashmere which works exceptionally well in both gloss and matte, creating a comforting





colour scheme and base palette in the room which is easily compatible with soft furnishings.

Darker colours – such as dark oak and classic indigo blue are also starting to dominate as people become braver with the colour choices, and look to fitted furniture as a way of making a style statement with a big impact piece, rather than something which blends into the background.

Nature continues to have a profound effect on interior design, a trend which grew over the course of 2020. As such,

green colour palettes are set to be big this year as people embrace botanical-inspired colour schemes throughout their homes – with the bedroom being no exception.

We've seen a big change in the way people use their homes change in the past 12 months – with homeowners evaluating what is important to them as they look to create tranquil, cosy retreats with very clear areas for relaxing, work and socialising. Having spent more time than ever at home, bedrooms have become a place to fully escape from work

2021 looks set to be the year of the fitted wardrobe

and home life, and this demand for a slick, uncluttered space is set to be a dominant trend for years to come.

Megan Baker is head of design at My Fitted Bedroom

1



INTERIOR INSPIRATION: HOME OFFICES

With the arrival of Covid, hundreds of thousands of homeowners took to their studies (or sofas) to work from home. As householders continue to combine home-working with being in the office to an unprecedented degree, we round up some of the best options to help you combine productivity with comfort, and create a great home office



1. Garden Trading's Elder Desk Lamp in 'Lily White' is designed to lift and brighten your home office, whether you're a lover of monochrome minimalism or a rainbow of hues. It's adjustable in three places with the press of a button for ultimate angled lighting. The lamp is priced at £85.

www.gardentrading.co.uk

2. This Sola Solid Walnut Home Office Desk by **Greenway Furniture** has an abundance of features, including a keyboard tray, three drawers, and a pull-out filing cabinet, plus a two-shelf storage cupboard. The desk is crafted from the highest grade of solid walnut, sourced from sustainable, managed plantations, and priced at £775.

www.greenwayfurniture.co.uk

3. Lakeland Furniture's Quebec Office Chair in vintage brown is made from soft faux leather, which is wrapped around three backrest 'pads' filled with high density foam. Both the arms and frame of the chair are moulded from chrome. The chair is priced at £194.99.

www.lakeland-furniture.co.uk

4. The Brooklyn Natural Solid Oak & Metal Desk by **Oak Furnitureland** is a welcome addition to any modern home office, featuring an open metal frame with a dark, aged effect that gives it an industrial appeal. The desk includes plentiful storage; a central shelf provides a great home for books and stationery; one side features three deep storage drawers, and the other has a handy cupboard compartment. The desk is priced at £699.99.

www.oakfurnitureland.co.uk

5. The Library of Wall Storage by **The Dormy House** creates a focal point in any room and provides a place for every book and/or precious collectables. The unit also provides hidden storage, and will look great in the home office. The Library of Wall Storage is priced at £2520.

www.thedormyhouse.com



The light fantastic



Marketa Rypacek of Industville looks at which of the many types of decorative lighting are best for your project, gives insights into how to go low energy without compromising light levels, and explains why lighting is like jewellery

HOW CAN LIGHTING HELP TO TRANSFORM THE BATHROOM INTO A PEACEFUL RETREAT?

We are finding more and more customers asking for advice about how to create a 'spa-like' feel at home, and lighting plays an important role. To create this look, choose handcrafted, high quality fixtures, as this will help create a luxurious feel in terms of materials. Dimmable bulbs are another good option and will give the perfect ambience for relaxing bathing.

One of the most common mistakes when it comes to bathroom lighting is not providing enough of it. That said, people will often counter this issue with a plethora of fixtures on the ceiling, which can look busy and overcrowded. Consider combining decorative lighting

with LED lighting strips that provide functional light, especially in areas around mirrors. This will create a design that's 'spot on' in terms of both the look and the functionality.

CAN I MAKE A ROOM FEEL LARGER USING LIGHTING?

A well thought through lighting solution is integral to the space, so it's vital that the lighting, as well as the electrical wiring, is considered from the very beginning of the project. Correctly specified lighting can make a space feel larger than it actually is. Lighting should be approached in a layered manner, so embrace the whole range of available sources, from pendants to recessed lights, to track lighting, lamps and spot lighting. I always advise customers to

vary the lighting in a room to create small pockets and pools of light, and to mix and match products to create a co-ordinated scheme.

HOW CAN LIGHTING BE USED TO ENHANCE A KITCHEN SPACE?

Creative use of lighting can in fact embellish your decorating project hence it is worth looking at implementing several different types of lighting. Ambient lighting will brighten and enhance the glow in a room, while lanterns and wall sconces will create a soft, relaxing atmosphere. Accent lighting is great for highlighting architectural features or to show off a piece of art or photography and can be created using halogen spotlights or table lamps. For work areas such as food preparation, task lighting provides localised light, and is particularly important in a kitchen.

In terms of decoration in a kitchen, aesthetic lighting can be used purely for embellishment. A trio of pendants over a dining table or breakfast bar makes a great statement and can complement other accessories in the kitchen, depending on the style chosen. For contrast, try using rustic handcrafted light fixtures with sleek modern style cabinetry and worktops. This popular style also adds another layer of texture to the room, giving a softer look.

Using high quality lighting will help to ensure that the interior is timeless and looks luxurious. Quality, handcrafted lighting needn't cost the earth but it does add a personal touch and will help to enhance the look of a kitchen. Lighting is like jewellery for a kitchen and can be used to add the finishing touches.

WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER WITH USING DECORATIVE LIGHTING OUTSIDE?

Whether you are wanting an industrial style look or something simple and minimalist for your outdoor space, there are lots of options for waterproof lighting that adheres to the strict IP regulations, and is on-trend in terms of its design.

When thinking about purchasing outdoor lighting it is a good idea to consider the size of your outdoor space as well as the purpose of the lighting. If, for example, you need to illuminate a path to help people stay safe, task lighting is a good option, whereas something more subtle could be used to



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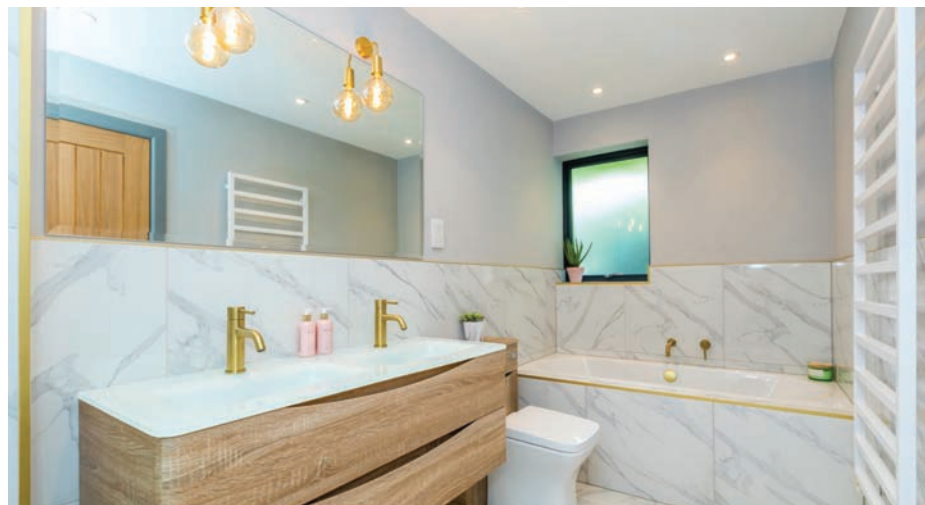
Consider the style of your property. Whether your home and garden is contemporary or traditional in character, decorative outdoor lighting can be designed for versatility to suit all styles, helping to further enhance the look of the property. When done well, outdoor lighting can be used to accentuate your home and make the elements you really love stand out.

Outdoor lighting also has the added advantage of deterring unwanted intruders, and you will also find a wide range of functional and motion activated solutions on the market.

HOW CAN I REDUCE ENERGY USE BUT ALSO KEEP THE RIGHT LIGHT LEVELS?

Instead of buying low priced, low-quality goods, look for products that will last longer, which do not hurt the environment and that you are proud to own.

In terms of bulbs, LED vintage bulbs are an excellent choice. With their clean, minimalist style, LED energy-saving



bulbs look great in any room, and they are as practical as they are decorative, as you won't need to replace the bulb for years. The increased wattage of modern LEDs provides a warm and relaxing glow that can be used in combination with incandescent bulbs for a 'polished' finish.

No one wants to waste energy unnecessarily, hence there has been increasing popularity of 'smart'

technology within the home. At the beginning of your design project it's worth looking into new technologies such as voice commands, mobile phones and other mobile devices to turn on lights at a specific percentage, as opposed to using the traditional method of turning a dimmer switch.

Marketa Rypacek is managing director of Industville

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Know your VAT position

Andrew Jones the VATman is the leading specialist on the VAT431 scheme for reclaiming VAT on self-builds, covering both new builds and conversions. *Selfbuilder + Homemaker* asked him to explain more about the ins and outs of the scheme, and how his firm can help

Q: Hi Andrew, could you briefly summarise what the scheme is all about?

A: The scheme has been around in different formats since 1974. It is designed – although I'd not quite agree with how successful it is, to put private individuals on the same level playing field as a VAT registered developer.

Q: When you say you'd not quite agree, could you expand on that?

A: Firstly, there are a lot of costs that cannot be reclaimed under the scheme, whereas a developer benefits from all these. HMRC actively seek reasons not to repay the claim, and subsequently reasons to reduce the claim once they have acknowledged the claim is valid.

Q: What reasons could HMRC have for refusing the claim in its entirety?

A: There is a very small timeframe in which to submit – should you submit outside that timeframe, HMRC could refuse. Another reason could be that the planning restricts who will live in the dwelling, for how long, or whether there is a tie to a business or agriculture. HMRC will also search the council tax banding register to see who lives there and for how long that person or people have been there – this can also become a problem. Another search carried out under this scheme is to see if the property is being sold. You cannot sell a property when building and reclaiming the VAT under this scheme, although there is no time limit under the scheme for the amount of time you have to live there afterwards.

Q: And what about reducing the claim after overcoming that hurdle?

A: HMRC require to view the original invoices. Order confirmations, proformas, quotations and so on will not be accepted, so you must present HMRC with the correct documents. Another reason is if you have paid the

wrong rate of VAT to your supplier, HMRC will not reimburse this VAT to you in your VAT reclaim.

Q: That is confusing, as I thought everyone pays 20 percent VAT and you send all the bills to HMRC at the end and wait for your cheque. Maybe it's not as straightforward?

