

selfbuilder + homemaker

ISSUE 02 2021

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BIG QUESTIONS ON TIMBER

Andrew Orriss of the Structural Timber Association answers self-builder FAQs on methods, quality and sustainability

Building in ICF against the odds

Tom Boddy reports on how an innovative build method turned out to be the least of a Surrey project's challenges

Structural support

Navigating the complex world of structural warranties

A kit house in the country

Discovering a German supplier offered a positive way forward after a tragedy for Merula Frankel





It's what's underneath that counts

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FROM THE EDITOR...

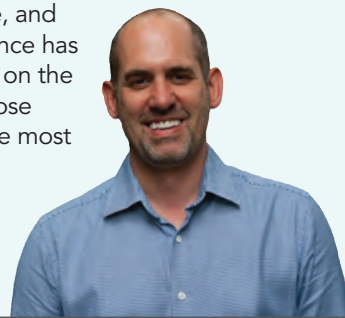
We hope that this issue finds you well, as the weather starts to improve, and the UK begins to tentatively emerge from a prolonged period of isolation. Hopefully we will see the country opening up fully soon, and recovering some of its former spirit, however of course we are far from home and dry yet.

Speaking of 'dry,' if your project has been disrupted over the past few months (which no doubt it has), we trust that you have been able to at least get it rainproof over the winter months. Otherwise the frustration you're feeling will I'm sure be doubly troublesome.

Our brief news section shows that self-build is actually on the up, despite Covid, particularly for the ever-active 50-60 year old self-builder contingent. Research by AMA has found that self-build has actually proved more resilient as a sector than overall housebuilding, which is saying something, although activity did decrease by 8 per cent in 2020. Two factors have helped, say AMA – the fact that small sites with fewer are more conducive to social distancing, and increased use of more Covid-safe offsite manufacturing for projects.

There have also been some interesting findings for those keen to pursue the Permitted Development property conversion route, and avoid through the rigmarole of planning. Pure Structured Finance has reported that after a lull in 2020, permitted developments are on the rise, and more expected this year as commercial properties close due to the effects of the pandemic. However, what remains the most popular conversion? Barns, of course. One day, presumably, there won't be any characterful old barns left to convert!

JAMES PARKER



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ON THE COVER...
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New planning guidance to support Right to Build

The National Custom & Self Build Association (NaCSBA) has welcomed the Government's recently published planning guidance which is designed to improve implementation of Right to Build across the UK.

The update to the Planning Practice Guidance on Self-build and Custom Housebuilding was published in February by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The new document updates the guidance to the original April 2016 legislation (previously updated in July 2017). The aim was to "strengthen the guidance as a tool for shaping provision and implementation of the Right to Build," said NaCSBA.

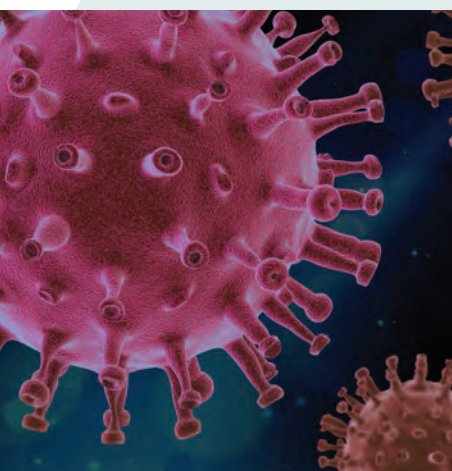
The Ministry's chief planner Joanna Averley stressed the Government's commitment to self- and custom-build housing, and the "crucial role" the sector has in delivering greater housing diversity. She commented: "Self- and custom-builders are well placed to build high quality, well designed homes that are energy efficient, accessible, affordable and welcomed by their communities."

The updated guidance will bring forward "a number of advantages," said NaCSBA. "Not least, it sets out that self- and custom-build can embrace a "spectrum of projects," and the fact that multi-unit and communal schemes qualify for the Community Infrastructure Levy exemption.

It also "adds weight to the registers in terms of them being a likely material consideration for planning purposes," said NaCSBA, reinforcing the fact that registers must be considered as evidence of demand by local authorities. It also includes several other measures that will support the delivery of custom- and self-build and "ensure it factors into wider local housing strategies."

The Government has committed to publishing data around the permission of plots "to create a body of evidence drawn from local authorities." As well as supporting future custom- and self-build, this will "increase transparency," said NaCSBA.

The updated guidance came alongside publication of the numbers of prospective self-builders currently on councils' Right to Build registers, and performance on Right to Build thus far. Right to Build is the common term used to describe the duties set out by the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016.



Self-build market shows resilience through the pandemic

According to the latest report by AMA Research, the self-build sector suffered a lot less in 2020 in comparison to the wider housebuilding market.

While self-builds fell by about 8 per cent from the previous year, and the market value declined by about 10 per cent to £4.3bn – the general market for houses completed suffered far worse.

A likely factor for this is that Covid-19 forced larger construction sites to close, with the majority of self-build projects managing to remain operational. This is because social distancing was a lot easier to achieve on these smaller sites, with offsite manufacturing also more conducive to safe working.

The findings showed that during 2020, self-build completions accounted for around 7-8 per cent of the overall housing output.

Further analysis in this report suggested that self-builders still managed to save around 20-40 per cent, compared to purchasing a similar house on the market.

The 50-60 age group remained the most active in the market during 2020, largely attributed to the fact they are more likely to self-fund their projects – using either savings, equity release from an already owned property, revenue from the sale of a property, or using properties as collateral against a remortgage.

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Five questions and five minutes with a mortgage adviser

Mortgages can be complex enough as it is, so throw in a house that doesn't exist yet and it can feel that much more complicated – but it doesn't have to be. Mortgages for self-build projects, whether that's building from scratch or doing large scale renovations, are becoming more accessible and part of the everyday norm. We caught up with one of Hanley Economic Mortgage Advisers, Jane Longmore, to chat about her thoughts on mortgages for Self-Build projects...

What are the big differences with a self-build mortgage compared to a classic mortgage I could get with any lender?

Well a key difference is, a self-build mortgage is a mortgage for a house that isn't there yet so things have to be done a little differently!

Stage payments are the biggest difference. With a traditional mortgage for a house, it's a straightforward transaction but as you are building a home – the mortgage is released in stages. This specialist kind of mortgage is more structured, which means a little more control whilst the build is taking place.

The application process is also different, simply because of the complexity. So as a lender, we need to see your plans and offer advice around your budget – it simply takes a little more time but it's worth it if you can build your dream home!

What do you think are the key highlights of a self-build mortgage?

Well we've talked about staged payments, it allows you the freedom of not paying as much interest as opposed to a loan as you only pay interest on the money once it has been released.

What's even better is a key feature with Hanley Economic is we can offer interest-only payments for up to 2 years – this means you are encouraging your outgoings to be as low as possible, as well as having that extra surplus.

These payments are also budgeted with your build, so it doesn't have to be the same amount at every stage. The earlier period of building your home may be more costly than later



down the line, that's fine as we can work around that!

Do you think self-build mortgages will change much in the future?

Yes because self-builders are changing! We are seeing less traditional builds, more eco-friendly aspects are being brought into everyday life around the home so lenders will need to change and adapt as we learn more.

From my point of view, it seems to be becoming more popular to build from the ground up over doing a renovation project as you can see more relaxed planning rules in some areas.

People are also taking advantage of changes to their work/life balance, they don't need to necessarily live in a city or large town to work now – they can commute much easier or work from home so of course people want to get out in to the countryside a little more!

So have you got any top-tips for aspiring self-builders?

Be realistic with your finances, and stay realistic. It sounds very easy but, it's harder than it seems! It's easy to run away with adding something here, spending a bit more money on your kitchen there... I (and my colleagues!) work with customers to make sure costings are realistic and it's your home that is being built, so we know that you may want a certain style of kitchen or a

swish bathroom – but we make sure you have budgeted for that before you start the build.

It's also a good idea to have a contingency plan – we always recommended around 10-15 per cent because it would be a miracle if nothing popped up unexpectedly! It's the classic saying, take care of the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.

What other resources would you recommend for self-builders applying for a mortgage with us?

Well we have some resources available on our website which may help those in the researching stage.

Our 'self-build lending guide' talks through lots of different subjects from warranty providers to types of property we can lend on so is really useful to read through – it's always the first thing we offer to people at Self-Build shows!

We also have a costings form which is a tool you can use to calculate costs and is a really handy reminder of what you need to think about at each stage.

There is also an 'Application Check List' which does what it says on the tin, but it's always good to know what you need ready to make your application.

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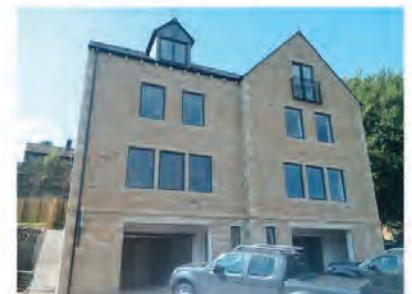
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LUXURY FOR LESS

With increasing focus on creating bathrooms as design-led, luxurious spaces, Sophie Schofield of Ribble Valley Bathrooms gives tips on how to create a spa-like retreat without blowing the budget

After the events of the past 12 months, the way we view and use our bathrooms has taken a step in a new direction. People want this room in particular to bring them joy and enhance their wellbeing – as much as their kitchen, garden and living areas do, if not more. It's clear that this trend is here to stay, so if you're in the process of planning or designing a bathroom it really is worth thinking about how you can elevate the bathroom into something spectacular.

One of the crucial things is getting the design and layout right before building work begins. Not only will this ensure that all pipework and drainage is positioned correctly, but it will also mean that you won't have to compromise on

any design features at the fit out stage. It could also save you a huge amount of time and money that could be incurred making retrospective changes.

At this early stage really stop and think about what you want from the finished space – are you planning on installing a statement designer bath? Or do you want to create a high-tech wet room? What lighting do you need to create the ambience that you are looking for? Do you want to zone your space? How can you maximise a smaller bathroom without compromising on design? Focusing on this level of detail at the design stage will mean that when you come to install your bathroom you won't have to compromise or increase spend.

Once you're confident in your layout and you know what you want from the finished design, it is time to source the sanitaryware, tiles and fixtures and fittings that will bring the room to life.

Bathrooms can be a big investment and it's a space that you want to stand the test of time. With that in mind, I would always recommend investing in the highest quality sanitaryware that your budget will allow. Not only will higher-spec bathroom furniture last longer and look good for years to come, but this is where you can start to introduce some designer touches.

Statement baths are here to stay for the long haul – from a classic Victorian roll top, to the smooth, curvaceous lines of more modern bath designs, a carefully chosen bath can be the perfect centrepiece. Think about the materials that you are choosing too. Polished ceramic is making way for a range of designer finishes that can really elevate



your space – matte white, wood, glass, concrete, pressurised surfaces and mineral cast basins – there are a plethora of choices well worth investing in to give your bathroom the wow factor.

To make the most of your basin or freestanding bath, it's essential to position it where it will be noticed. If you have invested in key bathroom pieces, you won't want the toilet to take the focus when you open the door. It is also crucial to allow space surrounding fittings, you may require wall space above or either side for storage, a mirror or tiling to complete the scheme.

It's no secret that tiling can send your bathroom budget into the stratosphere, but there are ways that you can save without impacting the finished look of



Wallpaper is becoming hugely popular in bathrooms

your room. Tile effect vinyl is a popular choice for homebuilders on a budget and can create a slick finish without breaking the bank. Wallpaper in bathrooms is also becoming hugely popular, and this is a great way of introducing a bold design centrepiece or statement wall without the cost of intricate tiling. There are a raft of companies now bringing out waterproof wallpaper designed specifically for bathrooms – which of course have lots of moisture and humidity. Plus, never underestimate how a lick of paint can transform a scheme.

When you're looking at the bigger picture, it can be easy to overlook the finishing touches such as brassware, drawer handles, flush plates, light pulls and mirrors than can really add

something special to a finished scheme. My advice is not to scrimp on the things that you can't easily change. You need things like taps, showerheads and flush plates to stand up to wear and tear. Cheap brassware and chrome plating can tarnish and flake – quickly looking unsightly. Buy the best that you can afford, and pay attention to how a statement tap or cutting edge shower head could really add that final designer touch to the room.

When you are faced with so many choices when it comes to bathroom design, it can be overwhelming and all too easy to opt for a safe neutral space – or go too far in the other direction and try and cram too many design features into one room. While there are a huge

amount of online retailers with web-based design tools and advice, never underestimate the importance of the personal touch.

Visiting your local designer bathroom showroom could put a whole different perspective on your finished scheme. Many will offer a free design service and can work with you to design a space that will suit your specific needs, as well as sourcing products and arranging delivery in line with your build timings. This higher level of service can really help to make the install of your bathroom as smooth as possible – something that money can't buy.

Sophie Schofield is head of design at Ribble Valley Bathrooms



INTERIOR INSPIRATION: KITCHENS & APPLIANCES



When it comes to making the 'heart of the home' function as healthily as it can, you need to choose the right units and appliances for your space and needs. This selection helps you pick from some of the latest kitchen furniture and devices out there, to make your kitchen look brilliant as well as work efficiently!

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1. The **High Back Counter Stool** by **Cox & Cox** features a black steel frame with a black oak veneered finished seat and backrest. Custom-set to instantly uplift your look – their bold design and slender frame will be impactful yet not appear too heavy in your space. Priced at £275.
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2. The **Copenhagen Solid Oak Small Dresser** by **Oak Furnitureland** has a modern style with a lighter look. Use in the kitchen or dining room, or as a room divider in a kitchen diner. The dresser's recessed handles and natural oak finish make it a great look for everyday life. Priced at £799.99
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3. Add a touch of elegance above a kitchen island, dining table or breakfast bar with the Trio of **Kielder Pendant Lights** by **Garden Trading**. Their hammered brass shades with a subtle shine immediately lift an interior colour palette to create a focal point wherever they're fitted. Priced at £110.
www.gardentrading.co.uk

4. The **Country Traditional Kitchen with Island** by **Wren Kitchens** features matt framed doors, which are available in 30 different colours. Shown here in Drawing Room Green with copper accents, this kitchen is equipped with an array of modern features such as built-in wine coolers and a pet bed. Priced at £7899.
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5. **QETTLE's Signature Modern Tap** dispenses 100°C boiling water, filtered drinking water, plus normal hot and cold flows. With its all-stainless steel build, warm copper finish and distinctive knurling on its handles, this tap complements kitchens with warm metallic accents. Priced at £985
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6. The contemporary Danish-inspired **Tortona Extending Dining Table** by **Cuckooland** is a must-have for any culinary entertainers. European Oak and structured veneers show the natural grains and knots of this wood, while the specialist matte lacquer gives a tactile and sophisticated finish. Priced at £975.
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It's time for timber



Andrew Orriss of the Structural Timber Association explains the basics around choosing structural timber, and why it holds so much promise for self-builds, particularly on sustainability grounds

Structural timber is now used across over a quarter of all new homes in the UK. For self-builders, the material offers an exceptionally cost-effective and sustainable construction option. What's more, structural timber excels in terms of design potential, aesthetic value and speed of construction, making it particularly well-suited for those building their own homes.

