

# selfbuilder + homemaker

MAR/APR 2022

## A JUGGLING ACT ON THE ISLE OF MULL

Although an experienced architect, Jane Burnside had her work cut out project managing, interior designing, and even catering her build on the Isle of Mull!

## Covering green goals

Julian Thurbin of Wallbarn on what you need to know when it comes to creating a green roof

## Show Preview: Grand Designs Live

Get face to face with the industry after the pandemic, at this spring's big self-build event in London

# *A glimpse of the future*

Wanting to downsize for her retirement, the owner of a historic listed farmhouse realised the solution was in her own back garden. Tom Boddy reports on a striking rural refurbishment



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# FROM THE EDITOR...

Hi and welcome to your March/April edition of *Selfbuilder + Homemaker*.

The sun is shining, and despite the worrying developments in Ukraine, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic closer to home. With everyone trying to reduce carbon emissions towards our national 'net zero' goals, self-builders are in a fantastic position to make a huge difference.

From heat pumps and PVs to thermal mass, Passivhaus and triple-glazing, many self-builders have already shown the way forward when it comes to using their design as a means to reduce not only their carbon emissions, but also their household bills.

And even better, some eco-homes can even function as 'mini-power stations,' constructed with such a high performance building fabric and spec that they can actually export electricity back to the grid. The outlay may be slightly higher on such 'carbon positive' homes, but the long-term payback, for owners and the planet, is infinitely more.

This is part of the reason why we decided to do some reader research to discover your eco aspirations, and your experience so far, when it comes to creating a home which could dramatically reduce your environmental impact, and your cost of living. Check your inbox for an email asking you to participate in our survey, or go to page 49 to find a QR code which you can scan with your phone to take you direct to it. It won't take long to complete, and you could even win a £250 Amazon voucher (maybe towards some extra eco-tech for your build)?

The survey will be completely anonymous, but will be a really important insight into what your current hopes, challenges and issues are, when it comes to building homes that will be more sustainable for you, and our global environment. We hope you will be keen to participate in this study!

**JAMES PARKER**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

**SOUTHWEST HOME & GARDEN SHOW**

9 - 10 APRIL, EXETER

[www.southwesthomeshow.co.uk](http://www.southwesthomeshow.co.uk)**GRAND DESIGNS LIVE**

30 APRIL - 8 MAY, LONDON

[www.granddesignslive.com](http://www.granddesignslive.com)**FURNITURE SHOW**

24 - 27 APRIL, BIRMINGHAM

[www.januaryfurnitureshow.com](http://www.januaryfurnitureshow.com)**SELFBUILD LIVE**

7 - 8 MAY, CORK

[www.live.selfbuild.ie/cork22](http://www.live.selfbuild.ie/cork22)**ON THE COVER...**

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# Growing green aspirations

For growing numbers of self-builders, green roofs are the right choice for topping off a home. But what are the key practicalities that you need to consider – and are they suitable for all projects? Julian Thurbin of Wallbarn has the answers

## WHY INSTALL A GREEN ROOF?

Many self-builders love the individualism, look, and eco-benefits of green roofs. As well as being an increasingly vital habitat for insects and birds, they have many positive environmental impacts, including managing heavy rainfall by prolonging the time between rain falling and entering the drainage system, improving air quality, reducing the Urban Heat Island effect in towns and cities and offering sound and thermal insulation benefits.

## WHAT ARE THE BASICS TO CONSIDER?

There are two primary considerations – is your roof pitch suitable, and can your

home (or the building taking the green roof, for example an extension, garden room or leisure suite) support its weight?

In terms of roof pitch, most green roofs are installed on flat roofs (generally a maximum pitch of around 15°), allowing the use of a traditional 'roll-out' system or newer 'modular' approach. That said, they can be installed on more complex projects (for example convex roofs) or pitches of more than 15°, but this does generally limit system choice to 'roll-out' only.

When it comes to load bearing requirements, a structural engineer should be consulted to ensure the structure can support the weight of a green roof, which may weigh up to 100 kg/m<sup>2</sup> when satu-

rated. For new-build projects or extensions, the required structural integrity can be 'designed-in.'

Once you've established viability, the next decision is choosing between a roll-out green roof system and a modular solution.