A: You're correct in theory. There are 2 variations to the VAT431 scheme, new build or conversion. It's important you apply the correct rate of VAT to your project. On a new build, any contractor visiting site to do work for you should not charge you VAT on their labour or any materials used, as your project is VAT exempt. This does not apply to purchases made at builders' merchants and other suppliers, where you will pay 20 percent as normal and then reclaim the VAT in your VAT reclaim. If you pay 20 percent VAT to a contractor and should not have done so, HMRC will not reimburse this to you despite the contractor having passed the VAT on to HMRC in their quarterly VAT return.

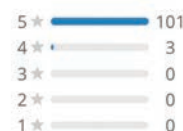
On a conversion, it's slightly more complicated; here any contractor visiting site to do work for you should only charge you 5 percent VAT for his labour and all materials used, then the 5 percent invoices are included together in your VAT reclaim with your 20 percent purchases from builders' merchants and alike. Should you pay 20 percent VAT when you should have paid 5 percent, HMRC will not reimburse you any of the VAT on that invoice – neither the 20 percent, the 5 percent nor the difference.

Q: How can you let your builder know you're not on 20 percent VAT?

A: If you're in any doubt if you're 5 percent or zero rated to contractors, don't hesitate in contacting me and I'll review your planning. But if you are sure of your position then good practice would be to present the contractor with your planning decision notice for their records.

Q: Is it that simple? What if the builder refuses?

A: There are two common difficulties here. The contractor may ask for a VAT exemption certificate or a reduced rate of VAT certificate, or may refuse



outright. If they ask for a certificate, we can help, as HMRC have not provided these since maybe before the 90s, but we have an alternative. (Please do not let this put you off the contractor, he is just making sure and covering his own financial exposure). If the builder outright refuses, you need to decide if you want to deal with someone who does not follow the rules, and if you're paying them more than you should.

Q: So where does your firm fit into all of this?

A: We provide a submission preparation service where we take your paperwork – in whatever condition you have them, you need to do nothing at all with them – and we will prepare and submit your reclaim for you. We will contact suppliers for correct documents, make sure no stone is left unturned in order to maximise your reclaim and most importantly, assist in appealing HMRC when the questions arrive after submitting the reclaim.

Q: So what do you see as the most difficult part of the VAT reclaim process for self-builders?

A: We have only covered some of the big issues, and each person and project have their own potential pitfalls, but briefly – when to submit, making sure it's the correct rate of VAT, names on the invoices, and HMRC's questions after submitting. However I have a helpful booklet with over 100 Q&A's similar to the above. If you'd like a copy, please get in touch at Andrew@vat431.co.uk. For a free, no obligation consultation, please call:

01269 825248 www.vat431.co.uk

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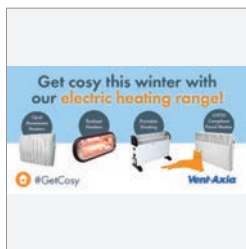


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www.sbhonline.co.uk


Heating tips to help you stay cosy this winter



Wintery weather and the pandemic are both causing us to spend an increasing time at home – making it more important than ever to stay cosy. **Vent-Axia** is committed to public health and helping in the nation's response to COVID-19 and so is therefore offering nine simple tips to help combat cold homes: Move your sofa away from the radiator; Maintain the right temperature; Turn down the heat by 1°C; Programme your heating; Eliminate any draughts; Check your insulation; Get cosy outside with

a radiant heater; Dry clothes away from the radiator; Let the sunshine in. For further information on all products and services offered by Vent-Axia visit their website.

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CASE STUDY



A CHALET FOR ALL SEASONS

Christa and Del Dobson had been planning their alpine-style project for nearly 20 years, and it has finally come to fruition in a luxurious off-grid chalet

TEXT NICHOLA HUNTER IMAGES DOUGLAS GIBB

Although Christa grew up in England, her mother's family hail from the German/Austrian border and the influence of the Alps has been prevalent throughout her life. When she met Del, he shared her passion and the couple opened two alpine shops in Bath. One specialising in interiors and the other in clothing.

"It was always our plan to do what we're doing now," Christa explains. "We wanted to have a really small bed and breakfast, a small shop and a beautiful chalet. The chalet was always part of the plan but not necessarily to build it ourselves!" About eight years ago, they were made an offer on the shops that was "really too good to turn down," but the buyer pulled out.

By that point, says Christa, "we'd already started the ball rolling to move. We didn't know where we wanted to go, we just knew what we were looking for." She explains further: "It had to be remote but not overly so, and on a main road but not a busy one. It was difficult to find the right place; we looked all over the UK." About 18 months after they started their search, they found a house in the Scottish Borders, which was "perfect."

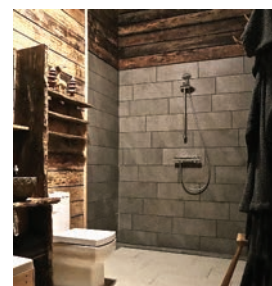
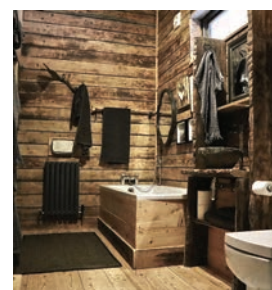
Originally owned by Jedburgh Abbey, Singdean was a small 'steading' (farmstead), located on a larger sheep farm, until the 1950s. When Christa and Del bought it eight years ago they changed the main house into a bed and breakfast and the small barn into an alpine shop. Two years ago, they realised the last part of their

LOW POINT

"Del broke his thumb, cladding the front of the house up a ladder. But we just had to carry on. It still hurts!"

*Planning was granted
under the 'rural tourism'
umbrella which means that
the chalet can only be sold
along with the house, not
as a separate entity*





dream – creating a stand-alone, alpine chalet in the former paddock.

The couple contacted their architect, Ray Cherry, a couple of years before they started the build – as he had already worked on the plans for their shop. However, at that point he was too busy, and they weren't ready financially. "When we were ready, Ray was still super busy, but as he'd already been to the site, met us and knew how we lived he agreed after a brief chat on the phone to send us a quick sketch." He emailed it over, and "that was it," says Christa – "he'd completely understood what we were looking for. He basically drew what was in my head – a luxury bothy [mountain shelter]."

While planning was straightforward, it still took a year to come through and was granted under the 'rural tourism' umbrella which means that the chalet can only be sold along with the house, not as a separate entity.

"It took a year to build, and we finished it in May 2019. We're very, very happy with it. When you've been dreaming about something for so long, it's quite nerve wracking when you come to do it, in case it doesn't live up to expectations.

FLEXIBLE TO CHALLENGES

The relatively simple layout is designed for couples who want to escape – one bedroom, a large bathroom, a cosy seating area, and a kitchen. However, despite its simplicity, Christa and Del soon realised that their budget wasn't

going to go very far.

"We had a budget, but it was a bit optimistic. It was very carefully researched over several months and I completely and utterly believed in it, but I underestimated things like the price of screws and how many we'd need – and that was crazy money," says Christa. "The price of insulation went through the roof because of a fire in Germany. The insulation company had to ramp up their production in different parts of the factory, which meant their machines broke because they were working too hard, and the price went up by about a third. And then waiting time went up too; it was things we couldn't plan for."

Fortunately, the couple's builder, John Elliott from Newcastleton, was flexible in his approach, which eased the pressure on the budget; he had already worked with the couple on their own house. "We had them do the important, difficult bits such as the foundations, drainage, the timber frame, basically any big tasks that required significant machinery."

When they realised their budget wasn't going to extend to the builder taking on everything, "Del and I rolled up our sleeves and did what we could, when we could." She adds: "John was great; it was a case of 'there's plenty here you can do yourselves but I'm here when you need me.' It's a difficult way to do a project but it's a lovely thing to do as well."

With hindsight, Christa can look back fondly on the build, but she explains that in the thick of

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it, it was a different matter. "I don't quite know how we did it. We had all the structural drawings, we understood them, and we knew what we had to do but the physical aspect of it was tough.

"I think we counted nine separate layers around the whole of the property that had to be applied within the walls, but the plasterboarding was definitely the most difficult and horrible job," she says. "Del and I struggled because the ceilings are so high and balancing the boards on your head while trying to screw them in is just exhausting." The weather didn't help either as the bulk of the build took place in winter and being off grid, they had to run everything off one very long extension lead.

Then there was the added complication of the B&B, which the couple were still running in tandem with the chalet build. "Time was our biggest enemy. Guests can arrive from 3 pm and at 2.30 pm, looking like a feral, wild thing, I'd try to finish what I was doing on the chalet, get changed, brush my hair and get ready to welcome our guests. Trying to squeeze the build into these few hours was difficult; our guests come for peace and quiet – we couldn't be hammering and drilling when anyone was staying."

Eventually, Del and Christa tried to book two weeks off to focus on the chalet, but didn't feel

When you've been dreaming about something for so long, it's quite nerve wracking when you come to do it, in case it doesn't live up to expectations

they could cancel a weekend booking in the middle. "We were in the process of digging the drainage for the septic tank, we'd just had a huge gravel delivery, and the site looked like a bomb had gone off. Three builders plus Del and I made a mammoth effort to make it all look pristine for the guests, and at the end of the weekend we pulled it all apart again!"

GETTING THE DETAILS RIGHT

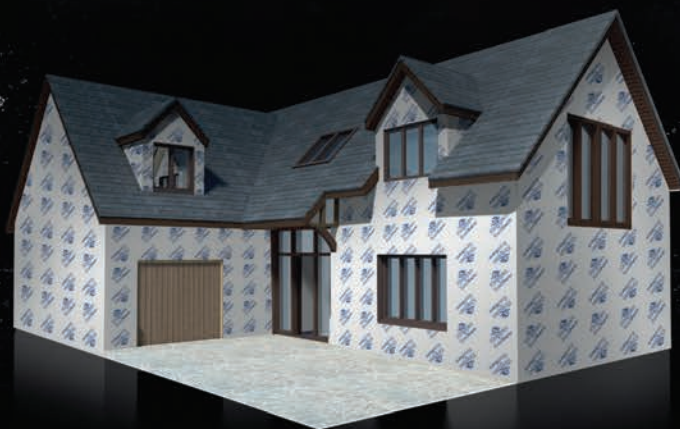
Internally, the couple have worked just as hard to build their alpine dream right down to the

HIGH POINT

"The moment our guests walk into Alpnhaus for the first time. Seeing their reaction is always amazing, and we sometimes have to pinch ourselves that we actually did it."

CHRISTA'S ADVICE

"Have more money! When you're doing a build of any kind and your budget is tight, it's stressful when things don't go according to plan."