WHAT IS STRUCTURAL TIMBER?

Structural timber refers to any timber solution used within a building's structure. Normally, structural timber homes are built around a load-bearing timber frame. The timber frame then transmits weight evenly to the building's foundations and ensures long-term, stable performance. For self-builders,

this form of construction offers a genuine alternative to those manufactured from steel frame, or concrete blockwork.

WHY USE STRUCTURAL TIMBER?

It's clear to see why structural timber is becoming such a popular option for self-builders, especially in an era of greater environmental awareness. Structural timber solutions help to create energy efficient buildings, as the systems have inherent properties which can incorporate very high levels of thermal insulation, and prevent heat being lost through the fabric of a building. Likewise, structural timber buildings are more sustainable than other construction methods. For example, structural timber can act as an effective 'carbon store,' with timber harvest crops absorbing more carbon during their growth than what's emitted during the manufacturing process.

Solutions manufactured from structural timber are often ideal for those self-builders wishing to embrace offsite construction methods. For self-builders, such 'modern methods of construction' can significantly reduce the need for onsite labour. As such, project management is greatly simplified, with integral building elements manufactured



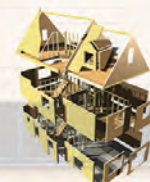
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in factory-controlled conditions away from the site. In turn, this helps those utilising the technique to achieve better quality on their finished projects. Finally, structural timber can contribute to those wishing to exceed current Building Regulations on thermal insulation and acoustic performance.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONSTRUCTION METHODS?

There are a lot of ways to utilise the latest structural timber technologies, but for self-builders, the most popular methods tend to be open panel timber frame, closed panel timber frame and structural insulated panels (SIPs). All types of structural timber construction methods offer self-builders excellent insulation levels, despite having thinner walls than those associated with traditional construction. What's more, structural timber construction methods deliver exceptional construction speed onsite. In fact, many timber frame kits can be typically erected in under two weeks.

Each of the aforementioned methods is slightly different. In open panel timber frame developments, the open panel system provides the structural frame, to which site installed insulation, services and plasterboard elements are added. In closed panel timber frame buildings, the structural frame is the same as an 'open panel' construction, but includes factory-fitted insulation and inner sheathing boards to close off the panel.

Finally, the SIPs building method utilises timber panels, which are bonded to insulation and combine to provide structural strength.

If these options don't seem suited to your build's needs, there are other methods which may be useful. For example, glue-laminated timber can be integrated into the structural design of any construction technology, and helps when looking to form large openings and spaces.

WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

Structural timber construction delivers the lowest carbon emissions of any construction material. As well as helping to reduce the construction sector's dependence on finite raw materials, structural timber can be extracted from nature sustainably. Most notably, for every tree the structural timber sector fells, it plants five more. Furthermore, it should be noted that all timber used by STA members comes from well-managed sources and does not use any timber from tropical deforestation.

Moreover, because trees absorb CO₂ as they grow, structural timber buildings contribute to the de-carbonisation of the environment. What's more, with structural timber homes able to achieve high levels of thermal efficiency, running costs are also lowered, through reduced energy consumption for the finished building.

Currently, the construction industry represents around 10 per cent of total

UK carbon emissions and directly contributes to a further 47 per cent. In looking to improve these figures, the sector must be willing to begin adopting more sustainable, low-carbon solutions, such as timber. In fact, when used instead of other building materials, a single cubic metre of timber will save around 0.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. Therefore, structural timber represents an effective and reliable way to ensure that properties are built in an environmentally conscious manner.

HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT I'M GETTING GOOD QUALITY?

As with any other material, it's paramount that self-builders only source structural timber solutions from reputable suppliers. The Structural Timber Association is committed to making sure this process is as simple as possible, which is why it has developed the STA Assure Scheme. Members of the scheme are committed to the highest quality standards on all structural timber. To this end, the scheme is designed to benefit both clients and members by ensuring the highest quality standards maintained by the individual STA member companies. This scheme offers reassurances to the construction community that the organisation's members meet or even exceed current legislation and regulatory requirements.

Andrew Orriss is Assure director at the Structural Timber Association (STA)



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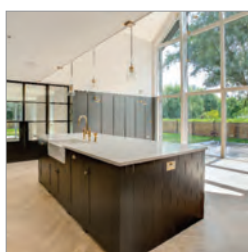


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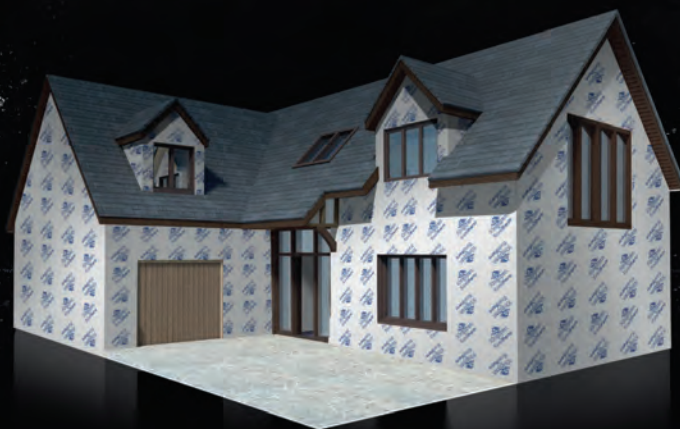
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Launch of The Timber Cladding Handbook

The Timber Decking and Cladding Association (TDCA) in collaboration with The Timber Trade Federation (TTF) have jointly published a new resource – The Timber Cladding Handbook.

Produced with support from the Wood Protection Association (WPA), Wood Campus and with technical input from Dr Ivor Davies, the Handbook is aimed at specifiers, buyers and installers of timber cladding.

A GO-TO REFERENCE

The 48 page book provides clear, relevant and up to date information covering cladding design, installation, material choice and UK building regulation compliance. The Handbook references a new version of the TRADA External Timber Cladding Manual which is due for release in late spring/early summer. The two

documents will complement each other – the Handbook acting as a forerunner with summarised and illustrative guidance with TRADA's being more detailed and of particular interest to the specification and professional installer market.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The Handbook has been produced as part of the TDCA/TTF partnership agreement aimed at strengthening the market for timber cladding and decking and the teams are working on a Timber Decking Handbook due for circulation in Spring, watch this space for further information.

Janet Sycamore – TDCA Director of Operations, commented:

"This clear and well-illustrated document has been produced to help prevent the common and easily avoidable problems that we see time



and time again and we are delighted with the result. The complexities of designing, creating and installing timber cladding can be quite daunting but this Handbook brings everything together in one accessible source. We hope it will prove to be a valuable reference for anyone involved with timber cladding".

For those looking for added assurances of quality, the TDCA operates the CladMark® quality accreditation schemes covering materials and installers. They provide evidence of compliance with the good manufacturing practices and the sound installation techniques required by the TDCA.

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A DIFFERENT ASPECT

Carol and David Fordham took a huge gamble when they bought a tired old 1930s house with the aim of starting from scratch and creating an 'eco' home

TEXT HEATHER DIXON IMAGES HEATHER DIXON & DAVID FORDHAM

BEFORE

The unmodernised original 1930s house had peeling render and included a later flat roof extension which was at odds with the main part of the property. The garden was completely overgrown and obscuring the countryside views





EXTERIOR

The once overgrown garden has been transformed with extensive landscaping and Carol's gardening skills

The plot was perfect and the location in North Yorkshire ideal; just what Carol and David Fordham were looking for as a site for their first eco-self build. The only thing standing in their way was the dated property that came with it.

Built in the 1930s, the house was too small for their needs, unsuitable for extension and, more to the point, at completely the wrong angle.

There was only one 'fix-all' solution and that was to demolish the existing house and build a new one facing the spectacular views that were crying out to be appreciated.

However, the Fordhams faced a huge gamble: were they prepared to buy the £350,000 property and risk having their ambitious plans for a modern family home rejected? "We knew we didn't want to live in the house as it was, or even extend it," says David. "The only way it would work for us was if we could knock it down and start afresh. We knew we were taking a huge risk, but we had been looking for a long time and this plot ticked all the boxes – except for the house itself."

To minimise the risk as much as possible, Carol and David arranged an informal meeting with Hambleton District Council planning department to discuss their ideas and assess the likelihood of their building plans being passed. The positive response they received was enough to give them the confidence to forge ahead.

"It was still a gamble, but we were confident we could make it work with a bit of negotiation and compromise," says David.

In June 2016 the couple sold their nearby 19th

century farmhouse, where they had lived for 17 years and raised their three children, and moved into a rented property until the new build was completed in May 2017.

They had already done their homework, visiting build shows and exhibitions and David had even taken a course specially geared towards first time self-builders. They had also drawn up a wish-list of what they wanted, including an open plan kitchen and dining room, four family sized bedrooms, energy efficiency, low maintenance and future proofing.

"We have had some experience of self-building because we built a house in Grassington many years ago, although it was very traditional and in a national park, with all the restrictions that imposed," says Carol. "We also extended and modernised the farmhouse, so we knew what to expect. But this was the first time we had done anything on this scale, this energy efficient, or using modern materials."

The priority was to find an architect who understood what they wanted to achieve and who would build on their ideas. They chose York-based Brierley Groom Architects whose experience, previous projects and enthusiasm won them over.

They also took tenders from five builders and eventually chose Honeybourne Developments, who not only came highly recommended but also had experience in bespoke properties. "They wanted to understand our budget and contingency plans so they could quote accurately, and we felt we could trust them to do an excellent job," says David. "They turned out

LOW POINT

There wasn't one. The build, on the whole, went without a hitch – to the point where we would definitely do it again, even though we have no plans to move from here.

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to be very easy to work with and we were always kept in the loop, even if we didn't manage to get to the site every day." The builder was also very thorough about informing them of the next stages so they could plan ahead and give them time to make decisions in advance of work being carried out.

Something else that was high on their 'must-do' list was to arrange meetings with their new neighbours to discuss their plans and talk through any concerns they might have about the new build.

"It was probably one of the most difficult parts of the process," says David. "One side was reasonably receptive to the idea while the other was opposed to it from the outset. It's quite a challenge to find your way through it without compromising your own dreams for the way you want to live." In the end, the architects had to negotiate with the planning department to

They had drawn up a wish-list of what they wanted, including an open plan kitchen and dining room

agree on the exact location of the property on the site.

Long before they applied for planning permission, the Fordhams cleared the overgrown site, which hadn't been touched for

STAIRS

The open treads of the oak staircase draw natural light from the double height windows into the entrance hall

SNUG

The top floor snug includes a striking feature window

HIGH POINT

Getting planning permission. We knew we were taking a risk when we bought the original house on the basis that we would demolish it and build something new and modern in its place.

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15 years and was full of conifers, diseased trees and disused ponds. "It was impossible to see the amazing views," says Carol. "As soon as the site was cleared we could see the potential. It opened it all up."

Planning was granted in May 2016 and building work began in September of the same year. "The plots along our road are at a strange angle and each of the original houses overlooked a neighbour," says David. "The new house has been positioned at a different angle

"Nothing was salvageable, so the builders were able to start with a clean slate"

KITCHEN
Bifold doors link the spacious dining kitchen to the garden

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SITTING ROOM

The cosy sitting room includes a log burner to supplement the ventilation and heat recovery system

so that the main aspects from the house are down the garden and not overlooking the property next door."

David made sure the water and electric supplies were shut off and the old house was then demolished in just three days, the rubble taken offsite in skips. "Nothing was salvageable, so the builders were able to start with a clean slate," says David.

The strip foundations were laid along with a garage base which was reinforced to allow for a guest sitting room in the roof space above it. The garage was built ahead of the main house so it could be used for storage during the main part of the project.

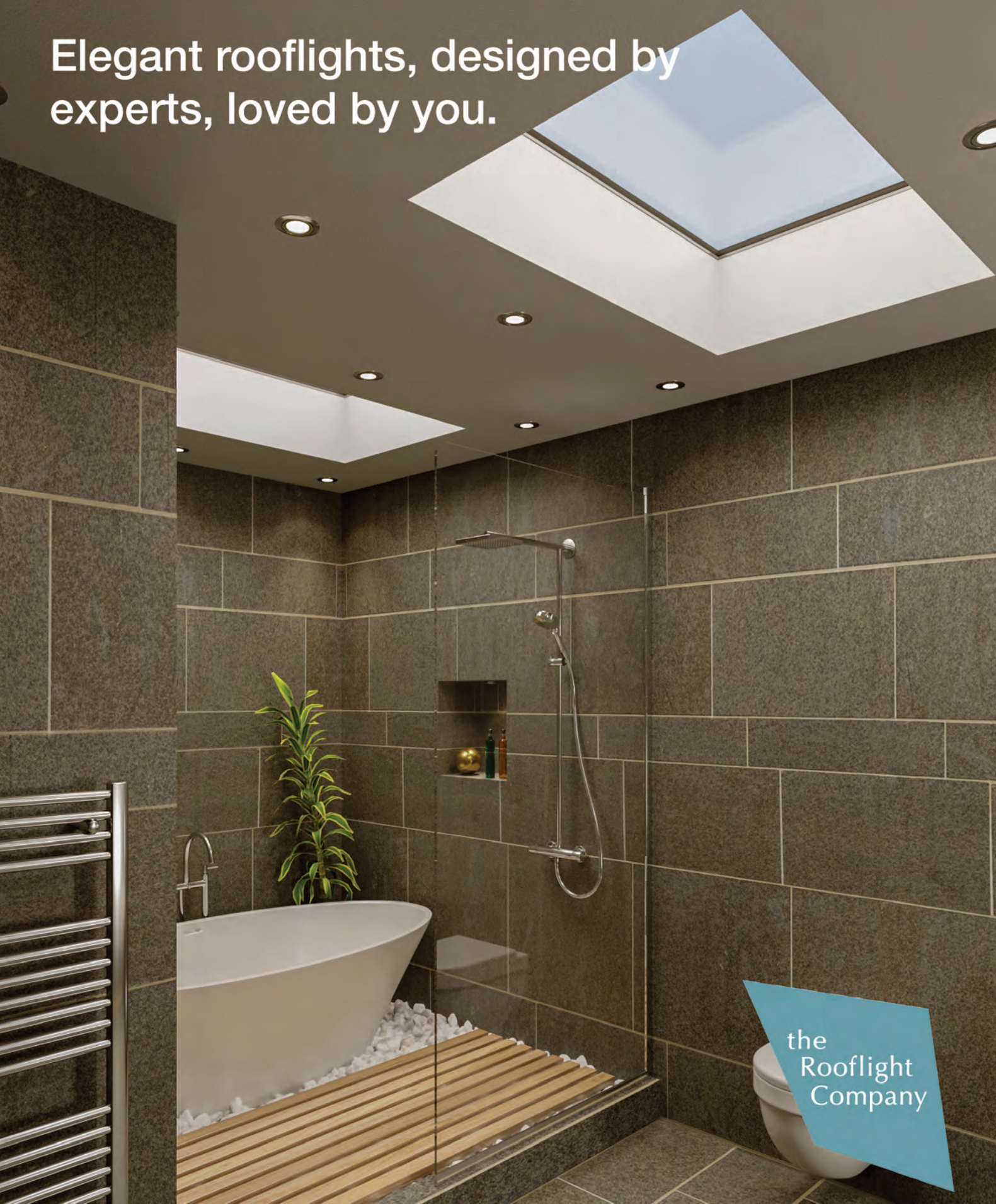
The main build was straightforward, aided by good weather and easy site access. The insulated block wall shell of the three storey property was completed to roof level – complete with Spanish slate tiles – and then finished externally with colour-fast thermal KRender render, before the windows were installed. The underfloor heating and thermal screed ground floor were also laid, alongside the installation of an air source heat pump to run this and provide hot water. They also installed an MVHR heat recovery ventilation system. All was going

"It sounds a bit back-to-front to start landscaping before the house is built, but it actually made a lot of sense"

smoothly and according to plan up until the delivery of the windows.