## ROLL-OUT VS MODULAR - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Until a few years ago, roll-out (or carpet systems) were the established method for laying a green roof. This approach entails installing each element individually – drainage layer, root barrier, substrate and sedum plants. For large roofs, or those with different depths or a pitch higher than around 15°, this traditional method remains popular.

Modular systems are a newer development, combining all elements of a green roof, including plants, in pre-prepared trays or cassettes that lock together during installation. They are essentially an established green roof in a box, delivering an 'instant' result quickly and cleanly, and removing potential for error. They also allow access to the roof deck post installation – by lifting out trays as required, which can then be returned into position.

## CAN I DESIGN AS WELL AS INSTALL A GREEN ROOF?

Modular green roofs lend themselves to design and installation by competent self-builders, and system manufacturers should be able to assist with questions and provide technical support. The basic build-up is a geotextile fabric laid onto the waterproofed roof, followed by the green roof cassettes which are clicked into place on top. Cassettes can be cut to fit the space precisely and roof edges finished with aluminium edging and pebbling (see below paragraphs).

If a roll-out solution has been chosen we'd advise engaging specialists to carry out the work from specification to installation.

## ARE THERE ANY TECHNICAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER?

Fire regulations require a hard border between vegetation and walls, and around features such as rooflights for all green roofs. This is often achieved using an aesthetically pleasing pebble border.

The fire performance of green roofs is also being discussed more frequently; leading manufacturers to offer systems with industry fire classification B Roof (T4) EXAP – from physical independent

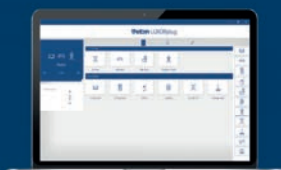




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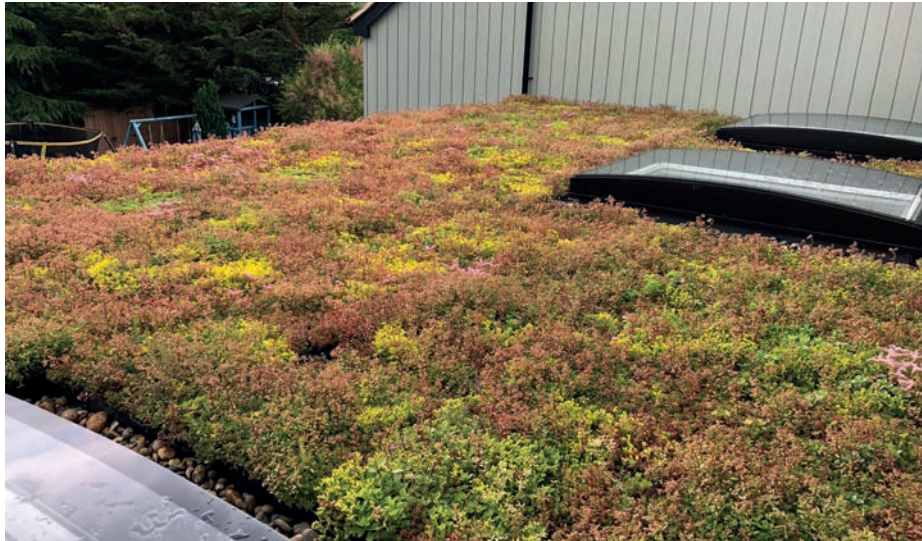
[www.wallbarn.com](http://www.wallbarn.com)

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**achieves fire classification rating B ROOF (t4)**







testing to CEN/TS1187:2012 (Test 4) and CEN/TS 16459:2019 (Test methods for external fire exposure to roofs). Look out for a classification of no fire penetration of the green roof system in a one hour physical fire test and ask for certificates.

### WHAT IS SUBSTRATE?

This means the material the plants grow in; its composition and depth varies from system to system and can heavily impact the roof's long-term performance. The GRO Green Roof Code ([www.green-rooforganisation.org](http://www.green-rooforganisation.org)) lays out recommended minimum depths for different systems, starting from 60 mm. We think that 100 mm is the ideal depth for a modular green roof, allowing optimum space for healthy roots. The Green Roof Code also discusses the content of substrates and advises that they should comply with BS8616:2019 Specification for performance parameters and test methods for green roof substrates. An

independent laboratory test showing that the substrate complies with BS8616 should be provided by the roof supplier.