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burnt larch that extends throughout the chalet. "Each piece of larch has been handled several times. Charring the wood took months but any piece of wood you touch, you can feel the grain much more than you can normally. We've made every bit of this building beautiful."

It's not just the larch, Christa and Del have been collecting for the chalet for nearly 10 years, and every room, accessory and detail has been carefully considered. "The chalet has been in our heads for so long when it came to the finishing touches it was more a case of implementing them than planning them. For example, we knew we didn't want a statement kitchen, it had to have the same feeling as the rest of the house." The black doors are simple MDF with leather handles, there's a slate splashback, and more wood. "It's designed to

complement the rest of the house."

The bathroom required a bit more thought to achieve a natural look that would survive moisture and to ensure it looked rustic, but felt luxurious. It has a huge walk-in shower and bath but the smaller details that Christa loves include the antler towel rails and river stone sink. "The whole chalet oozes luxury, but the kind where you don't have to take your shoes off. We don't do egos here!"

Guests can also take some of that luxury home with them as the chalet contains many alpine lifestyle pieces, clothes, jewellery and hand-made essential oils that the couple stock in their shop. "There's a diffuser that Del makes and sells and it's in the chalet for guests to use too."

Not for sale are many things that Christa grew up with or sourced on a visit to see her family.

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"There are old sledges that I had when I was a child and that we've reused as a bedside table, and there've been a lot of instances when we were ordering for the shop that an extra piece was added for the chalet."

The chalet also ticks all its eco credentials following in the footsteps of the rest of Singdean by being completely off grid. "The chalet has solar panels and is heated by a biomass boiler. However, the insulation is so good, we've hardly had the heating on." Water comes from a private spring and electricity is stored in a large battery bank with generator backup. The couple is also about to install a small wind turbine "which we're really excited about."

A STRONG HUG

It appears that Alpnhause does have everything one could wish for and more besides, including a wood fired hot tub is perfect for relaxing under the stars. The building has also been designed so that it can be enjoyed whatever the weather. "What I especially love is the balcony," says Christa. "It's huge and has a massive overhang which means it's incredibly sheltered but still has an amazing view." This is a building that can withstand all weathers: "in the Scottish borders,

The price of insulation went through the roof because of a fire in Germany

we sometimes get every season in one day. It had to be strong and protective, and it's a big strong hug of a place."

After 18 months, the house that Christa and Del built is certainly strong and solid, and as a project does the couple great justice. How do they feel about the whole experience, and what have they learned? "I've done it once, and it's incredible and amazing," says Christa.

She concludes: "I'm of the opinion that if someone can do it, then I can do it. During this project I've learned that's not always the case, but I'll always give it a try. Now whatever life throws at us, we're like, 'we can handle that, we built a chalet!'" ■



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Off-grid sewerage

Rebecca Taylor from HD Services gives her insights into getting groundwork specifications right for your build, and explains the options available when no mains sewerage connection is possible

Building your own home can be one of the most rewarding things to do in your life, as well as one of the most daunting. There are many things to consider from building materials to groundworks, from roofing options to utilities. Connecting to services such as water, electricity, gas and sewerage can cost thousands if the connection points are not close to the chosen location of the build, but there are options available which can allow you to remain 'off grid.'

If there is no mains connection available, you may be able to install a system to treat the sewage produced so that it can be safely disposed of. It is estimated that approximately 4 per cent of properties in the UK have off-mains drainage systems, and these properties are typically situated in more rural locations where a connection to a main sewer is not possible.

You must have Building Regulations approval if you have or are planning to install a new septic tank or small sewage treatment plant. You may also need planning permission.

There are three options for managing sewage from your property if you are not connected to the mains sewerage system – cesspits, septic tanks and sewage treatment plants.

CESSPITS

A cesspit is a holding tank for the waste from your property. Waste goes in and stays there until the tank is emptied, as there is no 'outlet.' The waste that enters does not undergo any treatment and only leaves the tank when emptied.

Cesspits are generally seen as the last resort for a property's drainage system, if the size or nature of the land available does not allow for a septic tank or sewage treatment plant to be installed. Cesspits should be at least 7 metres away from any habitable parts of the building, and located within 30 metres of an access point to allow for tank emptying.

SEPTIC TANKS

A septic tank is the most common type of off-mains drainage tank. Its purpose is to



System disguised as a bee house

treat wastewater from your property's toilets, sinks, baths and showers, dishwashers and washing machines by a process of biological decomposition and drainage. The wastewater will usually pass through a number of inspection chambers.

A septic tank does not have any mechanical parts and it doesn't perform any direct 'treatment' of the waste. The term 'septic' means 'infected with microorganisms' – tanks contain bacteria which break down organic waste, separating the solids and the liquid. Once the wastewater reaches the level of the outlet pipe in the first chamber, it will overflow into the next chamber and so on.

The solids in the water break down and separate into three distinct zones or layers. The top layer is made up of less dense matter – fats, oils and solids that have not yet broken down. This layer is known as the crust. The second layer is mostly wastewater with solids 'in suspension'. The third/bottom layer is known as sludge, and consists largely of more dense waste that builds up slowly over time. This, plus the top layer of crust, are what should be removed during a

It is estimated that approximately 4 per cent of properties in the UK have off-mains drainage systems

routine septic tank emptying.

A septic tank should only need emptying when the solids levels have built up within the tank. The settled liquid drains away through a soakaway or drainage field. The drainage field is designed to treat the waste effluent by the action of naturally occurring bacteria. For this process to work successfully the septic tank must be working efficiently and the subsoil free-draining.

The treated liquid effluent is commonly disposed of in a septic drain field or



'shallow infiltration system.' Nonetheless, groundwater pollution may occur and can be a problem.

Discharge regulations relating to wastewater from septic tanks were changed on 1 January 2020. Under the new rules, septic tanks can no longer discharge to surface water drains, rivers, canals, ditches, streams or any other type of waterway. If you have a septic tank that

does, you are required to upgrade or replace your septic tank to a full sewage treatment plant.

Currently, all septic tanks that discharge into waterways must either be replaced with a sewage treatment system, or have the discharge to waterways impeded and redirected to a drainage field. Like cesspits, septic tanks must be at least 7 metres away from any habitable parts of

the building and be located within 30 metres of an access point.

SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS

A sewage treatment plant system is the latest form of off-mains sewage treatment and drainage. Powered by an electricity supply, a sewage treatment plant provides treatment of the waste by physical, biological and sometimes chemical processes to remove pollutants. This means that the wastewater which leaves the tank is cleaner than that coming from a septic tank. For this reason, it is permitted for sewage treatment plants to discharge into a flowing ditch or watercourse.

Sewage treatment systems come in two different formats; package plant and bespoke design. A package plant is an 'off the shelf,' ready to go unit which can be purchased ready-made – like an all-in-one stereo system which has an in-built radio, CD player, record player etc.

A bespoke design is akin to a 'separates' stereo system, where if you need only to replace the radio, you can. Bespoke systems can provide you with exactly what you require and may require in the future.

Rebecca Taylor is business development and compliance manager at HD Services



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CASE STUDY

LONG DISTANCE CHAMPIONS

How virtual project management was the answer for long-distance clients to turn a Victorian vicarage into a modern masterpiece

TEXT JAYNE DOWLE IMAGES MATTHEW CATTELL



When the major renovation of Melinda and Chris Swann's Victorian vicarage near Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire began, the couple were almost 7,000 miles away in Singapore.

Chris, 62, a director in the oil and gas industry, was posted overseas to the Far East, so Melinda, 59, managed the first nine months of the build from the end of a phone and laptop, holding virtual meetings with her architect, Stuart Hall, and builder, Samir 'Sammy' Ene, to ensure that progress was being made.

"We used Facetime, email and Dropbox to share photos," Melinda says. "I popped back every six weeks for the bigger decisions, and returned to the UK three months before the

project's completion, when we stayed in London before moving in."

Stuart and Sammy agree that this remote way of working was successful because Melinda, a volunteer for The National Trust and the Sue Ryder palliative care charity, was very proactive and directed all the project management and interior design herself, although she doesn't have formal training.

"Melinda is an excellent client, because she knows how to make decisions, and sticks to them," says Stuart, a co-founder of Colony Architects, a practice which is based in Reading and Guildford. "We've always been keen on collaborative working anyway," he adds. "We started working individually, then we started meeting up in a shared office space, but we are

LOW POINT

"When the staircase company let us down regarding the timing, and didn't communicate with us effectively. We did resolve it in the end with the help of the builders, but it was frustrating."





all comfortable working remotely with each other."

He conducted site meetings by doing a walk-around video, which Melinda could watch. If there was a question which needed an immediate answer, they could speak on the telephone.

For instance, when a major query popped up about the basement – the plan was to retain a vaulted ceiling, but the builders discovered that it was actually made of plasterboard – and it needed a fairly prompt response, Melinda and Stuart shared a Skype call. "That time, she turned the camera around to show me where she was," he says. "It was a typical Maldives scene; azure water, white sands, and she told me, 'this is my office today!'"

Builder Sammy, whose company SDA Build typically works on high-end renovation projects in south west London, also found Melinda's clear focus a great help. "To keep things on track, the main thing is to be focused before you start the job, and know exactly what you want to achieve," he says.

His advice to other self-builders and renovators is not to start tweaking plans too much once the actual build process is underway. Also, he stresses that you should set aside a sensible contingency fund: "Any work on a period house will cost more than a standard build because of the cost of specialist materials and replacements – such as chimney pots and bricks – which will need to match the originals in order to meet conservation guidelines."

HIGH POINT

"Moving in on the exact day the builders predicted, a year to the day since they started. The entire project finished exactly on time."



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CHALLENGES

At £2m, for the full renovation of the 540 m² house (incorporating the former school house) and annex, The Old Vicarage's budget was generous. However, there were some practical issues to overcome.

Sammy says that because most of his projects are usually in London, his major challenge was to work out the logistics of remote working and establish trusting relationships with local building merchants and suppliers. "I'm very grateful to D.J. Giles, the salvage and reclamation company we found in nearby Stokenchurch," he says. "They were so helpful when it came to finding things like chimney pots and roof tiles, which we would have found really difficult to source otherwise."

Although The Old Vicarage is not listed, its status as an excellent example of mid-Victorian ecclesiastical architecture brought its own challenges for Melinda and Chris. "We used our own moral compass with regards to maintaining likeness and replacing like for like," says Melinda. There were also various tree preservation orders in the grounds to adhere to, plus the property stands in the picturesque hamlet of Highmoor Cross, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); any alterations were expected to be sympathetic to the surroundings.