"We knew from everything we had read and heard that the windows are often the sticking point on a new build," says David. "To prevent delays, we ordered the Velux windows long before building work had even started. Unfortunately, even that precautionary measure didn't quite work!" They were due to arrive in December 2016 but didn't actually arrive on site until February 2017, and even then

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two of them were the wrong size and had to be remade. Despite this, the couple are "really pleased with them."

The windows offer the best of both worlds combining low maintenance aluminium on the outside with wooden inner frames that have increased thermal values. There is also a double height glazed entrance hall and zinc cladding detail around the larger windows and bi-fold doors.

An unlikely second glitch arose in the form of the bespoke staircase. It was designed and made by a company in Hull using a CAD system.

"Everything was measured and applied with utmost accuracy, yet when it came to the installation it just wouldn't fit and no-one could understand it," says David. "After a lot of head scratching it transpired that there was a problem in the CAD software itself. As soon as this came to light they remade one section. Fortunately, the second fitting was perfect."

"I was very relieved," says Carol. "I didn't particularly like climbing up the three storeys on ladders."

Before Carol and David moved into the house in May 2017, the MKM kitchen and Watermark bathroom fittings had been installed, second fixes completed, floor coverings were down and most of the decorating completed.

They also had the garden landscaped long before the main building work got underway to make sure a large digger could access the back of the house.

"It sounds a bit back-to-front to start landscaping before the house is built, but it actually made a lot of sense," says Carol. "We asked designer David Webster to transform the

wilderness into different areas, including a wildflower garden. Opening up the view was a priority from the outset – on a clear day we can see the White Horse of Kilburn from here."

Thanks to their prudent budgeting and the efficiency of the tradespeople involved, the build came in virtually on time and only just over their allocated budget. A further £20,000 had been set aside for the garden but that escalated to include professional landscaping, a good-sized workshop/garage, Indian stone patio, fencing, rabbit proofing and a large gravel area to the front of the house, as well as improvements to the drainage – bringing the overall total to around £400,000. The house, which has a 2,500 ft² footprint, was recently valued at around £900,000.

On top of this, they have reduced their annual fuel bills from £4,000 for LPG at the farmhouse to £2,400 a year, less an annual £1000 Domestic RHI grant.

"The house has lived up to all our expectations," says Carol. "The whole process was incredibly straightforward but much of that was down to good forward planning and good professionals involved in the design and build."

"Our advice to anyone embarking on a self-build project is to do your homework, choose a good architect who understands what you are wanting to achieve and can make those ideas grow, and find a builder you can work well with on a daily basis," says David. "You need to be able to communicate well together, trust them to do a good job and negotiate your way through challenges. With those foundations in place, you have the basis of a successful build." ■

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECTS

Brierley Groom
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MAIN CONTRACTOR

Honeybourne Developments
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BUILDING A NEW FUTURE

After a car accident devastated her family, Merula Frankel put all plans for a self-build on hold – but a few years later life took a new turn when she came across a company that shared her sustainable ethos

TEXT EMMA HEDGES IMAGES BAUFRTZ

Merula and Richard Frankel had lived in their beloved Grade II listed Hampshire home since 1977, but over the years they had begun to dream that perhaps one day, when their four children had grown up and left home, they might build a new house for themselves in their 3.5-acre garden. Located in an East Hampshire conservation area, the 16th-century village property had extensive grounds, including a paddock and an old swimming pool, and the couple felt they could see the perfect plot for a new house on their tennis court, positioned next to a slope that led down to a stream. In the early 2000s they decided to turn their dream into a reality, and engaged a local architect.

"We were pretty ignorant, but I was never entirely happy with what the architect suggested," says Merula. "It was certainly not a system build – it was a traditional build – and it was far too big. I also didn't think he embraced environmental and sustainable matters in the

"I just put the whole project to bed, as I, and my family, tried to grapple with what had happened"

way that I wanted. So at this point I was dragging my feet about it."

Planning consent was initially refused, so they modified the plan, and then went to appeal and won. Just as they were on the point of committing to the project, tragedy struck – Richard, together with the couple's seven-year-old grandchild, were killed in a car accident. "I made an executive decision. I paid off the architect, and thanked him for what he had

LOW POINT

* Any of the small problems I had tended to be when I wasn't dealing with Baufritz. We did however have one issue that was spotted by their architect when he first came to the site, and that was how to get a 38-tonne crane down the lane to the plot. We ended up having to demolish an old flint wall where the entrance is – and then rebuild it using lime and mortar.





done. And then I just put the whole project to bed, as I, and my family, tried to grapple with what had happened,” says Merula.

She did, however, make what turned out to have been a crucial move at this point, and chose to renew planning consent. This had the effect of pushing any kind of deadline further down the road, and allowed her three more years before having to make a final decision on the matter. “I did nothing for a while,” she recalls. “But finally I decided that if I was going to do a build, I just had to get on with it. So then I picked up the phone to a [kit build] company called Baufritz.”

A meeting was arranged with Baufritz architect Robert Lumme, and Merula’s brother and sister-in-law came along to give an objective ear, as by then Merula had done some research and was concerned that it all sounded too good to be true. “I asked Robert what is it about a Baufritz house that is so different? What is so special? Why should I go to Germany to choose a house when there are a million architects here in England? And the fundamental thing for me was their ethos,” she says. “Their absolute commitment to using materials that have no toxins, and using sustainable materials from top to toe – from their paints to the carpet. That really rang a bell with me.”

Visits to some homes built by Baufritz in the UK only served to fuel Merula’s enthusiasm, so

Robert Lumme suggested she travel to Baufritz’s German headquarters in Erkheim, Bavaria, to settle on a design and meet the people who would be working on her project.

“Going to Germany was a wonderful experience,” she says. “You see the sort of materials that you can select for the internal fit and external cladding. One of the things that I really warmed to was the fact that I could have any design I wanted, subject to the span of a section being able to be produced in their factory. You could have pitched roof, flat roof, Bauhaus – any style that’s likely to be approved by your local district council.”

Merula opted for a gable roof with dark charcoal clay tiles, larch cladding in a contemporary profile on the upper floor and attic, and organic mineral render on the lower half. “Around the windows I chose olive green powder-coated aluminium, just to be different and because it settles well with the garden,” she explains.

At this point an issue with planning arose. Standards had evolved since the Frankels first received consent, and the district council now required the build to have 25 per cent renewables in order to maximise energy saving, but wouldn’t permit solar panels to be installed because it was a conservation area. Baufritz solved the problem by opting for a small gas boiler, and introducing a mechanical heat

MERULA'S TOP TIPS

- * Have as clear a vision as possible before you start about what it is you want. I think when we originally started looking to do a project, we really didn’t have a clear vision, but by the time I actually came to do it, I knew exactly what I wanted. That made the process much simpler.
- * Don’t try to build too big. I have fewer rooms but with a sense of spaciousness that works perfectly – I’m very comfortable.
- * Once you’re set on your design, try not to chop and change, because applying for variations can cost quite a bit extra.

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Two months before the build, Merula made a second trip to Germany to go through the 'sampling' process, which took nearly three days. "Your project manager holds your hand through the whole process, room by room until you've done it all," says Merula. "Every detail, from the door handles to whether the woodgrain on the front door should be vertical or horizontal." Then work to demolish the tennis court and start building a slab began.

A vital element of the Baufritz service that was instantly attractive to Merula was the fact that, through the company's partner network, they were able to provide most of the trade contacts that were needed to complete the project. "So the business of me worrying about who was going to fit the windows, or the doors, or install the showers – all those questions were answered," she says.

One such key contact was garden designer Hannah Genders, who had worked with Baufritz on a number of projects and specialises in creating eco landscapes and therapy gardens. Recognising early on in the process that a plot positioned by a slope added a layer of complexity to the build, and that gardening and eco concerns were important to Merula, Baufritz architect Robert Lumme recommended working with Hannah. "She was brilliant and absolutely took on board sensitivity to the environment around the build, and marrying the practical with the aesthetic," says Merula.

"The fundamental thing for me was their ethos, their absolute commitment to using materials that have no toxins"

An industrial estate had to be found to house the sections arriving from Germany before they were transferred onto smaller lorries to navigate the narrow Hampshire village lanes with ease. Then work began, and things moved quickly. Conveniently, Merula was still living in her old property so she was able to pop in and check on progress every day. "We had a dry shell in four days, and then teams of people came to do the fit out. The house arrived at the beginning of April, and the keys were handed over to me in the last week of August," she says. "By mid November that year I had moved in."

The finished four-bedroom property has a downstairs, first floor and loft, and sits comfortably within its 1-acre garden, which Hannah Genders designed to include a vegetable patch, soft perennial planting and a

HIGH POINT

* Watching all the skilled workmen – master carpenters, plumbers, metal workers and electricians – and the quality of their work. Seeing them take the build sections from the truck was like watching a dance – each section is numbered so they know exactly which one to take and when. They worked solidly – it was very inspiring to see and wonderful to feel part of the process.

* Baufritz's attitude. I had never done anything like this before, but I never felt patronised – I felt embraced. I didn't feel pushed in any way or that they were hard selling – from the word go I felt I could trust these people to work with me through the whole project.



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wildflower meadow. Benefitting from stunning vistas from all aspects, the triple-glazed aluminium-clad wooden windows let in plenty of natural light, so that Merula always feels connected to the outside.

"As soon as you come into the house there is a sense of space," she says. "I've been greedy with the entrance hall, which is 2 metres wide as I wanted it to be a circulation area – and when you walk in you can see straight through to the garden beyond." When she has big family gatherings she can seat everyone comfortably in the dining area, "and I can put a trestle table up in the hallway for all the kids so it becomes a usable space," she adds.

The ground floor's open-plan layout has wooden floorboards throughout and is carefully designed so that all the elements flow easily into one another. Each room has underfloor heating with its own thermostat for ultimate temperature control. Beyond the dining area is a cosy sitting space around a wood-burning stove for spending time during the winter, along with a more open space adjoining it for relaxing in during the summer months. With a downstairs study, large utility room, two shower rooms and

"You could have pitched roof, flat roof, Bauhaus – any style that's likely to be approved by your local district council"

two bathrooms, the house is designed to be comfortable and functional. "I would say it's enriched my quality of life," she says.

Merula feels that her kitchen was probably her greatest extravagance, but that on reflection it was absolutely worth the expense. "If you've got a kitchen that's very much on view you want it to be aesthetically pleasing," she says. "It's so different from our old house which had a big green Aga and a farmhouse-style kitchen. Here I've got a beautiful Bulthaup kitchen – which I

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have always wanted – and Gaggenau ovens. And instead of a larder I have a large Liebherr larder fridge.”

The Baufritz part of the project came in on budget at 631,000 Euros, and this includes all aspects of the project apart from the slab, ground work, utilities, engineering costs, land registry, landscaping and the garage. Merula estimates that the total cost of the build probably came in at around £1 million. Now that the house is finished, the Baufritz servicing department still deals with any snagging issues – there have only been a couple – and Merula continues to be on good terms with Robert Lumme. Another happy outcome is that a local family from the village bought the

Frankels’ old house, so that Merula already knew her neighbours.