### WHAT PLANTS CAN I HAVE ON A GREEN ROOF?

Traditionally sedum plants have been the go-to for green roof manufacturers, because these super hardy succulents are drought-tolerant and more than capable of thriving in harsh weather conditions. They form a year-round carpet of greenery with spring/summer flowers and (brilliantly) absorb carbon dioxide.

For self-builders and home renovators wanting something more unusual, there's the option of native British wildflower mixes, which deliver a more natural finish with greater seasonal variation in appearance. There's a growing trend for this style of green roof, with some manufacturers reporting that their wildflower mixes are now outselling pure sedum systems. The best systems offer a mix of wildflowers and sedum to ensure all-year greenery.

### CAN I ORDER MY GREEN ROOF IN ADVANCE?

Yes if you are installing a modular system, probably not if it's a roll-out solution. Modular systems, because they come

*Traditionally sedum has been the go-to for roof suppliers because these super hardy succulents are drought-tolerant and more than capable of thriving in harsh weather conditions*

completely self-contained within trays can, if necessary, be unpacked and left on the ground until required. Elements of a roll-out system can be stored but the sedum layer must be unfurled within 24 hours of delivery to ensure healthy plants. For this reason, it is also important to consider the time spent in transit of your green roof, modular or roll-out. If left too long on transport crates – we advise a maximum of 48 hours – enzymes begin to break down the plants.

### DO I HAVE TO LOOK AFTER MY GREEN ROOF?

Green roofs are low maintenance but not no maintenance. The plants will tolerate extreme conditions (Some green roofs are over 75 years old, and thrive worldwide in a wide variety of climatic conditions) but you should expect to carry out twice yearly maintenance, including applying a slow release fertiliser for best year-round results. In extremely dry conditions it may be necessary to water the roof – or fit a simple irrigation system as part of the overall installation.

*Julian Thurbin is managing director at Wallbarn*







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# VERSATILE UNDERFOOT

Choosing tiled flooring can have major design benefits, but there are decisions to get right. Here Jo Oliver of Stone & Ceramic Warehouse provides the robust case for porcelain

**F**looring serves as the foundation for your interior design and can ultimately impact its overall success. It is likely to be the largest surface area in a property and so its selection is important in terms of both functionality and design. There are hundreds of hard flooring materials available in a wide choice of finishes – each with their own aesthetic qualities.

Porcelain tiles are manufactured in a wide range of realistic finishes, including marble, natural limestone, wood and concrete. They are also available in a variety of sizes; from traditional wooden planks to contemporary large-format slab tiles, they offer homeowners huge

scope in terms of interior design. Thanks to advances in technology, digital printing has allowed porcelain tiles to be produced with a 'natural' variation from tile to tile making it possible to achieve the look you want with all the practical benefits of a hard-wearing material.

Laying the same style of flooring throughout a property will make the overall space appear much larger while creating a well-designed cohesive feel. Different finishes can also be selected to help define different areas. For example, a stone effect porcelain works beautifully from an entrance hall leading into a kitchen and dining area, and can be easily combined with another finish




such as a wood effect in a living room. This will create clearly defined areas that work in unison with one another.

## TILE TYPES

Wood effect porcelain floor tiles create a warm and welcoming feel and are suitable for both contemporary and traditional-style properties. We find that customers looking for wood effect tiles tend to choose warmer more realistic looking shades, rather than the cooler greys. This means they can achieve the look of real wood but with the practical scratch and stain proof benefits of porcelain. Wider and long planks are a popular choice as they make a room feel very spacious, for example long planks all laid pointing towards bi-fold doors will lead the eye outside and accentuate the room size. Alternatively, if laid across a narrow room they will make it feel wider, rather than long and thin. Herringbone





*Laying the same flooring throughout will make the overall space appear much larger while creating a cohesive feel*

and chevron tiles are on trend currently, and can be a great alternative to a patterned tile floor.