The house was built between 1857 and 1859

"We are all comfortable working remotely with each other" – Stuart Hall, Colony Architects

as the vicarage for nearby St Paul's church, with distinctive brick and flint elevations under a slate tile roof. Strong ecclesiastical influences remain, including gothic arches, leaded and stained glass windows, and the sign of the cross decorating some doors and joinery.

A small village school was added to the vicarage in the 19th century, then in time, the school became part of the house. Melinda and Chris bought the property in 2015 and spent some months working on their ideas before the build began.

The strong and good-humoured connection between client, architect and builder helped the project to run exactly (literally to the day) to schedule, taking a full year to complete. Melinda had worked with Sammy before, on

YOUR BEST BIT OF ADVICE ON RENOVATING?

"Plan. The devil is in the detail. Also, communicate constantly with your architect and builders, and follow up their queries. And don't forget to step back and enjoy the fact that your dream is being realised."

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the renovation of a property in London, but this was her first project with Stuart: "I originally looked at two architects but went with the younger, open-minded 'can do' attitude of Stuart." She says working with him and SDA was "a winning combination."

REMODELLING

Their task involved the complete remodelling of the existing vicarage, the adjoining school-house and the guest house outbuilding. The main house now has a sitting room,

dining room, TV room, kitchen and breakfast room, wine cellar, boot room, and laundry room. Sammy says that it required skill, patience and research to seamlessly match up the 'school' part of the property with the principal house, as there were discrepancies in the level of finish between the two.

To aid this, he managed to source some photographs of cottages built by the same original builder of the vicarage, which helped him to establish key design details, such as the shape and style of the chimney pots – a detail he is especially proud of.

Outside in the 1.7 acres of garden, there is a heated swimming pool, also freshly renovated by Sammy and his team; the Swanns generously allowed the builders to use the pool when they had finished work for the day. "They also provided space on the top floor of the house with a television and PlayStation for the lads, some of whom stayed in the house for the

project as Melinda and Chris were away," says Sammy. "The younger ones loved it in Henley-on-Thames, and enjoyed going around the countryside on their motorbikes."

Contrary to the usual renovation advice of starting at the top of a house by securing the roof and working downwards, the builders started first in the coach house, then moved on to digging out the basement. "It was more of a 'bottom-up' approach," says Melinda. "But this was only possible because there was no one living on the property, besides the builders."

Melinda was keen to ensure everyone felt at ease and involved, especially because of the scale of the work involved. "It was a huge, huge project," she says. "The house was so higgledy-piggledy with twists and turns everywhere and it was cold and draughty, just like a church hall really. None of the buildings had been touched for some time and there was a mish-mash of copper pipes everywhere and there were twin staircases – the vicars' and the maids'."

STRUCTURAL SOLUTIONS

There were two major structural challenges: removing the two individual staircases to be replaced by one central sweeping spiral staircase, which shows off stunning leaded glass windows and allows more light into the entrance hall, and joining the old school with the vicarage. The two were originally connected by means of a "tight little corridor" says Melinda, which was removed and replaced with boxed

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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glass to allow the “garden in” as well as flood the glazed link with light.

She explains that the house was sold as having eight bedrooms, but she wanted every bedroom to be ensuite. So, some of the bedrooms were lost, and a couple of rooms repurposed as his and her separate dressing rooms off the main bedroom’s ensuite.

“And the kitchen was moved from the ‘maids’ side of the house, to become more central and therefore the heart of the home,” adds Melinda. In addition, the cellar was extended and waterproofed and now houses a wine cellar for Chris, a plant room, and the laundry room.

TRADITIONAL WITH A TWIST

A major consideration for what had been a draughty old house was good insulation to improve energy efficiency to super-high standards – now the insides of all the exterior walls are lined with 5 cm of ThermoLite (a synthetic insulation material). The living spaces and pool are heated by way of air-source heat pumps, with underfloor heating throughout the house, all the windows have been replaced with like-for-like double-glazed units, and wood-burning stoves have been installed into all the original fireplaces.

Melinda calls her visual style ‘traditional with a twist.’ She focused on emphasising classic features without turning her new home into a period pastiche and found inspiration by reading every decorating magazine she could get her hands on, attending design fairs, and visiting designers and makers at the Design Centre Chelsea Harbour in Lots Road, Fulham, west London for thoughts and ideas. Engaging a lighting designer from John Cullen Lighting, and

having the confidence to employ bold pattern has helped to balance out light and shade and bring character and warmth to the rooms.

As always, her trusty builder and architect supported her in this vision. “For example, I wished to use a fabulous ‘Timorous Beasties’ wallpaper in the main bedroom, on a wall facing the bed,” she explains. “However, with a window in that wall, the wastage would have been costly. So instead, I asked the builders to create two panels of wallpaper on either side of the window. It looks amazing!”

The delight in Melinda’s voice is clear. She says that her proudest achievement is that her home makes her family happy – “and we are proud of what we’ve done to it.” She is especially pleased with the entrance hall and its new staircase, the glassed-in passage link, the welcoming kitchen and the elegant double aspect dining room, with its working shutters and a marble fireplace surround.

Would she consider undertaking another major renovation project? She laughs and says she’s already working on the next; her daughter’s house in Fulham, west London, using the same architect and build team.

It’s ironic that a project so steeped in history has been such a catalyst for setting in place such innovative methods of project management for all concerned. “We’ve really embraced remote working now, after our experience with Melinda’s project,” says architect Stuart Hall, who says the practice now takes videos of sites and asks clients to supply videos of their homes and ideas in return. “It’s helpful for looking back as well. I can review the videos that we took, rather than reading emails or whatever, and I can see so much of the progress.” ■

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A strikingly modern residential property in one of Kent's most famous coastal towns is making articulate use of **Marmox** Multiboards as part of its cladding solution. Gerald Glover commented "Given the elevated coastal position the boards had to be fully waterproof, while we also needed them to comply with fire regulations for exterior cladding use, but the lightness of Multiboard – enabling you to install large sections without difficulty – as well as the ease of cutting and fixing, were all

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Wolverton Hall: The only folly is to call it a folly



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A folly; an ornamental building with no practical purpose built in a large garden. Whilst aspects of this definition can be applied to describe Wolverton Hall Folly, it certainly contradicts the 'practical purpose' element with the most appealing of purposes. Wolverton Hall Folly is a retreat for contemplation and a place to entertain. The orange hues of the Henley Red brick from **Michelmersh's** Charnwood factory offered the opportunity to introduce a handmade texture which was designed to the specific dimensions of 2", in keeping with the building's mix of Tudor and Georgian design. The brickwork was given wide mortar joints and complemented with stonework to give the facade a brightness.

www.mbhplc.co.uk/wolverton_hall_folly

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Getting brickwork right

Sean Wilkins of the Brick Development Association gives specification, design and workmanship tips that will ensure that your brickwork is successful



Despite being used for thousands of years with evidence of their use in the UK dating back to the time of the Roman Empire, clay bricks remain a fundamental ingredient in the construction of modern residential buildings.

With thousands of different styles of bricks available in the UK, the colour, texture and general appearance of brick is the main starting point for narrowing down the specification. Brick is a durable and robust material which is suitable for use anywhere in the UK.

However, for the parts of the UK that are classified as severely exposed to freeze-thaw cycles, it is important to check that the 'Durability' category of a brick is F2, and its 'Soluble Salts' category is S2. The F2 and S2 categories can be found on the Declaration of Performance, which are available from the manufacturer. These are produced for all bricks available on the UK market as part of the CE marking process.

In addition to the brick specification, it is important to confirm that the mortar specification is appropriate to the

exposure conditions. This is done by specifying the proportions of binder (cement and lime) to the amount of sand in the mortar.

How the mortar joint is finished will mostly affect the appearance, but it should be noted that recessed mortar joints are only suitable for sheltered locations. This is because a recessed joint can allow water to sit on the exposed part of the brick, which can impact durability and increase water penetration.

DESIGN

The design of brickwork can influence the durability and performance of the finished building, but also it can affect how the brickwork will weather.

Firstly, the setting out of the brickwork should be to co-ordination dimensions, which are a multiple of the brick size, plus the mortar joints. This will help make sure that mortar joints are kept to acceptable widths and minimise the need for cutting bricks.

One of the joys of brickwork is that the bricks can be arranged in an almost infinite number of ways. Fashions in

brickwork are constantly changing, as architects and builders experiment with new ways of using the material, from minimal Scandinavian design to the more recent trend for decorative brickwork. Our website contains a number of projects





that could give you inspiration on the design of your self-build brickwork project. There are also a number of short design guides that introduce details, such as 'hit and miss' and textured brickwork.

The detailed design for brickwork is a large subject – too much to cover in the space we have here. Historically, the detailed design would have varied due

to the local geography and building style. As a general rule, more exposed locations would have overhanging copings, sills and roof eaves to minimise the saturation of brickwork, due to wind-driven rain. In severely exposed conditions it is a requirement to use overhanging details to ensure durability and prevent water penetration.

WORKMANSHIP

The success of brickwork is very dependent on the quality of workmanship provided by the bricklayer. Once brickwork is built there is very little appetite to take it down, so it is essential that it is built correctly the first time.

Due to the nature of brickwork being a site-based trade, it can be challenging to manage expectations around the appearance of the finished work. For larger projects, the single most important step is to build a sample panel of brickwork so that all parties can agree to the quality of finish. The sample panel should be at least 1 m² (60 bricks) and preferably in a location where it can be kept for the duration of the project. If a sample panel is not possible then an area of brickwork should be agreed as the quality benchmark.

Brick is a natural material, which can mean there is a small variation from

The design of brickwork can influence the durability and performance of the finished building, can also affect how it will weather

one pallet to the next. To minimise the possibility of patchy brickwork therefore, bricks should be blended from a minimum of three packs. For more detail on this and a number of other workmanship tips, please see the BDA document 'Good site practice and workmanship.'

Sean Wilkins is technical manager at the Brick Development Association

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Rooflights – historic solutions

You might think rooflights are a modern invention, but as Peter Daniel of The Rooflight Company explains, they have a long history which ties into humanity's perennial desire to bring light into buildings

Natural light has been worshipped since time immemorial, even pre the agricultural revolution which occurred approximately 12,000 years ago. Every culture has at one time or other worshipped the life-giving ball of fire in the sky, and while it would be a bit grandiose to say that this is the ultimate beginning of the story of rooflights, it also wouldn't be totally wrong.

Natural light has been critical to architecture since we first started making our own dwellings in the prehistoric era. Ultimately, from a practical standpoint we have always needed to be able to see what we're doing. But we first see evidence of natural light going beyond the perfunctory and becoming a focal point of architectural design, a celebration, or a tool for the dramatic, as long ago as 4,000 BC in Egypt and China. And the primary drivers of this change were religion and royalty.