So now that she’s settled in and had time to experience living in her new eco home, how does she feel it turned out? “It’s wonderful. I wanted it to be crisp and contemporary, but restful – not minimalist and harsh. It looks lovely, and I love the fact that I played a part in designing it,” says Merula. “People were so worried for me – that I wouldn’t be able to manage, and that it would be difficult living next-door to so many happy memories. But there isn’t a day that goes by now that I don’t come in and I feel joy and good fortune – good fortune that after such a tragedy, this project has given me so much pleasure.” ■

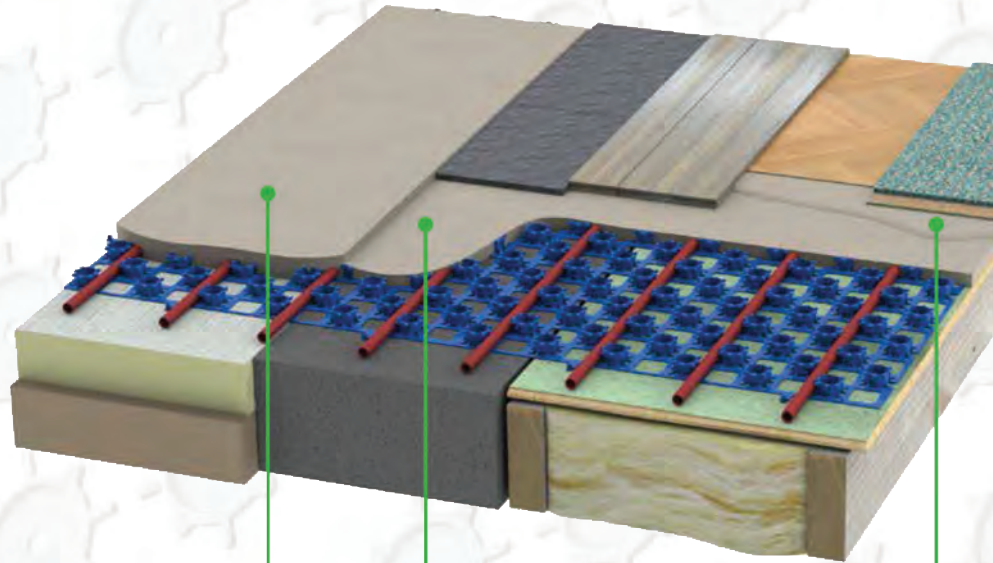




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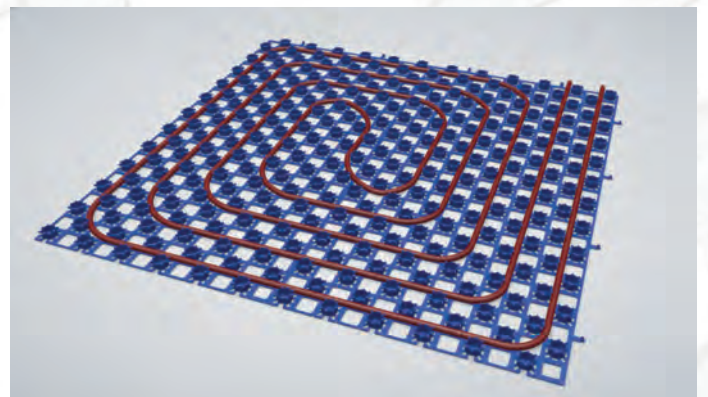
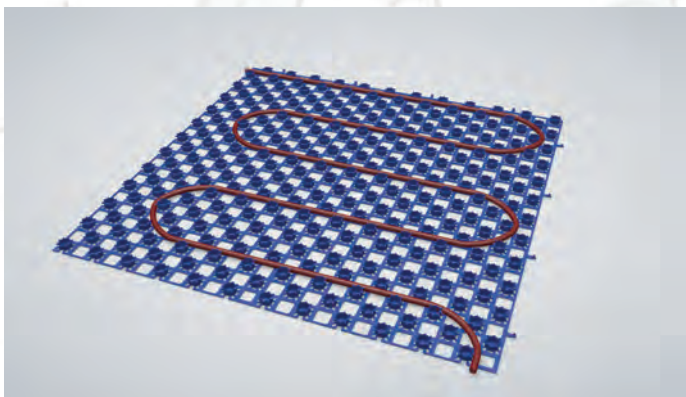
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Know your VAT position

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

Know your VAT position



Andrew Jones the VATman is a 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: "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 appeasing HMRC when the questions arrive after submitting the reclaim."

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Structural warranties – a guide

Advantage Home Construction Insurance (AHCI) navigates through the often complex world of structural warranties required by mortgage firms, providing some clarity for self-builders



A structural defects warranty (also known as latent defects insurance) covers defects affecting newly built properties. Structural warranties also cover existing properties, including converted and refurbished residential developments. This article specifically focuses on structural warranty cover for self-builders.

A structural warranty generally lasts for 10 years on new build properties. Specific policies can differ in the detail, but they will offer comprehensive cover against major structural defects and will

usually include:

- Two years' builder warranty against defects
- A further eight years' structural insurance
- Contaminated land cover
- Deposit protection if your builder becomes insolvent.

If you require a self-build mortgage, it is likely that your mortgage provider will require that you have a structural warranty before they agree to release any funds.

Even if you don't need a mortgage and

are not planning on selling your self-build, you may still require a structural warranty, which will cover any rebuild costs that can arise as a result of defective design, workmanship or damage to materials that occur during the build period, but which are not discovered until after completion.

WHAT DO WARRANTIES COVER?

Warranties typically cover major structural elements such as foundations, roofs, ceilings, load bearing walls and stairs and glazing in outside walls. Warranties don't cover general wear and tear, superficial

damage or damage caused by storms or other adverse weather conditions.

Some self-builders choose an architect's certificate (which may cost less than a structural warranty). However, a structural warranty provides more protection and mortgage providers may insist that you provide a structural warranty, rather than an architect's certificate, on this basis.

The old adage 'you buy cheap, you buy twice,' has never been more true. When it comes to developments, 'every pound is a prisoner,' but there are certain things you shouldn't cut corners on, and your structural warranty is probably one of the main ones.

The reason being that it's this final certificate that allows you to complete on the sale of the development. In the past, various offshore insurers have gone out of business, leaving the unsuspecting purchaser or developer with a warranty that isn't fit for purpose. At AHCI we have helped hundreds of people who've found themselves in that position to obtain a suitable and acceptable final certificate to suit their needs.

IS IT SIMILAR TO HOME INSURANCE?

Home insurance is provided on the basis of likely risks to a property and can cover both the building and its contents. Almost all homes are insurable, including

older properties, although costs can vary significantly. New home warranties and insurance policies are only concerned with the structural integrity of your home, not its fixtures and fittings, and are usually only available for newly built or newly converted homes. Structural warranty providers work closely with self-builders, carrying out site visits in accordance with current social distancing guidance.

WORKING WITH SPECIALISTS

You are not legally required to have structural warranty cover for your project. However, as mentioned above, if you require a self-build mortgage, you will be likely to be required to have one. Also, should you wish to sell your self-build within the next 10-years, it will be very difficult to do so without a structural warranty covering the property. Also, working with a structural warranty specialist may help you to avoid potential issues arising during the build and can provide peace of mind during the construction stage and beyond.

The leading approved providers of structural warranties adhere to the Consumer Code. The code features a dispute resolution scheme that you can use during the first two years should a dispute arise between yourself and your structural warranty provider.

It is likely that your mortgage provider will require that you have a structural warranty before they agree to release any funds

The steps to take to secure structural warranty cover for your self-build are firstly, fill out an application form and request a quotation, then review it, and pay the requisite survey fees and deposit. Finally, arrange for a full plan/specification check and subsequent survey. At this time, existing defects will be noted and will be either corrected or excluded from cover. As a footnote, it's good to know that structural surveys can still be carried out during the current coronavirus restrictions.



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Happy when it rains

Not only can a rainwater harvesting system be a first line of defence against flooding, it can also help you achieve long term sustainability in our unpredictable climate. Jae Lester of RainWater Harvesting explains



In recent years the UK has suffered times with too little or too much rain. A cycle of near-drought and flood conditions. Sometimes we need to look to the past to find solutions for the future. Rainwater has been collected for domestic use since time immemorial, and can still be used today in our modern, sustainable homes. Although the principle remains the same, obviously the technology has changed.

Water is collected off the roof via standard guttering and downpipes; the water is filtered and stored in an underground tank. When required, it is pumped back into the home to be used for flushing toilets, washing machines and outside use, which greatly reduces the demand on mains supply. There is no need to flush toilets with processed

drinking quality water bought from miles away. The other question in our quest for sustainability is – should we use mains water for non-drinking purposes?

So how does a rainwater harvesting system work? Installing a system is suited to new builds or major renovations as there will be a rainwater feed to toilets and other non-potable appliances. Taps, basins, showers, and baths will remain on mains supply.

THE HARVESTING TANK

Tanks can be made with a number of materials but the majority are constructed of high-grade plastic. They are usually buried underground where there is no light and only a small temperature variance to keep the water cool and fresh.

They can also be large (and some would say not great) visual addition to the garden landscape.

Tank sizes are calculated on location, collectable roof area, number of people/toilets, and application for the water. There are a number of tank size calculators available on the web to enable you to find a suitable size.

Most systems are designed to require minimum maintenance and have self-cleaning filters. As the water flows into the tank there is a mesh that allows water to flow into the tank but leaves and debris are directed into a soakaway. The filters are designed for easy access so once or twice a year it is worth removing and flushing with clean water.

Within the tank, there is a pump that



activates when a drop in pressure is identified. For example, when a toilet is flushed there will be no water in the cistern so the pressure will be low and water will flow to refill.

NOT ENOUGH RAINFALL?

Tank sizes are traditionally calculated on a 21-day supply, as it's assumed it will rain within that timescale. However, should the water run low, the toilets still need to flush. Therefore if the water is going to be used within the home and not just for the garden, it is important to specify a mains back up system in case of severe drought conditions.

There are two main types of systems – direct and gravity fed. In a direct feed system, the pump is directly connected to

the appliance and so runs every time a toilet is flushed. If rainwater becomes critically low a small amount of mains water would be introduced into the underground tank. In a gravity-fed system, the water is pumped up into a header tank located in the loft space and appliances are serviced from there. The latter method only requires the pump to be operated when the header tank needs replenishing. This can make running costs as low as 1p per person per day.

TOO MUCH RAINFALL

The advantage of collecting rainwater is that it is a relatively simple process and it also has a further benefit regarding Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDS). During heavy rainstorms, water is

Tank sizes are traditionally calculated on a 21-day supply, however should the water run low, toilets still need to flush

collected within the tank first preventing localised flooding. New emerging systems allow a volume of the tank to be used for non-potable applications, but have an extra capacity specifically when there is excess rain. This extra volume is calculated specific to the site and meets the criteria for severe rain events. Water is released back into the storm drain or soak away at a controlled rate so reducing the risk of downstream flooding. This can be as low as 0.05 l/sec per plot, and so will not overwhelm the network.

INSTALLATION

In a new build, there are a number of trades to complete the build, and a small amount of time by some of these will be required to install the rainwater system. Apart from the electrical element however, most of the work can be project managed by any competent person.

A groundworker is required to dig the hole and site the tank under the manufacturer's instructions. Some tanks are 'shallow dig' so only require a depth of 1-1.5 metres, making it easy to install in areas where there is a relatively high water table and ease of calculation of levels. The laying and connection of pipework to and from the house. There must be a 'fall' from the downpipe so the rainwater flows towards the harvesting tank. It is very important that the piping from the roof to the tank is 'closed' and there are no open gulleys. This will help keep the water as clean as possible.

A plumber is required to install the pipework to the appliances and connect both the rainwater and mains supply, and an electrician is needed to connect the pump and sensors to activate the flow of water. Modern systems are designed to make installation relatively simple however, and therefore should not add significant cost to a building project.

Jae Lester is a director at RainWater Harvesting



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WHY HARVEST RAINWATER & WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH IT

With the increasing unpredictability of the British weather, there hasn't ever been a better time to harvest rainwater for use around your home and garden.

Water harvesting systems come in all different shapes and sizes, so depending on the size of your home and room you have available, you can choose a system that suits you. Keep in mind: the more water you collect, the more water you're able to save. You can also decide between above and below ground storage.

Harvesting rainwater can have some huge benefits for both you and the environment:



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Forming an opinion

Chris Stride at ICFA discusses why self-builders, particularly those looking to maximise energy efficiency, should consider building with Insulated Concrete Formwork (ICF)



If you've been researching your new build project recently you will notice that the spotlight is currently on the building industry to help tackle the global climate crisis. When you consider that heating and powering buildings currently account for 40 per cent of the UK's total energy usage, it is easy to see why improving energy performance within the home has become such an important issue.

Responding to the 2019 consultation on Future Homes Standards, the Government has recently proposed changes to Part L (conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations. This will ensure that by 2025 all newly built homes will be zero carbon ready and produce at least 75 per cent fewer carbon emissions than those built to current energy efficient standards.

FABRIC FIRST

The new performance standards and measures will look to adopt what is called a 'Fabric First' approach. Buildings designed and constructed using this approach aim to maximise the energy efficiency of the building through high-quality insulation to achieve low U-values and increase airtightness.

The upcoming changes in standards

and specifications can seem a daunting prospect for self-builders but there are solutions on the market, such as Insulated Concrete Formwork (ICF), where energy performance is 'built in.' Quick to construct with high levels of performance and durability, ICF has been gaining popularity in the UK for some time.

The method combines the insulating material of a hollow formwork or block which is then filled with concrete to create a solid, monolithic core that is incredibly energy efficient. The most common ICF systems supplied in the UK are made with either Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) or woodcrete, a recycled wood fibre bonded with cement. The easy-to-handle blocks are stacked, initially to first floor height, and interlock without the need for an intermediate bedding material, such as mortar, before concrete is poured into the cavity. This process continues until full building height is achieved.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT U-VALUES

With ICF systems the formwork stays in place providing thermal insulation on both sides of the building envelope. Combined with the strength of the concrete core homeowners can achieve U-values as low as 0.10 W/m².K.

Of course, achieving the target

Building with ICF is a proven way of creating an energy efficient building that is impact and weather resistant, and requires little maintenance

U-values and creating an energy efficient home is not only about the level of insulation used. Solid concrete wall construction of this type also ensures good levels of airtightness – as low as 0.33 m³/hr.m² or 0.18 ACH – and superior thermal bridging performance. This results in even temperatures throughout the structure with reduced draughts and



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cold spots, enabling the building to stay warm in the winter and cool throughout the summer. An airtight environment also reduces the effects of dust or allergens and studies have shown this will benefit occupants with allergies and chest complaints.

SIMPLICITY

Another advantage for self-builders is the simplicity in the design and construction of an ICF home, which is

beneficial for those with limited building experience. ICFA members hold training courses for anyone new to building with their ICF product and these will give you the knowledge, skills and hands-on experience needed when starting your project.

The lightweight nature of the material means there is little requirement for heavy plant, and the preformed blocks fit together far more quickly than courses of bricks or concrete blocks can be laid, without the time delay in waiting for mortar to harden. The blocks are made offsite and transported to site for assembly, and the inefficiencies and delays that can affect onsite construction are minimised. ICF construction can also continue in almost all weather, even through the wet winter months.

Building with ICF is a proven way of creating an energy efficient building that is impact and weather resistant, requires little maintenance and offers fire resistance of up to four hours. The system can be used for work above and below ground, making it an ideal choice for basements or retaining walls.

Even though a home is constructed using large blocks, the number of design possibilities are almost limitless, whether you are looking for a traditional looking farmhouse or a contemporary home. A wide range of external facing materials

can be applied to achieve your preferred look, including brick, stone, render and timber, as well as steel, aluminium and cement cladding panels.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

It's important to do your research and find the system that is right for you. ICF suppliers have a wide range of standard 'forms' which can create dramatic architectural features such as curved walls, vaulted ceilings and cantilevers. In fact, some features are easier to achieve with ICF thanks to the inherent strength of the concrete core.

Get your supplier involved early in the design stage, they have the knowledge and technical resources to support you through your build, and can flag up any areas that may require special considerations.

Systems supplied by ICFA members are recognised by mortgage providers as a 'standard form of construction.' There are many companies that offer structural warranties, otherwise known as latent defects insurance, on buildings constructed using an ICF product. It is important to include your structural warranty company prior to commencing the build to ensure you meet your policy's requirements.