Large format porcelain slab tiles can achieve a practical and sleek look. Using oversized tiles in a small room or an open plan space tricks the eye into thinking that the area is much bigger than it really is, so can help to create a sense of scale. Thanks to their large surface area and fewer grout lines, using large-format tiles also results in a continuous, uninterrupted finish – a look that is proving very popular with homeowners. In a bathroom, choosing light coloured tiles such as a marble or pale stone effect will create a high-end look while enhancing the feeling of space as they reflect more light than darker colours.

Porcelain slabs have proved a popular choice for floors and walls over the last few years and we have seen an increasing number of clients using

porcelain to create a seamless look in their kitchens and bathrooms. Using the same tiles on the walls, floor and even countertop will make the room appear much larger. It is also worth noting that the 12 mm & 20 mm porcelain need not be limited to kitchen worktops – it can also be used to great effect on tabletops, bathroom vanity units, and bath surrounds.

Pattered floor tiles are perfect for making a design statement, and choosing the right colour, pattern and style of floor tile for your space is important when making your selection. Traditional designs often feature muted tones with classic patterns that can create a nostalgic, vintage style feel. For more modern spaces, there are many contemporary designs available ranging from simple monochrome patterns to more eye-catching, colourful options. The key to pulling off this look

is to let the tiles be the focus of the room. We'd recommend furnishing the rest of the space with complementary pieces and lighting to create a look that is full of character and artistic flair.

Often only thought of as internal tiles, porcelain can be used outside too. Bringing the outside in creates a feeling of space and works from a functional viewpoint for summer entertaining. Tiles are a great way to achieve a seamless link between the two spaces; laying a continuous floor that flows from the home into the garden will make the whole area feel much larger, even when the doors are closed. Porcelain floor tiles and pavers are ideal for this. Not only are they easy to maintain, but they are also very hard wearing and don't stain.

Jo Oliver is director at Stone & Ceramic Warehouse





# EXTERIOR INSPIRATION: GARDENS

The exterior of your home is arguably just as important as the interior; the design needs to relate to the building as well as the wider landscape. Here we round up some of the latest outdoor products to influence your ideas

**1. Cox & Cox's Woven Rope Corner Dining Set** features a lattice weave of PE rope which, as well as being natural looking, is enviably weather proof and long lasting. As well as the corner sofa, this versatile set includes an armchair, a bench and a table. Priced at £3495. [www.coxandcox.co.uk](http://www.coxandcox.co.uk)

**2. The Classic Fire Pit** by FirepitsUK is designed for both gathering around and cooking over. Inspired by the tripod design, it is hand-forged and a brilliant value all-rounder. The 50-90 cm fire pits are made from 3 mm British steel. Priced at £179. [www.firepitsuk.co.uk](http://www.firepitsuk.co.uk)

**3. Go Modern Furniture's versatile Contardi Freedom Lamp** is suitable for indoor or outdoor use, as there is an electric or a battery operated version available. The diffuser is made of fibre-glass and is ivory in colour, which gives a lovely soft glow. Priced at £680. [www.gomodern.co.uk](http://www.gomodern.co.uk)





4. New this season, this **Rattan Garden Corner Sofa** by **Gardenesque** is perfect for large families or for those who love to entertain and show off their outdoor space. Complete with padded light grey cushions and an elevated glass top coffee table for snacks and nibbles, this garden corner sofa is practical, comfortable and stylish. Priced at £3999. [www.gardenesque.com](http://www.gardenesque.com)

5. **Haddonstone** has introduced the new **Box Planter range** to its collection. This contemporary design is available in three sizes and is manufactured in Haddonstone's TecLite material to ensure stone thickness, and weight is kept to a minimum. All designs are available in Haddonstone's standard colours at no extra cost. Priced at £80. [www.haddonstone.com](http://www.haddonstone.com)

6. These **Minster Rustic Slate Effect Slab Tiles** by **Walls and Floors** bring a touch of beauty to your outdoor space. Much like real slate, they emulate the multiple face variation with rich browns, greys and russet flecks working with a rustic matt finish. Price: £47.95 per sqm. [www.wallsandfloors.co.uk](http://www.wallsandfloors.co.uk)





# JANE OF ALL TRADES

As an architect, Jane Burnside has created many stunning contemporary homes. However, also taking on the role of project manager and interior designer – and even cook – on her own self-build on the Isle of Mull required a whole new skillset

TEXT NIK HUNTER IMAGES DANIEL WILCOX PHOTOGRAPHY



## HIGH POINT

"When the builders asked me to come over to the site one Sunday, I was surprised. I entered the living room and there was a great big telescope set up. They said 'we saw you looking on Gumtree for a telescope, so we ordered one for you as a house-warming present.' I was so touched, and every time I look through it, I think of the great times I had with the amazing team who made this house, Chip, George and Constantine."