It's not until the period between 1 BCE and 1 AD that we see what could really be called the direct ancestor of the modern rooflight – the atrium. The Romans' advanced engineering and architectural skills allowed them to build houses and public buildings with atriums – literally a hole in the roof to let the light in and the heat out – as a matter of course for all statesmen and wealthy homeowners.

Over the next 1800 years or so, something akin to modern-day rooflights developed from atriums with the simple addition of artisan glass, but they remained rare and exclusive. It wasn't until the Victorians came along, the great architectural and engineering innovators that they were, that glass became clear, consistent, easily mass-produced, and cheap.

They marked this wonderful achievement of harnessing natural light at the Great Exhibition of 1851, with the construction of the iconic iron and glass



Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London. It was the grandmother of all rooflights, a completely glazed roof, and it's no surprise then that the mass-produced Victorian rooflight followed shortly thereafter.

The first cast-iron rooflights came in two styles; 'deadlight' or opening. They were top hung, flush to the roof, single glazed and utterly beautiful. They were also prone to rusting, and about as thermally inefficient as it is possible to get (atriums just edging into first place on this front).

The next step in the rooflight's

evolution may be more familiar to you. With the invention of plastic polymers, and multi-glazed window systems, the thermal efficiency of windows improved, but we lost some of the aesthetic appeal of windows and rooflights, and they often clashed with older properties.

Period properties simply would not suit having all-new 'plastic-fantastic' windows and rooflights, indeed, conservation officers simply would not allow it. This meant that owners of listed properties and properties in conservation areas were stuck with the beautiful but thermally



inefficient cast-iron, single-glazed Victorian rooflights.

That's where the next major innovation in the rooflights occurred, where modern spec met the superior aesthetic quality of the days of yore. Products like the Conservation Rooflight, a steel replica of the original cast-iron Victorian rooflight that is double-glazed but still authentically top-opening have that 1850s look, but are fitted with specially developed thermal shielding to perform

like a modern window.

Since then, rooflight-related developments, in terms of both technology and aesthetics, have boomed. We now have modern, flat and energy-efficient rooflights, the likes of which would have boggled the minds of Victorian architects, and yet still retain that high quality look and feel they would expect.

The bottom line is, it doesn't matter how aesthetically demanding your design

is, whether it be listed or in a conservation area, or recently built and high-spec, we are living in the golden age of rooflights and there is something perfect out there for your project. The really key thing to consider is you will probably look out of that rooflight for decades to come, so it's worth getting it right.

Peter Daniel is product innovation director at The Rooflight Company



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Planning ahead for summer - with the ideal patio door

If you're dreaming of spending summer in your garden, then now's the time to start researching your ideal sliding patio door - a stylish and practical way to provide easy access to your garden, patio or balcony, and to bring more light and air into your home.

Modern window technology has significantly improved the design, performance and security of patio doors, but as they become more sophisticated then specification can be more complex, and expert advice more important.

For example, not every wall can accommodate every type of sliding door, especially if you want to create an extra wide opening, so start with a structural assessment before you start planning. Also think about orientation. In a south facing facade a sliding door may cause too much solar gain – unwanted heat from the sun – but this can be controlled by specifying excellent insulation and specialist glass. Security is also vital, so look for doors which are Part Q approved. This means they already satisfy Building Regulations for safety and security, with features such as multi-point locking, strengthened glass and internal glass seals (glazing beads).

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CASE STUDY: GAMEKEEPER'S LODGE, WARWICKSHIRE

This impressive new build home, created by interior designer Sarah Farrington, features the VELFAC composite system throughout, specified for its low U-values, slim frames and contemporary style. 'I wanted a really well-insulated home which also made the most of views over a lake at the front and woodland at the back,' explains Sarah. 'I also wanted windows on both east and west elevations of the large open plan living space, but as we are on top of a hill air tightness was also important.' Triple glazed VELFAC units were the ideal solution: 'The timber internal frame acts as a thermal break, preventing warm air leaving the house, and the triple glazing keeps the inner glass at a comfortable temperature,' she says: 'The aluminium external frames are also durable and low maintenance,' she adds.

Almost every room at Gatekeeper's Lodge features floor to ceiling windows and doors with two impressive full height windows, each 4m long, installed one above the other around an internal lightwell. 'Large windows

mean the house is always filled with light,' notes Sarah, 'despite being built into the hillside.' But with so much glazing installed, making the right choice of windows was vital she says: 'The VELFAC system is exactly my style - contemporary, refined and elegant'. Security was also important, she adds: 'I only have two doors with keys as everything else locks simply from the inside.'

Sarah's architect, Hayward Smart, recommended VELFAC: 'I actually bought my windows six months before we started as it was such an obvious decision,' she says: 'I ordered the windows directly from our architect's drawings, thanks to our main contractor Sibbasbridge, which meant the windows were delivered to site ready to fit which helped us achieve our impressive build time of only 14 months. I also used a VELFAC Approved Joiner who was price competitive and efficient. We've had very few snags but VELFAC has worked hard to resolve any issues, and this level of customer service would make me recommend VELFAC again and again.'

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A photograph of a modern, two-story house with a dark brick facade. The house is set against a twilight sky with some trees visible in the background. A large, vertical glass window on the left side of the upper floor is illuminated from within, showing a bright interior. The ground floor has a dark, recessed entrance area with a small, glowing light source. To the right, a balcony with a glass railing is visible, also illuminated from within. The overall mood is contemporary and sophisticated.

CASE STUDY

CONTEMPORARY BLEND

Set in a secluded Hampshire valley, a very contemporary home blends into its rural setting thanks to a design by two architectural practices that echoes traditional local buildings. James Parker reports

TEXT JAMES PARKER IMAGES RICHARD CHIVERS



A strikingly modern house has arrived in the South Downs National Park, its brick walls helping offset the design's contemporary, rectangular lines and blend into this very rural, isolated setting. In a picturesque part of the world that sees few planning permissions granted, the fact that this home got the go-ahead (despite admittedly on appeal), is a coup for both the client and architects involved.

Woodcote House is located just north of the village of Upham, near Winchester, and replaces a small cottage, plus a handful of other brick buildings, that had fallen into disrepair. In 2017, work started on the new, four-bedroomed house, which would have a modern open-plan layout to suit the couple who now live there. They run an agricultural equipment business, which came in handy demolishing the existing buildings and clearing the site.

The project kicked off when the clients approached Richard Rose-Casemore, director of Winchester-based architects Design



Engine, when he gave a talk locally, and asked if he would be interested in taking on the project. However, with the firm normally specialising in larger projects, they offered it to architect Paul Cashin to deliver after they had taken it through planning; he formerly worked for Design Engine but had formed his own practice in 2012.

This being a very early project for him, Cashin had little in the way of relevant schemes to show the clients in order to convince them of his credentials. However, a two-way relationship of trust developed between architect and client during the early meetings which pervaded the whole project, including the dealings with the building contractor (Wickham-based Baker Newman, recommended by Paul) further down the line.

The 250 m² footprint of the new house would be the same as the combined area of the cottage, garage and barn it replaces. With the owners putting their faith in Paul, he pushed for a low-profile, flat-roofed contemporary building – and importantly, one which made the most of the great views.

Choosing a local builder proved to be a bonus, with Baker Newman delivering the goods in terms of the attention to detail needed for a high quality finish. Paul is full of praise for their work, also the fact that they were “really flexible about the costs, and the programme.” Having originally only planned to take on the building’s frame and exterior, after being introduced to the owners Baker Newman ended up doing the

whole project, “and did a great job.”

Having designed an unconventional modern structure however, getting through planning would be an unenviable task. It was refused at the first time of asking, to no-one’s surprise: “You just don’t get to do that in the South Downs,” says Paul. It went to appeal and got through with the help of a planning consultant, who made two key arguments, firstly that it was a replacement dwelling – helping to deal with the problem that it was much bigger than the cottage.

A further argument that helped swing the balance was that the rule around a new building not being any bigger than what it replaced was based around creating affordable housing in the area, but “no-one was going to be able to claim this was affordable housing stock,” says Cashin. He says the consultant made the case that this effectively rendered the policy void in this situation. The architect has advice for others facing a similar challenge: “You don’t argue against the policy, you argue with the reasons behind it.”

BEDDING DOWN

Inspired by contemporary European residential architecture, the architects created a striking, minimalist form that bedded down into the hillside site, with trees sitting behind it. The house’s long single-storey section replaces the barn and double garage, and attached, sitting at the top of the site where the cottage



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was, is a two-storey building containing the bedrooms.

From a distance, the silhouette would be similar to what people had previously seen on the site. However, the house departs from tradition in many respects, intended to provide a “sculptural” overall look with the building being viewable from all sides due to the isolated location. It’s not completely monolithic; the square two-storey section cantilevers to the north side, and openings are “carved” out, says the architect, such as the oriel window that sits at the top of the stairwell, framed – as are all the windows – by slim, dark aluminium. The attention to detail within the design is evident in how the brick walls are framed with matching, specially fabricated aluminium copings.

The low-rise section is glazed to both sides, looking out to the gardens and short flights of steps to north and south. It encloses the open kitchen/dining/living space, with central bi-folds blending the interior with the exterior. These open onto a sheltered patio and outdoor dining area to the south, adjacent to the entrance, and a lawn to the north.

MATERIALS & SUSTAINABILITY

In creating a decidedly modern family home, the architects were still “conscious of trying to bring the old house into the new.” Brick was therefore

“Interior designers like curtains, they keep reverberant sound down, and stop heat escaping and wind coming in”

the obvious choice for the main material, echoing the former cottage and local Hampshire buildings. A Michelmersh rustic facing brick (Freshfield Lane First Quality Multi) was chosen to create virtually all the building’s cladding, bar a couple of aluminium panels.

However, in order to achieve a more textured visual result, the designers specified the joints to be raked out by 10 mm, providing “much more depth and variety,” says Cashin. The project’s structural engineer specified a steel truss frame to provide the cantilever, as well as large spans of up to 11 metres. The cavities are extra-wide at 250 mm, hiding all the guttering within to not interrupt the exterior aesthetic, as well as housing large amounts of insulation.

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECTS

Design Engine/Paul Cashin Architects

CONTRACTOR

Baker Newman Building

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

Andy McIndoe

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Intelligent Lighting Solutions



Although no longer mandatory, the building has been designed to Code 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The 8 metre stairwell provides night-time 'purge' ventilation via an openable roof light and a tilt/turn window on the north wall of the ground floor, providing a chimney effect. Water for the property is supplied from a combination of a borehole and an aquifer.