Chris Stride is chairman at ICFA

TACKLING ALL OBSTACLES

Two former rugby team-mates decided to pool their talents as project manager and architect to build a pair of semi-detached, thermally-efficient homes in Surrey. However a series of challenges tested their resolve, as *Selfbuilder + Homemaker* reports

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES ARC8 PROJECTS



Down a quiet semi-rural road in Surrey, sits a pair of new semi-detached houses constructed in insulated concrete formwork (ICF) and designed to near-Passivhaus standards. Although not technically a 'self-build' per se, being initially developed to sell, a two-man team of architect Rik Hall and project manager Matt Johnson were faced with a host of unexpected challenges that any self-builder could come across. The learnings Richard and Matt took away are useful for anyone tackling similar builds.

Ever since they were rugby team-mates, and subsequently worked together on projects in east London, the pair have discussed teaming up and taking on a new build together.

However, it wasn't until Matt presented a very promising site to Rik that things really got going on their build. Matt passed it every day on his way to work, and was intrigued by its sloping topography and unusual combination of seclusion and convenience. It contrasts strongly with the nearby London suburb of New Malden. "It feels like you're in the middle of the countryside but you're actually two minutes from the A3 and into town," says Rik.

The building then sitting on the site was a dilapidated Victorian cottage. Rik describes it as having "no real architectural merit," and being a "house a child would draw." Before purchasing the site, they knew it was going to be a case of knocking down and building new.



AFTER

BEFORE



CONTAMINATED LAND

It wasn't long after purchasing the site that Rik and Matt discovered a major issue with the land. Just down the road there had been an old gunpowder factory. Built during the 1600s and still in production during the first world war, the factory's pollution had infiltrated into the soil and caused significant contamination over the years. Finding this out early on was "stressful," says Rik, "but instead of panicking, you've got to sit down and work out how to resolve it."

They submitted this to the local contaminated land officer, "who was nice, but overly pessimistic about the contamination." He gave them two choices – either install a membrane throughout the site, or the more drastic measure of stripping back the ground down to the virgin clay. While this option meant pushing back their schedule as well as adding costs, they decided it was something they had to do. "If this was going to be me living there with my family I wouldn't want there to be any possibility of soil contamination, it's enough to put anyone off," says Rik. So they proceeded to remove all the contaminated soil, replacing it with clean subsoil.

PLANNING

Rik and Matt's goal was to create two "generously-sized," desirable family homes, ones which Rik says, "I would be very happy to live in myself." He adds: "I wanted to avoid it being just a 12-metre box for five people. A

home should be a bonus in life, not just a place to live in."

Rik used his architectural expertise, with help from Matt, to draw up their first submitted plan. This was supported by both the planning officer and the head of planning. However, as a tree protection order (TPO) was in force on the neighbouring site, the design had to be checked by a tree preservation officer which again slowed the project down.

Although Rik believed he had addressed the TPO in the initial plan, the officer wasn't happy with it as it stood, and at one point was going to refuse completely based on the root protection area required. Despite the pair's efforts to prove their design would not contravene the restrictions, the officer insisted the plans were redrawn.

They worked alongside the officer on the redesign however, and eventually both parties were satisfied. As a result, one of the homes is smaller than the other as a 'setback' was required in the rear extension. "We had to take this on the chin and move forward," says Rik.

He advises anyone embarking on a new build to "get in touch with planners as early on as possible" to tackle such problems collaboratively. He adds: "It's about having dialogue with them, working with them as much as possible. You've got to take a pragmatic view, and submit something that any rational person can look at and go 'yes I can see that if we can

LOW POINT

"There wasn't a low point as such, the fire was concerning, as you just think 'I hope no one's hurt,' but there was no real material loss."



HIGH POINT

"When I showed my wife around at the end – she hadn't seen it in a long time and she just loved it. That was kind of like self-affirmation. For someone to come in with a fresh eye and say it's good – you just get a warm fuzzy feeling like 'I've done something really cool here.'"

make a few changes here, I'll be happy with it."

FIRE

With plans finally approved and demolition about to start, yet another challenge confronted the pair.

Rik received an agitated midnight phone call from the neighbours, who yelled "your house is on fire!" The Victorian cottage was somehow ablaze and the flames had spread to the neighbours' site and damaged their shed. Thankfully, no-one was hurt.

At this point, Rik couldn't help but feel that the project may be jinxed. Fortunately however, as the structure was being knocked down anyway, the damage they would need to cover was minimal. "We got a small claim, but nothing like the value of the house, and rightly so," explains Rik.

How the fire started remains a mystery. At first it was thought to be arson, with various cases of arson having occurred nearby. A second theory was "a freak accident," says Rik. There's a small potting shed next to the cottage, and the Fire Service suggested that with it being a particularly hot summer compost could have self-ignited. Richard is sceptical about this idea however.

Another positive outcome was that the team managed to salvage all the bricks from the cottage and sell them to a local merchant. "Where we could, we reused and recycled any materials that were on site," explains Rik.

"It feels like you're in the middle of the countryside but you're actually two minutes from the A3"

CONSTRUCTION

After overcoming all the challenges, the build finally got underway in April 2018.

The project's construction is unusual, with its envelope being built using ICF. Classed as a 'modern method of construction,' hollow expanded polystyrene (EPS) blocks are stacked on site, and reinforced with steel beams that lock them into position. Concrete is then poured into the structure, creating walls that provide high thermal performance.

Thermohouse UK was selected as ICF supplier and installer, as Rik says that he "just couldn't fault the product." Due to the "one-stop shop" nature of the method, it wasn't long after they arrived on site that the shell was complete, taking only eight weeks. "All we had to do was pop in the windows and get the roof up."



RIK'S ADVICE

"Get in a good architect and take time on the design, think every little detail through."

"Once you're planning, make sure you choose a good Building Control officer, (local authority or private), get them on site early, check through all the drawings, make sure you're ticking off all the boxes as you go along."

"There will always be issues and 'surprises' on any project - you just have to find pragmatic solutions. You can't sit there crying over your problems, you've got to get on with it, and turn a new page."



Rik explains why ICF works for self-builds: "You can get the structure up, and then tender out the various pieces of work. For a self-builder it's a lot more manageable."

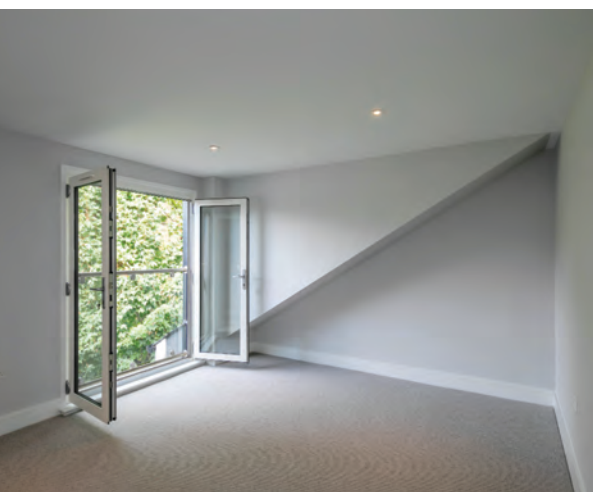
GETTING NEAR PASSIVHAUS

The plan in creating a very thermally efficient and airtight build, assisted by the ICF, was "never to aim for Passivhaus standards," says Rik, "but to get as near as possible." Although the goal was to create a pair of sustainable homes, true passive design was not within their budget, and an MVHR ventilation system, which would have been required to meet Passivhaus air-tightness standards, wasn't feasible. Rik comments: "In an ideal world, we would have met all standards, but sadly in this case it was a bridge too far on the cost side."

Instead, the design uses trickle vents within a whole-house ventilation system whereby in moisture- or heat-heavy rooms such as kitchen and bathrooms, a sensor activates so that the air is removed and replaced as needed.

As well as rooflights, solar PVs have been included on the flat roofs to the rear. The panels are currently making enough electricity to export some back to the grid. "Not a huge amount," admits Rik, "but it helps, and everyone should have panels at the end of the day." He believes that the PVs would have paid for themselves in about six or seven years.

While not scaling the absolute heights of Passivhaus, the building has achieved a commendable Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 88 per cent – three points off





CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

GROUNDWORKS
Octopus Building Ltd

SHELL
Thermohouse UK Ltd

ENGINEER
Paudie O'Connor
Thermohouse UK Ltd

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scoring an A. To help achieve the air-tightness standards they wanted to get to this high rating, they hired a specialist consultant. Rik comments: "Using ICF gives excellent results, but the crux of the performance relies on the penetrations of the envelope being properly sealed. This is most crucial where drainage and services come into the building."

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Considering the design's strong focus on energy efficiency, the houses' look doesn't scream 'typical eco-houses.' In fact, their design incorporates some traditional elements, proportions and well considered detailing which all help to create an attractive result.

As Matt and Rik wanted their build to fit within

"If this was going to be me living there with my family I wouldn't want there to be any possibility of soil contamination"

the "street scene," they've taken design cues from neighbouring dwellings, in terms of both size and style. The pair of semis have similar ridge heights, and have also replicated the square Edwardian windows of their nearby counterparts. Rik explains the approach: "It is a really well-considered Edwardian aesthetic, without the bricks!" He adds: "If you're going to do something completely out of character, you will be up against it from day one and have to go the extra mile to ensure the final product is aesthetically pleasing and considered."

To create a functional space for a family, the homes' interiors have been divided into two living zones. The upstairs – which Rik describes as a "more formal" area – includes the generously sized bedrooms, a study, and a spare



“It has been a huge learning curve”

room that can either be a children’s bedroom or a home office – a useful alternative in the current climate. The interior detailing has also incorporated some traditional aspects, as well as being fairly neutral – with simple greys, white painted spindles, mahogany handrails, and carpet runners up the stairs. “With the interior, we weren’t trying to break the mould because everyone has different tastes,” says Rik.

The downstairs, which is essentially the basement due to the gradient, is where the design turns more contemporary. It’s a large open-plan space with the kitchen at the front,

dining in the middle, and a living area at the rear with bi-folding doors leading out into the garden. Rik explains that “the family could all be downstairs watching TV, having dinner, playing in the garden, but upstairs is a bit more formal.”

With the downstairs being at ‘basement’ level, the design needed to allow as much natural light into the homes as possible. This was achieved by including basement-level lightwells at the front of the homes facing east. This allows the morning sun to pass through into the kitchen, lighting up the downstairs. As the sun passes over, the large rooflights in the houses’ kitchens and the bi-folding doors at the west-facing rear, capture the midday and evening sun, creating a downstairs area filled with natural light throughout the day.

The way the houses are built into the slope has been noticed by the local council, who have asked if they could use the site as an example of good design on a sloping topography. This is just one validation of the project’s success for the pair.

Although the project faced a litany of problems, Matt and Rik have taken many positives from it. “It has been a huge learning curve,” says Rik. “On a project that had so many issues the way we’ve dealt with the problems and come out on top, I think for me it’s a big success.”

The twist in the tale is that while the homes are currently on the market, Rik explains that his family may end up moving into one of them as their house is currently for sale, “so it may well end up being a self-build after all!” ■



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DOUBLING UP

Jessica and Harry Gold doubled the size of a Victorian house in Surrey, combining traditional and modern features to create a stunning, light-filled home to relocate to from London

TEXT DEBBIE JEFFERY IMAGES DAVID BUTLER

EXTERIOR

The detached Victorian house has been thoughtfully extended to the side and rear, using bricks reclaimed from the original building





KITCHEN

Smoked glass splashbacks bring texture to the contemporary kitchen cabinets, which are finished in 3 mm thick concrete

DINING AREA

A roof lantern and corner glass doors ensure the open plan dining area is filled with light



// We didn't have children when we bought our London townhouse, so school catchment areas weren't an issue then," says Jessica Gold. "By the time I was pregnant with our second child our priorities had changed, though, and we began hunting for a home outside of London."

Jessica and her husband Harry, a ship broker, searched for a family home in areas within easy commuting distance from London. "For us, the location was everything, so we kept looking further and further afield because we could buy far more for our money," Jessica continues.

Various problems with the sale of their house meant that Jessica's due date was growing ever closer, and the couple were determined to find a



LOW POINT

"We blew our contingency budget on underpinning the house after discovering it had been built without foundations!"

HIGH POINT

"Designing the interiors – particularly the bathrooms – was the most enjoyable part."

JESSICA'S ADVICE

"Don't scrimp on your downstairs cloakroom, because it's the one bathroom that all your guests will use."

new home before their son was born. "It was becoming increasingly stressful, and we decided to view a house which had been on the market for some time and was a bit below our budget," says Jessica.

The detached Victorian house in a popular Surrey village was dark, poorly laid out, and in need of complete renovation. Jessica and Harry had never previously tackled such a large project, but both recognised the potential that the property offered.

"It was quite a small, pokey house. The ground floor had a sitting room and separate dining room to the front, and two rooms at the back had been combined to make a kitchen," says Jessica. "Upstairs there were four bedrooms, a bathroom and en suite. The garden was completely overgrown and there was a tatty detached double garage to one side, so leaving our lovely open plan London home to come here was quite depressing!"

In May 2017, the couple moved into the house with their daughter, Georgia, who was then two. They had decided to live there for a short time before later moving out while the renovation and extension work was completed. Their son, Jackson, was born shortly after, and the new layout was initially designed around a family with two children.

"We Googled architects in the area and loved the look of Concept Eight Architects' projects," explains Jessica. "They were very responsive, operated on a fixed-fee basis, and I knew immediately that these were people I wanted to work with."

The award-winning practice specialises in residential architecture of all scales, in London and the south east, and its work has featured widely in the media. Director and founding partner, Mufajel Chowdhury, says: "One of the big things for us is to identify and understand the setting, so a detailed site appraisal is something that we start with on all projects. Then it's about how someone feels in our spaces, as much as how they look, and we try to really understand how a family wants to live in the house."

The family spent most of their time living in the kitchen to the rear of the house, in order to keep close visual contact with the children, but this meant that the other ground floor rooms were rarely used.

"It felt like we were living in a tiny flat, so our brief was for light, open plan spaces," says Jessica. "I was probably quite bossy when it came to the design, but although I knew what I wanted, I didn't know how to bring everything together and make it look cohesive – that was where our architects came in!"

DESIGN

Demolishing the existing shabby double garage would have created plenty of space for a side extension, but Jessica knew that this west-facing part of the garden was a real sun-trap. She asked Concept Eight Architects to design a double height extension to the other side of the house, freeing up the former garage

They were finally able to move into the house in 2019, just in time for lockdown as the pandemic swept the world

site as a terrace.

A single-storey kitchen/dining/living extension to the rear would then connect to the terrace and garden through glass sliding doors, designed to wrap around the structure. When fully open, these would create the impression that the kitchen/dining area was part of the garden, with just one slim supporting column on view.