Childhood sailing trips up Scotland's west coast had instilled a love of the Isle of Mull in Jane Burnside. So, when she and her husband David Page came across a property for sale on the island in 2014, they jumped at the chance to buy.

Both award-winning architects and experts in their field, Jane hails from Northern Ireland where she has her own practice, Jane Burnside Architects and David is an artist and founder member of Page\Park Architects in Glasgow.

When the couple happened across the two-storey property in Tobermory on Mull, it had already seen some renovation, as Jane recalls: "The building had been split into flats in the 50s, but the previous owners had managed to purchase both flats and had restored it back to one property. As the previous owner was also a haulier, he had built an enormous, two-storey shed in the back yard which offered some potential too."

For five years, The Art House – as they named it – was the couple's well-loved home but in

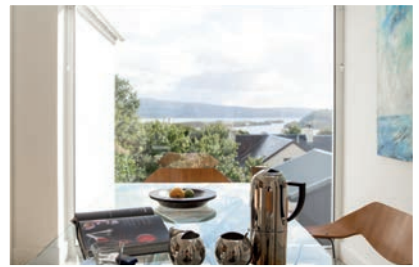
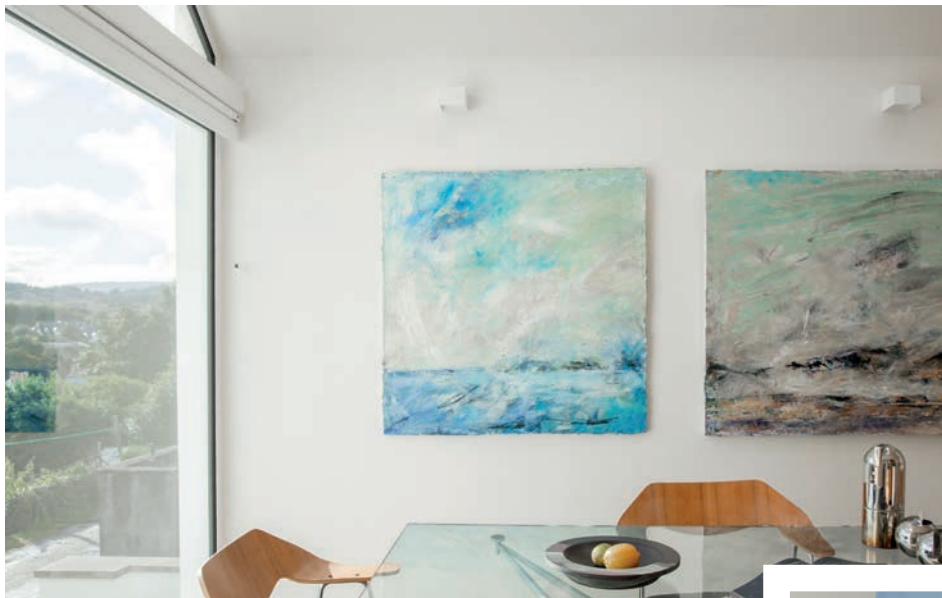
*"I prefer heavyweight construction with double-skin blockwork walls, which gives the property tremendous air-tightness"*

2019, they turned it into a holiday let and moved in, after managing to realise the site's full potential.









"We had been looking for a plot to build on in Tobermory which is almost impossible in the middle of a conservation area except that we had a huge two-storey shed in our garden." Hoping to develop what was classified as a brownfield site, Jane applied for planning permission to build a bold, contemporary, two storey home. "I had written a book, *Contemporary Design Secrets*, about how to design contemporary houses in both landscape and conservation settings. I showed the planners the kind of work I did, and they were very supportive."

Also in Jane's favour was another small, modern intervention which had been built at the end of the lane and the planners agreed that they would complement each other. So much so, that Jane's permission came through in six weeks.