INTERNAL LAYOUT

With great views of the open countryside to the north and west, the design provided large amounts of glazing, particularly for the ground floor living areas. A corridor runs along the southern side of the ground floor, open to the living spaces and forming a 'spine' leading from the front door to the stairs. An uncovered car port to the west of the ground floor gives the potential to convert into a further reception room in future.

The house's layout overall is somewhat open-plan, but also provides "a series of distinct zones," says architect Paul Cashin. Ascending the stairs, the rooms "increase in intimacy and privacy," culminating in the first-floor master suite. The split level of the ground floor, due to the gradient, helps to signal more of a 'private' area; up just a few steps of the staircase are the two ground floor ensuite bedrooms (one is currently being used as a home office). There are two further bedrooms with ensuites on the first floor.

The free-flowing ground floor space is framed by a kitchen at one end and a fireplace at the other. Cashin says the design serves the major requirements of modern homeowners: "To do all of your cooking and eating and leisure in one area and move between spaces easily, that's what people want."

The fireplace and bathrooms feature bespoke joinery, and despite the fact that the property is not overlooked, the owners wanted curtains, partly to minimise heat loss. Cashin says they also help to protect the property: "they can shut the whole house down when they are away travelling, which they do a lot." He is a firm

advocate of bespoke curtains over blinds, being "much more luxurious," and believes they are seeing a comeback as a preferred option for contemporary properties.

The glazing to the bathrooms is one of the most daring parts of the design, being completely unobscured, and floor to ceiling in the case of the master ensuite. However, as Paul Cashin says, "there's no one to look in!" The addition of some 'brise soleil' external shading does protect the modesty of users of the freestanding bath from the road to the north west, otherwise there's an uninterrupted view of the landscape.

One of the most visible examples of the interior's precise detailing is the timber-treaded staircase, which has a recessed handrail plus a shadow gap. This provides an elegantly understated visual result, and an unimpeded view up the stairs, plus the practical benefit of avoiding snagging clothes! The stairs are embedded with soft LEDs to gently illuminate the stairwell. "It took a lot of time to get right, and a lot of conversations with the builder." There are also shadow gaps around the home's full height doors, rather than architraves, adding to the clean lines of the spaces.

The interior is painted a "yellowish white," to the homeowners' preference, a choice which Paul Cashin admits "slightly worried" the designers. However, they reportedly "really like" the colour now; Cashin says it helps in softening the minimalist feel that the design has produced, such as the level ceilings throughout. The owners have provided their own varied range of furniture, acquired from their global travels.

In terms of landscaping, it is still a work in progress, however the owners have planted what's "almost an orchard," says the architect, admitting it "will take a few seasons to bed in." The external areas around the previous buildings were very overgrown, and the topsoil was not great, so the lawned areas have been returfed and resown.

TRUST IN THE TEAM

Trust characterised the relationships on this



“To do all of your cooking and eating and leisure in one area and move between spaces easily, that’s what people want”

project, and was key to its success, says Paul Cashin. The owners are “trusting people,” he says, “and that’s really to their benefit.” He asserts: “If you had a client that was in any way controlling, I don’t think it’d be anywhere near as good.

“There’s a reason why projects are successful, it’s because they have good clients.” The collaboration fostered on this project meant that a candid, open dialogue was achieved, including with the builder, who provided an ‘open-book’ approach on costs.

Due to the healthy relationship, an informal ‘labour plus materials’ approach to the contract was possible with the builders. Cashin says that in this situation, “It’s more about people liking each other and working with each other than it is about getting contractors in place.” An example is when the owners had to go away for “four or five months, and just told the builders to stop. They said fine, we’ll go and work on something else, they boarded up the site – you wouldn’t get that with a formal contractor.”

As an architect, he says that sometimes the key to a self-build project is “about getting the right kind of contractor to meet the right kind of

client. We’re almost trying to matchmake them.” He says the best approach for such schemes from his firm’s perspective is to “find characteristics and personalities that work together, and design the building around that.”

Cashin is critical of TV shows like *Grand Designs* for in his view wrongly over-dramatising the process of self-building. “Why as an industry would we portray it in such a way? If you get people who know what they are doing it shouldn’t be anywhere near as bad as that.”

The architect believes that self-builders have been “misled” into thinking that they need to feel empowered to take on the running of all aspects of projects themselves, while a more fruitful approach is to work collaboratively with designers and builders. He says “we’ve had projects where they were going to do it all themselves, and didn’t believe anything we said.”

Woodcote House was clearly the opposite of that approach. Says Cashin, “this client listened to everything from every consultant, took opinions, made decisions, stuck with it and let us get on with it.” He asserts: They’ve ended up with a successful project because they trusted us.” ■

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The warm glow of lower bills

Rises in gas and electricity prices mean that specifying more energy efficient and renewable heating options such as biomass is even more important, as Ian Sams from Specflue explains



Renewable energy means energy produced from sources that are constantly replenished. Generating heat or electricity from renewable sources reduces reliance on fossil fuels, plus installing renewable heating in your new home, rather than relying on the grid, will reduce your carbon footprint and ensure you are more protected from any future price rises.

Pellet stoves provide one of the most practical and economical ways to heat single or multiple rooms in a home. In fact, in providing the same heating power, pellet and wood are decidedly more economical compared to traditional fuels such as oil or gas.

As the search for green energy sources

intensifies, pellet stoves have seen an upturn in popularity, becoming a viable, economical, and popular option for home heating systems in the last decade.

WHY USE BIOMASS HEATING SOURCES?

Pellet stoves burn wood pellets, which are classed as CO₂-neutral. These biomass fuels are a renewable energy source, and although they release carbon dioxide when burned, it is considerably less than fossil fuels. A stove is designed to heat a single room – but may be fitted with a boiler to provide water heating as well.

Pellets are made of sawdust, a product of the wood processing industry. If the forests from which the wood comes are managed sustainably, the carbon balance

of pellet combustion is zero. This is because the amount of carbon emitted during combustion is the same as the amount of carbon absorbed by the tree during its growth.

However a pellet stove also provides an attractive addition to any room, not to mention providing a level of convenience thanks to its automatic ignition and wireless controls.

WHAT IS AUTOMATIC IGNITION?

An automatic ignition pellet stove uses electricity to light itself, and either requires no interference or assistance from a user, or requires that you simply push a button. You can adjust the temperature with a mobile app or a



room thermostat. Some models can even be programmed and operated daily or monthly via a mobile app.

The stove automatically feeds pellets as necessary to maintain a comfortable temperature in your home. As a safety feature, the convection and combustion blowers will continue to operate until they no longer sense heat in the firebox, thus protecting your home from any unwanted re-ignitions.

PELLET STOVES AND OPEN PLAN LIVING

Many new homes are now designed with an open plan layout. Open-plan living

means occupants can share the same zone, encouraging conversation and stronger family relationships, however they can be difficult spaces to heat. This isn't the case with a pellet stove.

Pellet stoves can be installed with a liner in a conventional chimney or more commonly with a metal twin wall system. The installation should comply with building regulations specifically document J.

HIGH EFFICIENCY

The efficiency of a pellet stove can be as high as 90 per cent, meaning that as little as 10 per cent of the energy generated by the pellets is lost via ventilation. This figure means more when compared with other forms of heating which also rely on fire. Traditional inset open fires for example work at an efficiency rate of 35-40 per cent, which means that approximately 60 per cent of the heat energy you've paid for goes up in smoke. Older stoves can reach 60-70 per cent efficiency, and DEFRA/Ecoready stoves – which have been designed with efficiency at their heart – can reach 80 per cent efficiency. But nothing can currently rival the heating efficiency of a pellet stove.

When researching pellet stoves, you should look for one which complies with Ecodesign, the European-wide initiative

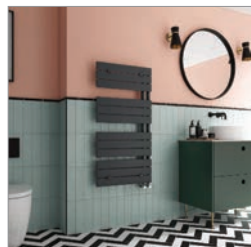
The efficiency of a pellet stove can be as high as 90 per cent, meaning as little as 10 per cent of the energy generated is lost

designed to improve efficiency and reduce emissions from solid fuel stoves. Ecodesign 2022 is the stove industry's response to the DEFRA Clean Air Strategy which aims to improve air quality and reduce emissions/pollution.

Self-building gives you the opportunity to design a bespoke property to suit your exact needs. Managing your heating with a pellet stove will not only provide an aesthetically pleasing addition to your property, but will also help to futureproof your heating.

Ian Sams is commercial director at Specflue

New kitchen and bathroom radiators



Stelrad Radiators has launched a new radiator series of specialist decorative and designer bathroom and kitchen radiators under its 'Boutique' branding, offering a comprehensive, premium range of living space, kitchen and bathroom products.

The new series has its own stylish section of the new Stelrad website. This series offers the marketplace the widest range of styles and by far the largest selection

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With an innovative optional kit, this designer gas fire can also be configured from a Reflex 105-3 three-sided version with panoramic views to a Reflex 105-2 two-sided corner installation if desired, with each format featuring non-reflective glass for uninterrupted atmosphere and complete visual clarity.

All fires in the Reflex range are controlled via Gazco's Harmony10 Control System, allowing you to ignite or extinguish your fire from the comfort of your sofa. Reflex 105 Multi-Sided fires can also be upgraded with Wi-Fi connectivity to allow you to control your fire using your smartphone or tablet – the ultimate in convenient heating.

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LAYER CAKE

The Hammills caused quite a stir when they remodelled a tired old Thirties house in York into a very modern home that became the talk of the town

TEXT & IMAGES HEATHER DIXON

Passers-by thought Erica and Michael Hammill's house had been destroyed in a gas explosion – such was the extent of its renovation. "We took it back to a shell – if not beyond," says Erica. "People were walking past wondering what on earth had happened. They didn't realise it was deliberate!"

The Hammills are used to causing a bit of a stir. Over the years they have renovated and remodelled a number of properties in their home city of York, some more radically than others, but none of them quite as dramatic as the one they are living in now.

When they first spotted the house for sale in 2015 it was, according to the couple, a "hideous" mid-century property with mock-Tudor detailing on the front gable and an uninspiring conservatory across the back. There was nothing they liked about it – apart from its position. "It's close to where my Dad lives and also within easy distance of the Knavesmire in York, where I walk our dog," says Erica. "The location felt right." So they put in an offer of £470,000, which was accepted, and then rented it out for a year while they decided what they were going to do with it.

"Our first thought was to demolish it and start again," says Michael. "We got an architect on board and he came up with an amazing design which we both liked, and which met with verbal approval from York City Council. However, we soon realised that the cost would probably spiral out of control and would be way beyond our budget, so we agreed to pull back and use the permitted development route instead to increase the size of the house." Michael and Erica spent months developing their ideas, Michael focusing on the floor plan, the building regs and structure, while Erica homed in on functionality and aesthetics. "We both have very strong views so there were a lot of lively discussions over the layout of rooms and how everything would work on a practical level, without compromising the overall design of the house," says Erica.