The new extensions would double the size of the house, with a two-storey side addition forming a ground floor playroom/snug beside the kitchen, as well as a utility, plant room, boot room, shower room and pantry on the ground floor.

Above this, two new bedrooms were created for the children, allowing the first-floor layout to be reconfigured to form a generous principal bedroom with an ensuite and a walk-in wardrobe. The existing sitting room was extended, and the former dining room turned into a study as part of the ambitious project, which involved rewiring and plumbing the entire house.

"Previously there were only north-facing windows to the rear, with none to the side, and the huge trees in the garden cast shade and made interiors dark," explains Jessica, "It was dingy, cold and miserable, so the priority was to bring in as much natural light as possible using glass."

Flexibility and futureproofing were also important considerations, and a new staircase – necessary to meet Building Regulations – was positioned to make a loft conversion practical.

The planning application included a loft conversion, together with the two other extensions, and permission was granted for all the adaptations, including introducing west-facing windows. The only amendment to the design was a request for a first-floor window to be frosted, as it overlooks the neighbouring bungalow.

"We didn't go ahead with the loft conversion for various reasons," says Jessica. "We borrowed against the house and our budget was already allocated, but then the bank decided to withdraw their offer and only provide around a quarter of the amount they'd promised. Fortunately, we managed to borrow from another source, but it caused a great deal of stress!"

MANAGING PROJECT CHALLENGES

Jessica has a background in finance and decided to take on the role of project manager herself, arranging childcare for two days each week to attend site meetings and spend time running the build. The family moved into a rented house a mile away from the site, placing half their belongings into storage. Following a tender process, a local building company was chosen, based on positive references, although Harry and Jessica had a far less successful experience.

"Discovering that we needed to underpin the existing brick house was a particularly low point," says Jessica. "We had a trial pit dug a couple of weeks before the build started, which was part of the party wall negotiation with our neighbour on the west. This revealed that the house had been built directly onto soil with no foundations. It was a miracle that it was still standing!"

The couple spent almost their entire contingency budget on underpinning work to stabilise the house, which involved engaging a structural engineer. Money was saved by cleaning the existing roof tiles, however, which have been matched with new tiles on the side extension for a seamless finish.

"Only one original wall remained untouched – everywhere else new openings were made and chimney breasts removed," says Jessica. "All the ceilings were taken down and rebuilt, too, and the builders found old bullets, newspapers, and even a wartime chewing gum wrapper as they were taking the house apart."

Bricks from demolished internal walls were salvaged and reused for the new extensions, with twenty-three new double-glazed timber sashes replacing the original draughty single-glazed windows. For the rear kitchen extension, huge aluminium sliding doors have been installed, causing numerous issues when they were initially made too small for the openings.

"The floor-to-ceiling sliding doors really add the wow factor, so we were adamant that we would find a way to afford them," says Jessica. Tracks and mechanisms have been concealed using the same non-slip tiles indoors and out, which means that the kitchen and dining areas merge with the garden when the doors are open.

LAYOUT & INTERIOR DESIGN

"Part way through the build I discovered I was expecting Rocco, our third child, which meant that we needed to ask Concept Eight to revise the layout," says Jessica, who has also recently launched a new business with her sister, Wellbeing Sisters.

"Originally, Georgia and Jackson were going to share a bathroom, so we left the plumbing in place but covered it over to make this into a nursery. The guest ensuite was then converted into a family bathroom, accessed from the landing."

Jessica undertook the interior design for the house, choosing predominantly white walls in

Various problems with the sale of their house meant that Jessica's due date was growing ever closer

the modern living space, adding texture with polished plaster feature walls, marble-effect bespoke joinery, and smoked glass splashbacks.

She chose traditional coving and dado rails for the hallway, lounge, and study, with cool greys above the dados contrasting with deep block colours below. Floor and wall tiles were also carefully selected, featuring unusual designs in the hallway and bathrooms.

"Originally, we were just going to install underfloor heating in the ground floor extensions, but the builders explained that it wouldn't cost much more to run this into the lounge, study and hallway – especially taking into account what we'd save on fancy radiators – and I'm so pleased we did, as it creates far cleaner lines," says Jessica. "Wall space is fairly limited because we have so many windows, with Crittall-style double glass doors connecting the rooms, so positioning radiators would have been difficult anyway."

The kitchen is a key feature, with its concrete-finished cabinetry, copper accents, and a bespoke island unit which incorporates built-in seating. Initially, Jessica had chosen and paid a deposit for a more traditional kitchen, but then changed her mind and decided that a sleek, contemporary design would better suit the space.

"The local company who supplied our kitchen was excellent. However, just before it was due to be delivered the German manufacturer went into administration," says Jessica. "Luckily an investor saved the company, and the kitchen arrived several weeks late."

The family had given notice to vacate their rental property, based on the builders' predictions for a completion date, but delays left them without anywhere to live for seven weeks. After staying with relatives, they were finally able to move into the house in 2019, just in time for lockdown as the Coronavirus pandemic swept the world.

"We actually felt extremely lucky to have such a wonderful home where we could open up the glass doors and relax out on the patio during the summer," says Jessica. "It's not been an easy project, but we love the way the new and old parts of the house work together to give us all the character, light and space we'd hoped for." ■

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT

Concept Eight Architects
www.concept8.co.uk

TILES

Mandarin Stone
www.mandarinstone.com

KITCHEN

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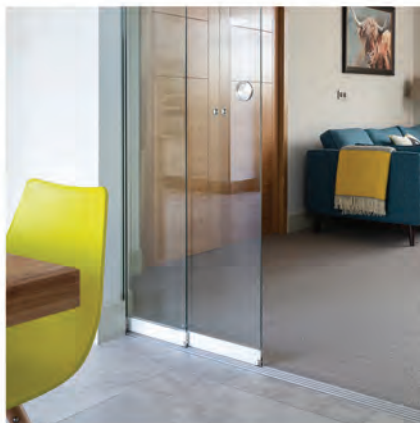
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Specifying large windows - Plan ahead to ensure success

Large windows, shaped windows, impressive window screens - glazing can add real drama to your new build home but can be challenging to specify correctly. Here's some advice on how to achieve the ideal balance of style and performance:

More glass means increased sunlight which can be a benefit but also a problem. Strategies to ensure a comfortable 'indoor climate' include tinted glass, external shading, and careful positioning of windows within facades.

Triple-glazing is not the only option for an energy efficient home - high performance double glazing can also deliver excellent insulation, or combine double and triple glazing for a tailored (and more cost-effective) solution.

Make sure your glazing plans meet relevant building regulations as soon as possible, and specify compliant windows and doors for swift approval from building control - if in doubt, ask your window supplier - VELFAC for example has a team of technical sales people on hand to help you.

Consult early with your builder and supplier to make sure larger windows can be delivered and installed safely, so you have time to adapt your plans if necessary.

FAIR RISING, PETERSFIELD

Construction company boss Jeremy Westcott was certain VELFAC composite glazing would be the perfect choice for his stunning new-build family home: 'A significant part of my business is the approved installation of VELFAC glazing, so I knew it was a great product,' he says. 'I really like the slim-line frame as it delivers a larger area of glass and is ideally suited to contemporary architecture,' he explains. 'The system is also tried and tested - it's a very solid product which functions extremely well.'

Designed by architect Carl Leroy Smith, Fair Rising is located on the edge of the South Downs National Park. The front elevation features full height glazed facades which rise into the distinctive double pitched roof. The windows bring maximum light - and



beautiful views - into living and dining areas, and into first floor bedrooms which also feature VELFAC glazed sliding doors opening onto balconies. At the rear, an impressive, full-width VELFAC bi-fold door links the kitchen to a courtyard paved with local stone, with an additional balcony above. Both internal timber and external aluminium frames have been painted black which, says Jeremy, 'is a definite style statement. It also gives greater emphasis to the internal frame while externally the black frame blends into the glass facade'.

MITIGATING SOLAR GAIN

Jeremy and Carl actively mitigated the impact of unwanted solar gain by specifying manually opening VELFAC units, motorised VELUX roof windows, and an MHVR system which together maintain good air circulation. The glazing is also set back 1200mm into the facade to gain extra shade from the extended timber-framed eaves and walls, and also from the first floor balconies.

Working with VELFAC experts, Jeremy could meet thermal targets and building regulations with a combination of triple and double glazed units: 'As new build homes have to be both energy efficient and satisfy the latest security standards, we installed triple

glazing at ground level and double glazing above, both of which are Secured by Design approved and offer excellent U-values. As a result our heating bills are low, despite the vaulted ceilings, and acoustic insulation is very impressive.' Installing so many large windows did present some significant technical challenges, but Jeremy drew on his own expertise to ensure all went smoothly: 'To install the upper windows at Fair Rising, for example, we had to construct a first-floor loading bay within the scaffolding, and use a crane to lift the units into position. This shows the importance of careful planning when installing large glazed units in order to minimise risk to people and to protect the product.'

Fair Rising proved to be such a successful project that Jeremy has used it as a showroom for clients interested in the VELFAC system: 'The house is very enjoyable to live in,' he says, 'and as a result I will continue to specify VELFAC glazing, and recommend the system to my clients.'

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47 is the new 50 – have you switched yet?

To build safer, stronger structures requires more than just top quality joist hangers; equally important is choosing the correct sized joist hanger. Regularised timber is now the UK standard, which means 50mm hangers are yesterday's news. Unlike rough sawn timber, where the width of a joist can be anything up to 50mm, regularised timber is planed down and the edges rounded for consistency, so regularised timber is always 45mm. At **Simpson Strong-Tie** we know that size matters! Regulated hanger sizes have long been offered across our hanger ranges. National Builders Merchant Sales Manager Steve Allen explains: "Our 47mm range provides the correct, secure fit. Using 50mm wide hangers leaves a gap between the hanger and the joist, which not only requires structural packing in order to meet regulations, but can still result in twisting timber and squeaky floors." The wider the hanger, the more important it is to use regularised sizing – and Simpson offer it as standard. We have 47mm hangers for singles joists, 91mm for doubles and 137mm for triple joist applications. Hanging two regularised joists in a traditional 100mm wide hanger results in a gap of 10mm, and three joists in a 150mm hanger means a 15mm gap to pack!" 47 is the new 50 – have you switched yet?

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SWA member replaces 203 steel windows



Steel Window Association (SWA) member, REA Metal Windows, has completed work on the Grade II listed Dantzic on the NOMA estate in Manchester. Situated near Manchester Victoria train station, Dantzic, NOMA has been transformed into 45,000 sq ft of office space. After completing a site survey of the selected area, REA supplied 203 W20 steel windows; replicating the original window fenestration. 1600 individual frames were required for this project and each one of them was hot dipped, galvanised and polyester painted to a RAL 9001 semi-gloss (cream) finish. Once installed into their respective openings on site, the frames were glazed with Part L compliant 16mm krypton gas filled double glazed units.

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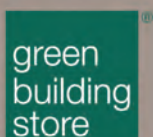


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JACKON systems offer massive benefits

JACKODUR ATLAS and THERMOMUR ICF from JACKON UK enable self-builders to create highly energy-efficient homes more easily and more quickly than any other construction method.

ICF construction integrates insulation materials into the concrete formwork, totally transforming the way houses are constructed. As well as being easier and quicker to build, an ICF house provides massive advantages during the life of a building. These include: dramatically improved insulation and therefore reduced expenditure on heating or cooling; excellent acoustic performance; fire resistance; enhanced resilience to flood, extreme weather and seismic activity; rot and vermin resistance; versatility with regard to remodelling and a minimal maintenance requirement.

JACKON has over 60 years' expertise

in EPS and XPS manufacturing. The company offers two separate systems. JACKODUR ATLAS uses an XPS (extruded polystyrene) insulated core to provide thermal insulation for floor slabs. The system comprises interlocking sections, eliminating thermal bridges and providing stable compressive strength properties. Supplied cut to size, rapid and problem-free construction is assured.

For the most energy efficient buildings, JACKODUR ATLAS should be used in conjunction with THERMOMUR ICF formwork. This is a robust pre-formed block with a hollow core, manufactured from Expanded Polystyrene (EPS). The empty core in the block is filled with a concrete pour during construction.

The system enables the achievement of u-values lower than 0.15 for both the slab and the external walls. The



developer of a recent project was amazed by both the ease of use of the JACKON systems, as well as the very high energy efficiency of the completed building. They particularly valued the fact that within the THERMOMUR range JACKON has developed a unique EPS cavity closure of a sufficient density to allow doors and windows to be fixed directly to it – thereby eliminating any cold bridging.

JACKON EPS and XPS products are manufactured in Europe and have Passivhaus certification. In the UK the products have mortgage, insurance and planning acceptance, conforming to the relevant British Standards, and have BBA Accreditation.

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companies. Selfbuilder & Homemaker also offers monthly updates with the Editor's Choice newsletter, sharing content curated by the editorial team and newsletter, offering news on products, services and events.

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Membranes protect Self Build Heroes



Motivation, adaptability, integrity and trustworthiness combined with nearly 50 years of construction experience is the description of an innovative service by Self Build Heroes, intended to support self-builders in achieving their dream of building their own home with military veterans. In their latest project, the roofs and the building envelope has been fitted with high-performing protective membranes from the **A. Proctor Group**. Matthew Burrows, Founder of Self Build Heroes explains: "We

chose Roofshield because of its superior air permeability and breathability. Roofshield has been used successfully on several of our projects and provides excellent robustness, versatility and protection."

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BAL products to feature in new TV show

A range of **BAL** tiling products are to feature in a new bathroom make-over show on Channel 5. GSA Bathrooms were approached in October by PI Productions to feature in a new show: *Kitchens and Bathrooms: You Won't Believe Your Eyes*, hosted by Mark Miller from *DIY SOS* fame. A £23k bathroom renovation was selected to be filmed as part of the program which will air later this year. The tiling was completed by KK Tiling Ltd from Edinburgh who used BAL Flex One – enhanced standard set tile adhesive for the wall tiling and BAL Rapid Flex One for the floor tiling. All the tiles were grouted with BAL Micromax2 Grout in Gunmetal. The 1200x600mm Marble Wall Tiles were used to complete one wall of the bathroom and the Jacuzzi surrounds, where they were fixed with a mitre finish. Kevin Swinton from KK Tiling explains: "The original design focused on the 1200x600 Marble Wall Tiles extending around the whole bathroom, but after some stock issues, we decided to create a feature wall using Metro Carrara Tiles in a offset herringbone pattern. It definitely creates a focal point in the room, and draws the eye." Kevin has always been a big BAL user and chose BAL Flex One for the walls due to its versatility. He added: "Flex One is a great product and gave us that little bit of leeway to build out, up to 15mm in isolated areas, which was particularly useful as some of the walls weren't 100 per cent flat in places and some of the wall tiles were slightly bowed in the middle."