What they eventually achieved was a completely new house based on the maximum extension allowed under permitted development of the original footprint. By eking out every square foot, streamlining external



walls, extending where possible, opening up internal spaces and converting the attic, they managed to increase the house to almost double its original size of 1,800 square feet to its final size of 3,500 feet. "There were one or two adjustments and compromises along the way, but if you really put your mind to it and do your research, you can gain a lot of extra space under permitted development," says Michael.

The Government's online Planning Portal offers a rough guide to permitted development rights which states that only half the area of land around the original house can be covered by extensions or other buildings. Extensions cannot be higher than the highest part of the existing roof; or higher at the eaves than the existing eaves. An extension cannot be built forward of the 'principal elevation' i.e. where it fronts a highway. Side extensions cannot exceed four metres in height and can only be single storey, measuring only up to half the width of the original house. Extensions of more than one storey must not extend beyond the rear wall of the original house by more than eight metres under certain circumstances. "Michael worked out that by using permitted development alone we could still create something which was

EXTERIORS TO REAR

The layer cake effect of the tiered house is particularly evident at the back – the moon door opening in the wall created using a circular timber former, built outwards with rounded blockwork

LOW POINT

Everything coming to a stop when we discovered the Roman remains under the site of the garage. It took a while to get the build back on track.

– Michael

*“I try to keep
focused on the
bigger picture
while dealing
with the
minutiae”*





visually great, and fulfilled all the functions,” says Erica. “As a chartered surveyor Michael was in a position to do his own drawings for the builders and we could keep control of how it evolved. I was surprised that we could achieve something of this scale, but much of it was down to Michael’s clever reworking of the house. I knew that whatever he came up with it would be stunning. I just looked at his plans and tweaked them.”

Erica particularly wanted a large, open plan kitchen and plenty of glass looking into the garden of their corner plot. Light and space were crucial elements of the remodelling. “I would have really liked to have a system whereby the entire corner of the house opened up onto the garden, but it was structurally impossible so we settled for a full wall of glass doors,” she says. Top of Michael’s wish-list was a “grand entrance”. He explains: “I like a house to have an impact as you walk through the door,” he says. In this case, a two-storey atrium opens into a spacious, art-filled sitting room and through to the structurally landscaped garden beyond.

By the time they made their application to Building Control and started working on site, it was March 2016. At this point everything started to move very quickly. Within a couple of weeks the old house had been all but dismantled, reduced to three exterior walls and a series of Acrow props supporting key structural beams.



“We agreed to pull back and use the permitted development route instead to increase the size of the house”

SITTING ROOM

The striking fireplace was key to the initial design of the sitting room, but ventilating the fire restricted the casing’s design, and the fitting process “wasn’t straightforward,” say the owners

HIGH POINT

Moving in and living in it. It’s everything we set out to achieve

– Erica





KITCHEN

The spacious, light-filled kitchen was a major expense but Erica wanted it to be absolutely right, with attention to detail paramount

BATHROOM

The stylish family bathroom was achieved on a budget of around £5,000. Erica: "We try to save in some areas and splash out in others to achieve an overall balance between cost and design"

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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"We unearthed the remains of a Roman villa, and everything ground to a halt"

The wall to the back of the house, where the old conservatory had stood, was completely demolished and the roof removed, leaving the old house unrecognisable.

"People were stopping to look," says Erica. "My dad often passes by the house on the bus, and loves to hear people's comments. We even had someone asking whether there had been a gas explosion. It was pretty radical." They might have been the talk of the street, and their neighbours – who have, they, say, been "brilliant" – might have wondered what on earth was going on, but Erica and Michael remained focused on the end goal.

"Generally speaking, people don't like change, but once they know you are working in a way which is clean and tidy and considerate, they begin to take a genuine interest in what you are doing and appreciate the end result," says Michael. "I try to keep focused on the bigger picture while dealing with the minutiae. I believe modern homes like this have their place in the development of a city, especially if they replace a very mediocre building with something





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problem. "We unearthed the remains of a Roman villa," says Michael. "Everything ground to a halt while we waited for an archaeological survey. We were eventually asked to cover the remains with a protective layer of concrete and raise the garage floor by 18 inches to keep everything away from the remains."

"The original house, which was built in 1934, had several levels so we chose the lowest of those and designed the rest of the house to work around it," says Erica. "The floors in the sitting room were dropped to create a 2.6 metre ceiling height, and we installed a new custom-built staircase to work with this."

The radically transformed property was treated virtually like a new-build, with all new services, underfloor heating, specialist lighting, all new doors and windows, revised room layouts, new kitchen and bathrooms and the 'wrap-around' garden structurally landscaped to work in conjunction with the contemporary design of the house.

"The garden was a challenge but with my ideas and visual skills and Michael's attention to detail, we managed to create exactly what we wanted," says Erica. "Over the years we've renovated a number of houses, but this is by far one of our favourites. It gets a lot of very favourable comments – especially from people who have watched the renovation with interest. For us it ticks all the boxes – and it's not often you get to say that about a house." ■

STAIRCASE

The bespoke staircase 'doubles back' from a picture window

much more exciting."

With the old house now a shell, Michael's building team started on the new timber and tile roof. Although they were not exceeding the original ridge height, they replaced the hip roof with gables and installed dormer windows at the back. All the external doors and windows were fitted to make the property watertight and secure again. At this point in the renovation Erica and Michael applied for planning permission to build a garage, which was approved providing they sunk it down into the ground to keep the roof height to the required minimum. It cost them £30,000 and took six months – mainly because they hit a major

A game changer amongst smart taps



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Earthborn paints pass the latest Toy Safety Standard

Earthborn is known for its distinctive paints that are better for the environment and healthier to live with. And its environmentally friendly formulations are now certified as child safe paints too! Independently tested to meet the latest Toy Safety Standard (EN71-3:2019), this means they are safe to use in babies' and children's rooms as well as on toys and furniture. The standard tests coatings to ensure there are no elements that could harm a child or release anything harmful into the atmosphere.

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Polyflor brings minimalist style to eco home

Imagine owning a house with no CO₂ producing gas supply that generates energy so efficiently that you receive back more in rebates than you are charged for the electricity you consume. This may seem like fiction but for David and Gill Jay it is a reality. Through a combination of careful design and innovative technology, their home achieves a very high SAP rating of 97, meaning it costs less to run than its current annual energy rebate.

The open-plan layout is flooded with natural light and includes a spacious living area and stylish kitchen diner which can be separated off with sliding dividers. The areas feature a monochrome palette of whites, blacks and greys supported with natural materials. In keeping with this, Polyflor's Colonia Wood PUR Luxury Vinyl Tile (LVT) collection was specified for the floors throughout this main living area in neutral Nordic White Oak.

Colonia Wood PUR fitted naturally within the design brief to create clean

internal spaces that could be easily maintained. Fitted in a traditional straight laid pattern, the oak-style floor brings Scandinavian charm to the home and is both soft and warm underfoot. Colonia features a textured surface which captures the look and feel of real wooden flooring but is far simpler to clean and care for over time.

Integral to this hard-wearing design is a durable wear layer which offers lasting protection against dirt, dust, soil and everyday wear and tear, backed with a comprehensive 7-year residential guarantee. Colonia LVT is also designed to handle accidental splashes and temporary surface water, meaning they are more than capable of dealing with the occasional spill or mishap within kitchen or dining areas.

In addition to ensuring their new home is highly energy efficient, the Jays were also keen to use sustainable materials within its construction. Colonia Wood PUR more than ticked this box. The LVT is



manufactured with materials which are responsibly sourced and typically comprise around 40 per cent recycled content. Their low maintenance regime means less water and chemicals are needed to keep the floors in top condition. Colonia is also 100 per cent recyclable. As a result of this environmentally friendly performance, Colonia has been assigned a BRE A rating.

David Jay, homeowner commented "We are very happy indeed with the quality of the Polyflor flooring. The finished surface looks good and with the right equipment, it is very easy to clean."

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Rocking the bathroom with statement washbasins

Kaldewei as well as being a leading brand in the bathroom industry is also renowned for its green stance; helping the environment with its support of the WWF and with it their own sustainable policies and practices.

It was this stance that drew the attention of legendary rockstar and photographer Bryan Adams, "If we take our responsibility towards each other and our environment seriously, we can see we are all naturally connected and have a responsibility to look after each other and our planet." says the photographer.

With this in mind a unique collaboration between Bryan Adams and Kaldewei evolved into the project "Natural Union". With his empathetic and professional vision, Adams photographed the 2021 washbasin collection; the charismatic images are emotionally charged with

a strong message.

"Everyday actions such as washing your hands have never been more important" this message highlights the concept behind the campaign, which features hands of all ages, sexes and nationalities coming together under running water, over the exquisite new Ming and colourful Miena washbasins.

The Ming and Miena Steel Enamel Washbasins

The new Ming washbasin is the embodiment of subtle sophistication forming an elegant silhouette, whether for the minimalist bathroom or more imaginative spaces.

Miena invigorates the bathroom with a totally new colour palette of blue and violet hues creating a perfect statement piece. The Kaldewei steel enamel used to create the washbasin is made up of a percentage of recycled steel enamel and is 100 per cent recyclable too.



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Tapping into savings

Stephen Johnson from Quooker UK talks through the benefits of boiling water taps, and how including them in your project not only gives convenience, but can also help save energy



Boiling water taps have grown rapidly in popularity over the past 10 years. Something that was originally viewed as an unnecessary luxury item has now become a household essential for millions across the globe.

A concept originally developed in the 1970s by Henri Peteri, the taps have now opened up their own industry sector, with hundreds of products on the market, each with their own characteristics. The reason for this rise in demand and an increase in production is threefold, the primary one being convenience.

We live in a world where people want things delivered at speed. We are inherently less patient than we used to be, increasingly unwilling to wait or compromise, and this is true when it comes to water delivery. On average, we spend four months of our lives waiting for the kettle to boil. Not so with a boiling water tap, which delivers the exact amount of boiling water needed instantly. Time is one of the most precious commodities, why waste time waiting for water to boil?

Concerns around safety used to be a significant factor in preventing people investing in a boiling water tap. However, with constant innovation, research and

development, taps on the market today are designed to be completely safe to use. Certain taps for example come with a user-friendly, in-built safety mechanism that makes it virtually impossible to turn on boiling water by accident, making it ideal for families with small children or those with restricted mobility.

Comparatively, a kettle can be dangerous. Not only can you burn yourself from the boiling casing, but if a kettle is knocked over or spilt, the consequences can be disastrous. Greater awareness around safety has convinced many to make the switch.