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HOME OF TWO HALVES

A picture postcard cottage on the Roseland peninsula in Cornwall has been enveloped in a distinctly modern addition which also strikes a balance with the property's traditional half

TEXT & IMAGES EWEN MACDONALD



For self-builders in the south west, it has become common to buy up a past-it mid-20th century cheaply-built bungalow with a priceless coastal view, and raze it to the ground to create a modern glass and concrete ocean pad. Glass-enclosed, flat-roofed white modernist homes have become something of a Cornish vernacular in architectural terms.

But for those looking to stretch the skills of their architect – not to mention their own sanity – working with an existing building can offer much more of a challenge. All the

decisions to be made can make it an architectural adventure: which bits to keep and what bits to get rid of? Can a modernist twist work in a traditional setting? For the brave, the spoils can be ultimately more rewarding than a complete new build with a bespoke design incorporating all that is best across distinct eras.

Jason and Fiona Ellis undertook just such a challenge when they bought a 200-year-old and unloved cottage on Cornwall's sought-after Roseland Peninsula. Homes here rarely come on the market – so the Ellis family snapped it



up and then sat back to consider the possibilities. "Cornwall had a deep connection with Jason as he had spent every summer holiday as a child on The Lizard peninsula, and later in his life I would also fall for the county," says Fiona. "We wanted a 'picture postcard' Cornish cottage due to our love of period properties to which we could eventually retire." They started to search for a property along the coastline between St Mawes and Fowey, ultimately ending up on the Roseland peninsula.

After two years of planning, designing and building, the cottage has been given a distinctly modern twist with the addition of a floor-to-ceiling glass extension that manages to contrast with – and complement – the existing historic building. The building has also been extended with a wing made from local granite that more closely matches the age of the house.

When considering adding to the size of a property – one of the major aims is often to create something seamless through a near-invisible extension that blends in with the style of the house. For Jason and Fiona, they knew that their newly bought character cottage would need additional space and wanted something that would stand out while complementing the building's existing charm. The couple had already embarked on a major renovation on their former Edwardian period home in London. "This is where we got a taste for combining period architecture and materials with modern design," says Jason. The previous work had taken 10 months to complete, and they felt well prepared for the major works on what would be

EXTERIOR

Glass allows light to flood in

SUN ROOM

A gin and coffee bar in the sun room

An exposed brick wall marks the end of the original cottage

LOW POINT

"We discovered an original well under the proposed extension plus the end of the cottage wall was sitting on earth that needed underpinning."

For those looking to stretch the skills of their architect, working with an existing building can offer much more of a challenge

LIVING SPACE

The living space features floor to ceiling glass from wall to wall.

EXTERIOR

The floor to ceiling glass features the stone walls



HIGH POINT

"One passer-by actually congratulated us on such a great addition to the cottage – linking it to the original granite barn – little did they know that the granite barn was part of the new addition!"

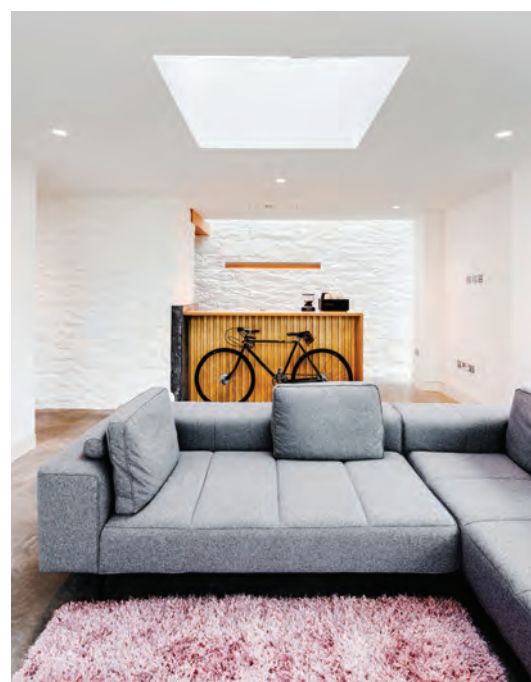
their perfect new Cornish home.

The couple bought the cottage to become their forever home, and had undertaken work to turn it into a home before embarking on an extensive project that went beyond updating and modernising the inside. Enter Van Ellen and Sheryn architects, who created a design to double the size of the building. Work began on site in October 2018 and was completed at the end of 2019. The couple worked with a quantity surveyor which made cost control and managing stage payments much easier for them and their contractor – something Jason recommends to anyone undertaking a self-build or major renovation.

DESIGN

The design and building work took 12 months to complete. The couple chose architects Van Ellen and Sheryn after reading about them in a homes magazine. "We hoped to achieve a style of two distinctive halves, deliberately bringing together a period and modern element," adds Fiona. "We didn't want the new addition to look like an extension built in white stone like the cottage.

There were easily identifiable issues that any design would need to rectify, not least an awkwardly-positioned garage. The original



house was orientated in such a way that the large rear garden was cut off from the house – and as with many period properties of this type,



the windows were small, and the ceilings were low, creating a dark interior losing the light that the Roseland peninsula is famous for. The overall feel was cosy but cramped.

The contrasting extension incorporates a rear glass sun-room, making the most of the new-look private garden, the far-reaching views of the countryside, and the all-important sunlight. This new space also houses one of their biggest extravagances: a dedicated coffee and gin station showcasing a La Marzocco espresso machine and featuring a GANT 'Oak and Concrete' light above.

The existing garage was badly positioned and the couple decided it was surplus to requirements. It has been converted into secondary accommodation, housing a utility room, a downstairs bathroom and storage.

Local granite was used from Cornish Lantoom Quarry to replace the existing garage with a granite barn structure that reflected other period properties in the area and reclaimed slate for the roof prevented it from looking new. Other materials that feature heavily in the new design are glass, birch plywood, cedar battening and reused Cornish local stone for landscaping.

The spaces between the two elements are

The building has also been extended with a wing made from local granite

distinct: one cosy and one spacious and light, utilising FineLine architectural glazing to provide a transparent enclosure. The floor-to-ceiling glass extends between the house and the former garage, and allows the white painted stone walls of the cottage to still be appreciated in the background. Similarly, the exposed granite wall of the new barn-like extension is visible through the floor-to-ceiling glass, bringing a great textural element to an internal wall that also celebrates the new part of the house.

The couple have succeeded in creating an addition that is both contrasting and modern in design rather than pastiche the era of the rest of the house. A contemporary and calm palette of materials has been used inside and out. Polished

KITCHEN

The kitchen combines old and new features, elements providing a sleek contrast against the property's whitewashed stone walls

JASON'S TOP TIPS

* "Our advice to anyone renovating/extending an old property would be to set a contingency and double it. Even when you think you have every eventuality covered, surprises happen!"



BEST BUYS

"Some of our best buys include the GANT light over our coffee island from Holloway's of Ludlow, the Rational replacement cottage windows from PS Counter which are sympathetic to the period architecture (and never need painting), and a modern grey felt sofa from BO Concept."

concrete floors and bright white walls bounce light around the room, while the timber coffee island and locally sourced Cornish stone provide natural colour and texture. The quality of the build and design helps prevent a visual clash when moving between the different spaces.

EXTERIORS

"The exterior of the property is 'picture postcard' cottage meets modern floating glass," says Fiona. She describes the interior of the original cottage as "New England modern coastal," with the extension bringing an "industrial design edge" with materials like polished concrete and marine birch plywood. Fiona adds: "The exposed granite wall of the new barn-like extension that is visible through the floor-to-ceiling glass and brings a great textural element to an internal wall."

This calm palette of materials is continued out into the garden with the use of granite setts as paving; perfectly matching the colour of the polished concrete inside. The floor-to-ceiling glass extends between the house and the garage and allows the white painted stone walls of the cottage to still be appreciated in the background.

To enhance the feeling of lightness when

The couple worked with a quantity surveyor which made cost control and managing stage payments much easier for them and their contractor

viewed externally, the extension has been designed with the thinnest of roof depths at its eaves. The thick, insulated roof above the room tapers out from the glazing line to a thin overhang, in an almost aerofoil shape. This roof plane 'floats' above the glass and stone walls below, and the lack of structure at the glass-to-glass corner in the glazing system further accentuates the effect.

"The clients had already undertaken

EXTERIOR

The new house includes granite, stone and glass parts



substantial improvements internally at the time of our initial meeting with them, and showed a good eye for interiors," says Ian Phillips, director of Van Ellen and Sheryn. "Due to the attractive and honest character of the existing cottage, it was agreed early on that any new addition should be of a contrasting and modern design. This would allow both the cottage and the extension to be enjoyed in their own right."

He continues: "The resultant spaces should be different in what they provide to the overall property; one cosy, one spacious and light." The composition of slimline glazing and an ultra-thin roof plane would "combine to create an elegant and light-touch addition to the cottage," he added. "We're very pleased to see that the client's eye for detail, and the talented construction team, have been able to realise the design concept with such accuracy and finesse."

There were plenty of other challenges along the way – not least discovering a well under the site of the proposed extension. To allow the extension to sit comfortably against the existing house, and provide a level access throughout, it was also necessary to dig down into the existing ground and underpin the existing stone walls. Below-ground structural work is expensive to undertake and added cost.

"We had quite a few low points at the beginning of the project when surprises revealed themselves as the extensive excavation works started," admits Fiona. "Even though we'd spent 18 months from concept to breaking earth



including test site digs. Our advice to anyone renovating or extending an old property would be to set a contingency and double it! Even when you think you have every eventuality covered, surprises happen."

But the sleepless nights and hours bent over a calculator have all but been forgotten in the joy of spending time in their new home. The end result is a stunning combination of new and old, history is preserved with a modern industrial addition that highlights the beauty of the cottage, rather than dwarf it.

"The high point of the build came from a passer-by who congratulated us on such a great addition to the cottage linking it to the original granite barn," says Jason. "Little did they know that the granite barn was part of the new addition and was spot on the brief – it makes it look as if it's always been there!" ■

CONTRACTORS & STOCKISTS

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Van Ellen and Sheryn,
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CONTRACTOR

Cathedral Builders

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Hosken Parks

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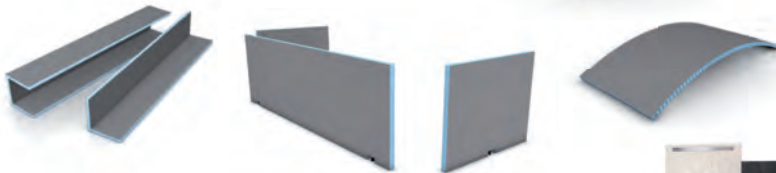
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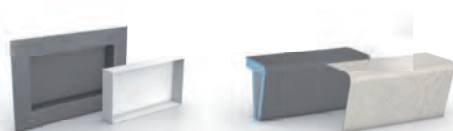
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Versatile wet rooms

Neil Whitehead from Impey offers insights into how to create the ideal wetroom or wet area shower space for every size and style of home



The coveted wetroom shower space has many guises and, when thoughtfully planned and installed, can fit into virtually any size and style of property. Here are some wetroom design options and tips on how to plan your perfect shower space.

OPEN PLANS

As we saw many years ago with the advent of the kitchen/diner, one of the most flexible design options for a showering space is an open plan layout. Taking inspiration from high-end hotel design, the opportunity to take down walls and open up rooms to create a luxurious bathroom environment is ever more desirable to homeowners.

An open concept wetroom offers the ultimate in adaptability. Providing an ideal foundation for even the smallest of showering spaces, an open plan wetroom allows for the floor area to be maximised and a simple design scheme to shine.

Opting for an elongated linear-style floor former can further enhance the modern look and feel of the space, with opportunities for personalisation including a 'barely there' tiled insert

drainage grate, offering effortless coordination. Clean, contemporary lines and modern sanitaryware, combined with concealed storage options and a contemporary glass screen; key design elements which showcase wetroom simplicity at its finest.

The addition of a glass screen (or configuration of screens) ensures that water is contained in the wet area of the bathroom and can add a touch of class to your room while separating the showering area from the rest of the room.

SPA-STYLE INDULGENCE

In a departure from the clean, minimalist bathrooms which have prevailed in recent years you may wish to recreate the sense of serenity and relaxation experienced at a spa, in your wetroom at home.

Texture, natural materials, and individuality are key if you are creating a spa or wellness style wetroom. Consider a natural tile choice, the introduction of wood, textured accessories like baskets, towels etc, rustic brushed copper or pewter fixtures and fittings and of course, the addition of some lush greenery.

A pared-back or muted colour palette,

with adaptable lighting which can be adjusted to suit the laid-back ambience you are trying to create; LED mood lighting, or a smart-shower, will all add to the feeling of tranquillity and calmness in your spa-style wetroom retreat.

SMALL SHOWERING SPACES

Wetrooms are an ideal showering solution for small or awkwardly shaped rooms owing to the flexibility of design and the removal of a traditional bathtub or shower enclosure, which immediately maximises floor space. A well designed wetroom can create a bespoke showering space in a loft/attic space, garage conversion, under-stairs cupboard or even basement refurb.

A completely open plan wetroom, one incorporates no screening at all, is perfect when space is limited. This is providing that drainage is well-positioned, and that towels/loo roll holders are situated to avoid the spray from the shower head.

Many wetroom floor formers can be cut to size to accommodate exact floor shapes. But of course, do check the guidelines on your specific model of floor former before purchase, to confirm your

project is viable.

In locations which incorporate a pitched roof, eaves or even reduced ceiling height, bespoke glass screens are available which can be cut to your exact dimensions; you will just need to allow some extra time for manufacture (generally four-six weeks).

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY

The consequences of future proofing and multigenerational living have added an emphasis within the bathroom environment which a level-access wetroom installation lends itself perfectly to.

Fitting a wetroom is a simple but effective way to create a shower space that can be utilised by every kind of user, regardless of age or physical limitations.

A wetroom provides an ideal walk-in showering space that is versatile, adaptable, and easy to maintain. It allows you to maximise your home's long-term potential, accommodating family members or guests who may need to avoid a 'step' into the shower, who may use a shower seat or a wheelchair, or may require assisted showering.

The addition of sleek, modern grab rails, and attractive, wall-mounted shower seating that can be folded away when not in use, ensure your wetroom is adaptable

and attractive, avoiding an 'institutional' look or feel.

BACK TO BLACK – INDUSTRIAL INSPIRATION

The trend for industrially inspired design is continuing to gather mainstream traction; with the addition of black-framed wetroom panels or enclosures and co-ordinating black bathroom accessories still popular.

For homeowners keen to incorporate the black-framed shower panel trend into a contemporary shower space, a 'Crittall-style' shower screen can quickly and simply create a strong design statement. To ensure longevity for your black-framed screen, it is essential to research the properties of the individual design, as there are very many styles and qualities of these popular screens available.