There has also been a significant consumer shift towards more sustainable and eco-conscious consumption. Climate change is upon us, and is showing no immediate signs of slowing down. As a result, people are quite rightly increasingly concerned with where their products come from and how they directly impact the environment. It is right we all play our part and across industries, companies are having to re-think and adapt their product offerings or services, and boiling water taps are no different.

In addition to the hot, cold and boiling water functions, companies are turning their attention to new water modes. For

Tanks store water at high temperatures under pressure, keeping the water hot without needing to use much energy at all

example, look at the development of offering filtered, chilled and sparkling water from the same tap, at the touch of a button. The UK household uses an average of 360 single use plastic bottles per year. However, taps that can deliver sparkling and chilled water dramatically reduce this figure, providing a more long-term sustainable alternative.

Furthermore, with a boiling water tap, you also save water and electricity. When



you dispense water, you use the exact amount of water you need, unlike a kettle whereby more water is boiled than needed, or how often is a kettle re-boiled because the water has cooled down, wasting yet more energy. Boiling water taps have tanks which store water at high temperatures under pressure. This

technology keeps the water hot without needing to use much energy at all. Think of it as an electrically powered flask, from which no energy can escape.

But it is not just the technical benefits that are persuading many to invest in a boiling water tap. The design and space-saving advantages are also impressive.

Simple, sleek and elegant, boiling water taps contribute a refined silhouette to any kitchen. The perfect accompaniment for modern and traditional spaces alike, there are a variety of styles, finishes and accessories to suit every kitchen.

Be it classic chrome or nickel to a more contemporary brushed gold or matt black, these taps have come a long way in terms of their design over the years. Removing the need for wires or chunky charging bases, worktops can remain clutter-free. From pull-out hoses and twin taps to adjustable heights and matching soap dispensers, they can be a design statement as well as an invaluable appliance to enhance everyday routines for the whole household.

The kitchen has always traditionally been the heart of the home. As lots of us now work from home, the kitchen is once again in the spotlight, becoming a multi-functional space; playing the role of kitchen, living room and home office, often at the same time. They are not inexpensive, but boiling water taps play a key role in this evolving space. Saving you time, money and water, and providing convenience, safety and environmental benefits, they are a compelling option.

Stephen Johnson is managing director at Quooker UK

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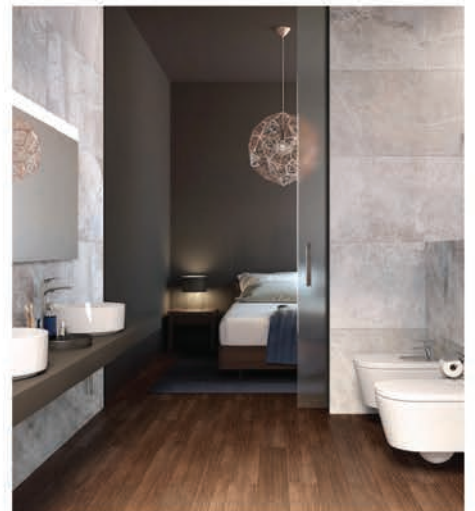
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Tim Spann from Keller Kitchens rounds up 2020



2020 has been a challenging year for **Keller** and the kitchen industry in general in the UK; yet we have been delighted with the huge levels of business – in particular, since the mid-point of the year. The second half of 2020 exceeded all expectations by a considerable margin. As a business which operates on an international basis, substantial year-on-year growth has been achieved for the fifth consecutive year. We are delighted to end the year where we are.

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CASE STUDY



SETTING THE BAR HIGH

After a couple of frustrating years spent hunting for a new home, Paul and Sarka embarked on a self-build journey with Huf Haus to realise a property that met their high expectations

TEXT EMMA HEDGES IMAGES LOTHAR REHERMANN





Making the decision to move out of London turned out to be the easy part for strategy consultant Paul, and his beauty therapist wife Sarka. There followed a long and fruitless search of the surrounding suburbs for a new-build home within easy commuting distance, but after visiting each property they were left bitterly disappointed, and everywhere the problem was the same. "My late father was an old-fashioned joiner, and I was brought up on building sites," explains Paul. "I have certain standards, coming from that. Once the developer had shown us the glitzy parts of the house, I'd go and open the airing cupboard and stick my head in the loft. Frankly, it was the poor build quality that meant we didn't find anything we liked," he says.

But their luck changed when they were due to view an unfinished Huf Haus project – and were waiting for an estate agent who was running late. "We took that time to wander around the site, and I was immediately struck by the quality of build – the fact that this house, that was made largely of wooden beams, was just so well put together. Then when we went inside, we loved the open nature of the environment, and the fact that there was so much light, as most of the walls were glass."

It was a decisive moment and a turning point for the couple. Paul and Sarka then contacted

Huf Haus who explained their design and build process – now the hunt was on to find a plot, or a property that they could knock down.

"One of the things that impressed me about Huf was that they thought about planning issues and problems getting planning permission, so they hired a planning advisor to help us," says Paul. "We'd send him information on a plot or a house, and he'd look up the local planning guidance and give us a rating – easy, middling or difficult – on whether we were likely to get planning permission to build a Huf house there. That was fantastic."

The advisor was so efficient that once an old Surrey property that fitted the bill had been found and purchased, planning permission went through first time round, and then the couple travelled to the Huf village in Hartenfels, Germany, to settle on the design of their new home. "It's a very well-planned journey," explains Paul. With his dad having been a builder, he was able to present a design to the company that they then refined. "You spend two days in the village looking at the different examples of what they can do, and you really work through every detail."

He's keen to stress that while there is a broad selection of designs that you can select from as the basis for your choice – theirs is the Bauhaus-inspired Huf Art 5 – the Huf approach is far from 'cookie cutter,' and is actually highly personalised. Working closely with Peter Huf, the company's chief architect in the UK, Paul and Sarka were able to come up with plans for their home that ticked all the boxes on their wish list. With another two days spent in the village in

LOW POINT

One of our neighbours tried to stop the build with a legal challenge. The main basis for their complaint was loss of privacy, but because we had rotated the orientation compared to the previous house, none of our windows faced their property.



HIGH POINT

There are things that you can intellectually appreciate in the house, but until you experience them you can't understand their full impact on the quality of your life – the light, the space, the air.

Hartenfels talking to different teams to finalise everything from the sophisticated heating system to colours, taps and cupboard handles, as well as having lunch with Georg Huf himself, they were poised to begin.

Having completed on the Surrey property in April, the site was cleared by October, the foundations were laid in December, the outdoor swimming pool went in the following January, and the actual build started in February. "Once the concrete base was in, the house and garage were up nine-and-a-half days later," says Paul. "Then it took two months for the fit-out of the interior – it's all remarkably quick." The couple, along with their five-year-old son John, moved in at the beginning of July.

The two-bedroom, two-storey home is constructed from renewable Nordic spruce, and has vast glass walls that offer uninterrupted views of the surrounding garden and let in plenty of natural light. The house benefits from triple glazing and has additional glazing in the gabled roof that heightens the sense of being connected to the outside. A core feature is that characteristically open atmosphere that Paul and Sarka initially fell in love with when they first set eyes on a Huf house, with all the living areas flowing seamlessly into one another, while the dining area is an expansive double-height space located at the heart of the home.

Paul is particularly happy with the kitchen – it's designed and built by furniture manufacturer and Huf subsidiary StilArt – which also created



“One of the things that impressed me about Huf was that they thought about planning issues and problems getting planning permission”



the bedroom and bathroom furniture – according to his own personal vision of the space. It features sleek white cabinetry, an island preparation area and a conveniently positioned wall of Gaggenau appliances. However, it is the bathroom that is his and Sarka's favourite part of the house. Bathed in natural light and decorated with Bisazza mosaic tiling in varying shades of grey, its atmosphere is peaceful and calming. It measures a generous 30 square metres, and is complete with spa bath, walk-in shower, and adjoining sauna and steam room. Sarka also has a beauty treatment room in this area of the house for when she sees clients, while John has his own ensuite.

Huf Haus prides itself on the fact that it follows

the strictest sustainability criteria, and its DGNB certification is proof that each house leaving its factory in Hartenfels has met German Sustainable Building Control's gold standard. For Paul and Sarka, this aspect of their home is the biggest revelation. "The energy consumption of the house is phenomenally low," says Paul. "We meet the German standard for 25 years from now. We have 88 light fittings, but our total energy bill – including a heated swimming pool – is £400 a year. Plus we get £2,000 back because we have ground-source heating and solar panels under the Government's scheme. So we're net carbon negative in a way that actually generates an income!" he laughs.

Added to that, in spite of the fact that 80 per cent of the walls are glass, he says the temperature and air quality in the house always feel exactly right because of the advanced built-in climate control system and ventilation technology. "We have a sophisticated heating system that produces 95 per cent heat retention with underfloor heating, and that inverts in the summer to become underfloor cooling. And as the air in the house is being continually refreshed, you've always got this feeling of fresh air."

The openness of the interior makes it particularly family-friendly and the glass walls enable them to feel constantly connected to one another. This means that whether little John is somewhere indoors or playing outside in the garden, Paul and Sarka always know where he is.

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"We can talk to him wherever we are in the house and it makes you feel as though you are always in good company," says Paul. "We've got the massive open gallery upstairs that looks down on the dining area, so I can sit in my office in that gallery space, and he can be downstairs drawing at the table, and we can talk to each other as if we're in the same room."

The smooth design and build process that Paul describes, along with the supportive

"It took two weeks for the main structure and then two months for the interior"

aftercare service Huf provides – as an example, the couple were left with a substantial 'repair kit' for their new home and still receive gifts at Christmas from the German brand – certainly take the sting out of what might, for many, have seemed like a daunting undertaking. But ultimately, it is the finely tuned blend of functionality and ambience that this Huf house provides that has proved to be the winning formula – so much so that they are now thinking of selling their house and embarking on a new Huf project nearer to Paul's roots in Yorkshire. "The core cost of our house was £1.4m. When I look at that cost, what we've got is good value for money compared to buying an old house and getting a company to come in and do a posh job on it," he says. "There are things we've learned that we would tweak, but we would definitely do it all over again." ■

PAUL'S TOP TIPS

- * Know who you're working with – try hard to get to know them and choose your people according to how you feel about them personally.
- * Do not underestimate project management – it really is so powerful. I did my own, but if you need to engage someone make sure you choose somebody with integrity who is committed to your project.
- * Put sustainability at the top of your agenda – I would say being sustainable has made my life better. We have a very comfortable house that is both cool in summer and warm in winter.

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