Co-ordinating decor options can vary from sticking to a simple monochrome colour palette, black taps, and shower heads, to throwing in bold splashes of eye-catching, bright colour. To embrace the industrial style completely, opt for stylish black bathroom accessories, bathroom linen, or even a black heated towel rail.

Neil Whitehead is brand marketing manager at Impey

Wetrooms are an ideal showering solution for small or awkwardly shaped rooms – owing to the flexibility of design and the removal of a traditional bathtub or shower enclosure, which immediately maximises your floor space



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Setcrete product and floor preparation guide



Leading manufacturer of high-performance floor preparation products, **Setcrete** has launched a new, 'fast check' product and floor preparation guide for its range of floor levelling compounds, repair mortars, primers, damp proof membranes and adhesives. Setcrete's product guide echoes the intuitive design of the range's clear and simple product packaging, which facilitates quick and easy selection, focusing on each product's key performance capability and its primary application. Both the packaging and

product guide make intelligent use of strong colour-coding and simple graphical information to further ease product selection. Setcrete's product and floor preparation guide is printed in a handy, pocket-size format.

www.setcrete.co.uk

Chic new BLANCOCULINA mixer tap



BLANCO, as ever the innovator in mixer taps and perfectly matching sinks, has designed the BLANCOCULINA mixer tap range for the "passionate cook at home". Given the rise in professionally-styled appliances in the kitchen due to the trend for home cooking, this tap is an asset to all new and existing design schemes. BLANCOCULINA oozes design and quality engineering credentials and has won multiple awards. The tall, bendable arched outlet can be rotated 360° and can

be pulled deep into the bowl, preventing splashes while the practical magnetic outlet holder is another ingenious detail. There are four models in the portfolio.

www.blanco.com/gb-en/mixer-taps/culina-f

Make light work (in 'Soho')

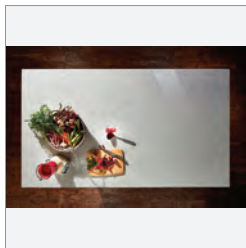
A big impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic is that far more of us are now working from home. Ensure you maximise natural daylight in your home working environment – it's good for your well-being says **Crittall Windows**... Daylight flooding into workplaces, schools - and homes - has a positive impact on our daily lives, and that's not just a vague feeling, it's scientifically proven. Daylight induces wakefulness, cognitive function, productivity, general health and healing. "Evidence suggests it's important to have a feelgood factor inside your home. Our positive well-being depends on frequent exposure to light, and daylight is the most powerful way, especially during these times of the pandemic, with more of us working from home and creating a home office or working zone," says Russell Ager, managing director of steel window and door manufacturer Crittall Windows. "Our homes play a big part in our sense of well-being and their design; lighting and exposure to natural light through windows and doors really do impact. Steel-framed windows are ideal with their inherent strength allowing large expanses of glass, elegantly slender frames and the slimmest of profiles. The hallmark of a Crittall window is the slender steel frame that is so much slimmer – and therefore admits so much more light – than alternative window systems which require far larger profiles due to the basic differences in the frame material and their relative strengths.

01376 530800 www.crittall-windows.co.uk



Nicola Hicks Design/Charlie Round-Turner/
Lightfoot Windows (Kent)

Make a house a home with Königstone



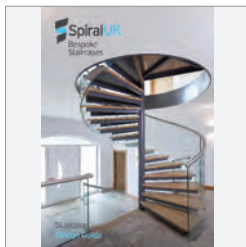
Königstone, renowned for durable, high-quality worktops, has added a new colour to the popular Königquartz portfolio: Monaco. The pale grey shade incorporates a marble-like effect with a natural-looking grain to create a unique and stylish surface.

As quartz is one of the toughest natural substances in the world, it is a great material for a kitchen or bathroom worktop. The beauty of new colour, Monaco, is that homeowners can brighten the look of their kitchen with a lighter shade, without the

fears of stains or scratches. The homeowner doesn't need to worry about any mess as the quartz is highly scratch-, stain- and heat-resistant, and can easily be cleaned with a damp cloth.

info@konigstone.co.uk

Your bespoke staircase from Spiral UK



If you're building or renovating your home the stairs are an opportunity for a wow-factor feature that fits your style and way of living.

If you don't know where to start with the complexities of staircase rules and regulations, design options, structural capacity and not least costs, **Spiral UK** has released a Staircase Design Guide that covers all the basics and gives you an idea of figures for your favourites to be fully

fitted. Head to the website to download your free copy and learn more about how Spiral UK can help with the design, manufacture and installation of your perfect stair.

www.spiral.uk.com/brochures

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P C Henderson’s Sienna system specified for a stunning self build

P C Henderson’s Sienna sliding door system has recently been specified for a stunning self-build project in the beautiful countryside of Aughrim, Co. Wicklow. Planning the design of the 3 bed bungalow themselves, the couple’s main goal was to create a large open plan living area for the family to enjoy. The couple opted for double glazed sliding doors to separate the living area from the bedroom block – vaulted ceilings were also included in the design to enhance the space even further. Fáinche Murphy commented: “Our aim was to maximise floor space in the living area whilst having the flexibility to create open spaces during the day and then close the doors off on an evening to enjoy a cosier environment. Sliding doors seemed the perfect solution especially with the added benefit of saving floor space in comparison to a swing door”. P C Henderson’s Sienna sliding door system was identified as the best solution for the project. Designed with a stainless steel bar track and exposed top mounted hangers, Sienna offers an elegant and stylish system. “We required a sliding door system which followed the same barn-style décor scheme we had used throughout the rest of the property – when we mentioned this to our builder, he was quick to mention P C Henderson. The Sienna system perfectly complements the other stainless steel features in our home and the doors glide open and closed with very little effort. We’re delighted with the flexibility that the system has brought to our home”, continued Fáinche.

0191 377 0701 www.pchenderson.com



30 per cent more coverage with new Powercoat paint roller

Painting and decorating expert Harris has launched the Ultimate Powercoat Roller Frame and Sleeve and as the name suggests, not only will it give you a great finish, but it will give you 30 per cent more paint coverage than the standard paint roller, making painting jobs faster, easier and more satisfying. Designed for painting smooth and semi-smooth surfaces with emulsion paint, the Harris Ultimate Powercoat Roller Sleeve is made from microfibre. Not only does this deliver greater coverage, but it also ensures a smoother finish. Equally beneficial is the fact that the microfibre also minimises splatter. This makes decorating with a Harris Ultimate Powercoat Roller Sleeve a far better experience. The microfibre sleeve is not the only benefit of the Harris Ultimate Powercoat Roller. The roller frame has an extra-long handle giving you greater reach with a comfortable grip, so that you can paint for longer. The combination of the handle design and the quality of the sleeve gives you the greater coverage – meaning faster painting and an exceptional finish on your walls and ceilings. When you consider that 95 per cent of the finish on a wall painted with a roller is down to the quality of the roller frame and sleeve, as opposed to the paint, then it really is worth giving the new Harris Ultimate Powercoat Roller Frame and Sleeve a try. With Harris’s new website full of hints, tips and ‘how-to’ videos, the DIY decorator can access the best in help and advice for all decorating needs.


01527 575441 www.harrisbrushes.com



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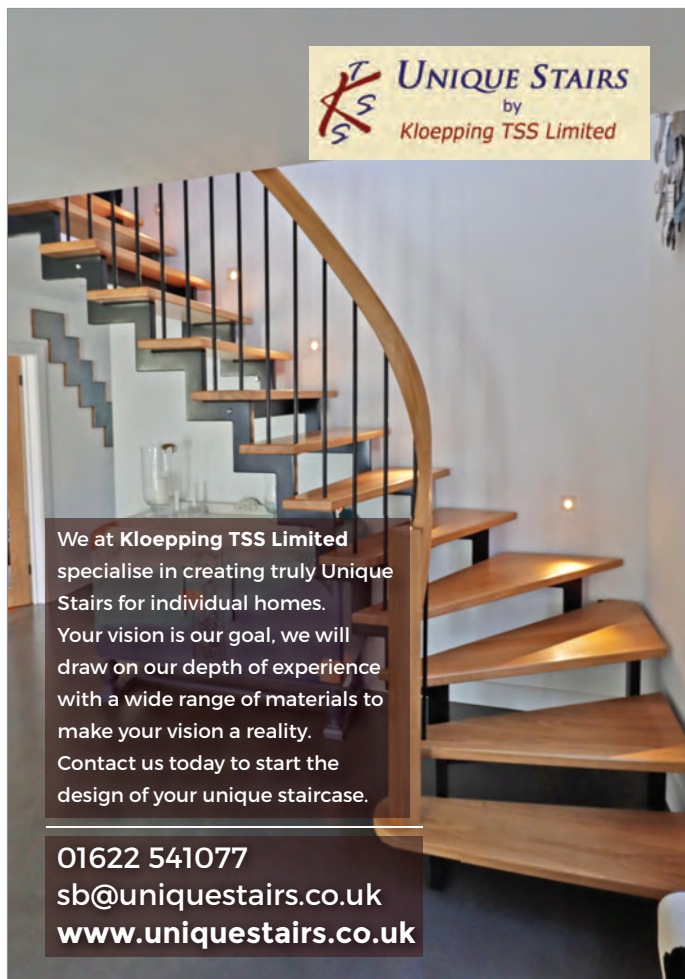
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Design, supply and installation for all projects are managed from their office in Maidstone, Kent to maintain the highest quality. Visit the new Unique Stairs website from Klopping TSS Limited to be inspired by recently completed projects and read about customer experiences.

www.uniquestairs.co.uk

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companies. Selfbuilder & Homemaker also offers monthly updates with the Editor's Choice newsletter, sharing content curated by the editorial team and newsletter, offering news on products, services and events.

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Go green with Drainage Superstore



We still might not be able to go far this year but thanks to **Drainage Superstore's** new range of landscaping products, you can go green and make the most of your outdoor spaces! The popular online builder's merchant has expanded its product offering to include everything from sheds and fencing to artificial grass and paving, plus plenty of other landscaping solutions to help improve and update external areas. Suitable for both trade and DIY jobs, customers can choose from a variety of big

brand names including Shire GB Sheds, Kärcher Pressure Washers, Border Top Soil and many more, with reliable deliveries straight to your door. It will also be updating the help and advice section of its website.

01752 692 221 www.drainagesuperstore.co.uk

Garden rooms made beautiful with Norbord



With more and more people working and studying at home, the need for extra space has grown enormously. This is good news for companies like H M Garden Rooms in Buckinghamshire. Using quality materials, they produce a range of built-to-last, aesthetically-pleasing garden buildings that their clients have put to a multitude of uses. One of the top-quality materials the company relies on for these structures is **Norbord's** SterlingOSB Zero. H M Garden Rooms Director Jordan Hickson explains:

"SterlingOSB Zero is easier to use and lighter but just as strong as plywood. It throws up no challenges so we are able to get the job done with no fuss. It's also cheaper than ply and readily available so it ticks a lot of boxes".

www.norbord.co.uk



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Small is beautiful

With an increasing value being placed on outdoor spaces, Ronan O'Dowd of Acheson & Glover shares his top tips on how to make the most of a small garden



The Covid-19 pandemic brought a new appreciation for our outdoor space, as we sought solace in getting outside and enjoying our gardens. They were no longer the lonely location of a sporadic BBQ on those rare sightings of sun but instead, with travel restricted, they became our own private sanctuary.

Small gardens have their own advantages; they are low-maintenance and also provide great opportunities to be creative, with even the smallest additions having a dramatic effect. They can be daunting, but with the right design and applying some tips and tricks, it doesn't have to be limiting. Whether you have a petite patio, tiny terrace or a small garden, you can transform the tiniest plot into the ultimate outdoor retreat.

The first thing to do is think about what you need from your garden and then how you can include those elements. Do you want to create a space for sitting outside on sunny days? Or perhaps you would like to use it to become more self-sufficient with vegetable plots and lots of plants, or your aim may be to have your city plot looking like a country garden. Once you have an idea of what you want from your garden you can then start to plan.

LEVEL UP

Shine a spotlight on your garden with the addition of levels to add perspective. Adding a sunken area or ledges will open up the space and give you extra room. You can also create extra surface area for pots by putting up some shelves – giving more room at ground level. Be mindful of

Use vertical wall space to create a living wall, allowing even the smallest of spaces to flourish

the weight though as not all fences will be able to hold them – we recommend mounting shelves onto brick where possible. Adding a mirror panel is a great way to add light into a garden and will also give the illusion of space.



IMPACTFUL PAVING

Introducing hardscape elements is a practical way to increase space. Adding curves and circles as well as different laying patterns in a range of colours and heights will add depth, interest, and colour to your garden.

VERTICAL THINKING

Use vertical wall space to create a living wall, allowing even the smallest of spaces to flourish. Edible gardening has grown in popularity – irrespective of whether you find yourself in an urban enclave or a country garden so why not add some herbs to your wall as well as herbaceous perennials, grasses and small shrubs. Window pots are also great if you are short of space or you can try and grow your own vegetable patch, which not only looks great but can also be of practical

use for daily life. A wide range of brick and walling products can be used to complete the look.

LET THE LIGHT IN

Where possible, use reflective and light-coloured materials to make your outdoor space feel larger. This also applies to plants – light, bright colours will give the feeling of a bigger garden. We all know that white gives the illusion of space – so why not paint your brick wall white? If this isn't for you, another way to brighten up your garden is by using surfaces that reflect light such as sparkly granite or glass tables.

INTRODUCE TEXTURE

Like colour, texture is another great way to create the illusion of depth and distance. If you have a shallow, sloping garden, position fine leaves in the background and coarse ones in front, this gives the impression that the space is deeper than it is.

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND SYMMETRICAL

If you like to keep things organised, then draw inspiration from formal gardens and design a classic layout with a central point and symmetrical borders, creating a space that feels elegant and

spacious. You could also give a new look to a border with tidy edging such as our bullnose kerb setts to retain your planting.

CONSIDER LIGHTING

No matter what our best intentions are, sometimes the unpredictable weather prohibits us from getting the most out of the garden. Considering the lighting of your garden will ensure a great view from the inside – even on those cold, dark, winter nights! Try and ensure the lighting is sharp to highlight plants and create shadows as well as adding depth to your garden.

FOCAL POINTS

Small gardens don't always have room for large sculptures, but you can still create focal points. A small water feature offset by large stones and rocks makes for an addition to your garden.

A small garden doesn't mean you have to curb your ambitions. No matter what size of outdoor space you have, it is possible to grow a wide range of plants and create a charming outdoor space that you can enjoy throughout the year.

Ronan O'Dowd is landscape designer at Acheson & Glover

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