Jane and David's wish list was straightforward – the main living space and bedroom upstairs to take advantage of the views, a light-filled studio space for both of them downstairs, outside living space upstairs, and a small garden.

#### DESIGN APPROACH

Building in a conservation area, Jane was keen to minimise the impact the build would have on its surroundings. "Tobermory has many buildings

with big stone gables and large chimneys. The Art House has these, and we wanted to reflect that in Origami Studio [the new house] by building a solid masonry gable to face onto the lane." Another obvious solution to help the building blend in was to retain the walls of the old shed to use as a boundary wall. "We cut them down into a stepping shape that broke down the mass of the existing walls. It got rid of any overlooking issues and gave the neighbours privacy."

Jane explains how she applied the same principle inside: "There's a lot of glazing, but we made sure we had strategically placed solid walls, so we weren't looking onto other people's gardens."

When it came to the actual structure, Jane perhaps surprisingly did not opt for a timber frame. "I think it's the wrong thing to do in a country that's so wet. Also, with houses that have a lot of large, glazed areas if it's a lightweight building there's nowhere for the heat to go. I prefer heavyweight construction with double-skin blockwork walls which are plastered which gives tremendous air-tightness. When the temperature rises inside you have concrete walls and floors which absorb that excess heat, and it takes out the peaks and troughs creating an even temperature."





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It's Jane's tried and tested method, and she hasn't been persuaded by timber frame yet. "There's not much of a saving in time as you have to allow such a long lead-in to order a timber frame kit and then get it delivered and erected – it works out about the same."

Jane's choice was for an 80 mm steel frame hidden within the double-skin blockwork walls. "It's a tiny, skinny steel frame and that sets out all the angles. It's all designed on a computer cutting machine, it's like a Meccano set – digital perfection." Building off the existing concrete slab from the original haulage yard slab, no new foundations were required just some adjustments in the steel frame so that each leg of the steel was slightly longer to account for the slope on the slab.

#### THE BUILD

The steel came from Smyth Steel in Northern Ireland who also provided the steelwork for Tottenham Hotspur's stadium. "The only problem was that we discovered on the last day of erection that the longest ridge beam was missing. I think it didn't fit into the galvanising tank with the other pieces. However, within 24 hours of realising it was missing it arrived in Tobermory, the company were incredible."

The glazing was also sourced from Ireland with glass from the Republic of Ireland and the alu-

***“Moving from being an architect to a project manager I now appreciate when a contractor says to me there’s been a delay on something”***

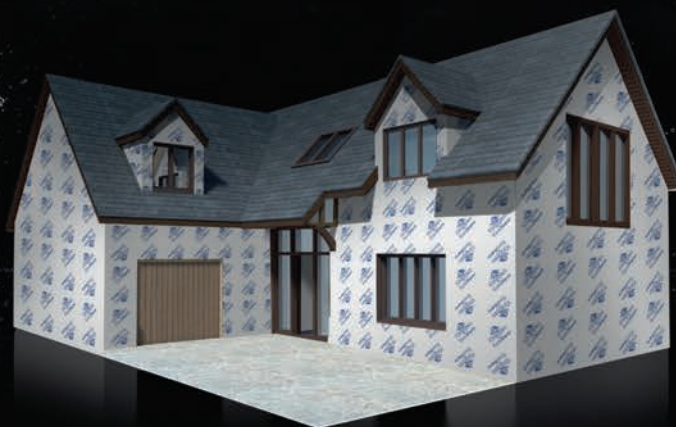
minium framing from Northern Ireland. "It was cheaper to get it all done there and for them to come over and fit it than to use a Scottish company. We hired a manitou from a local haulier to lift it into place. I had a lot of tradesmen for dinner that night! It kept me fit as I was constantly running up and down to the shop for more food, which is at the bottom of the second steepest street in Scotland!"

This is where another of Jane's roles came into play – chief cook! Her team of tradesmen stayed in The Art House during the build, and

#### LOW POINT

"I paid a deposit for a specific insulation, which you blow into the cavities after everything is complete. When I called the company to confirm the installation date there was no answer; they'd gone to the wall. Over the next two days I rang over 60 companies around the UK to find a replacement supplier. My builder even offered to go on a course to fit it."

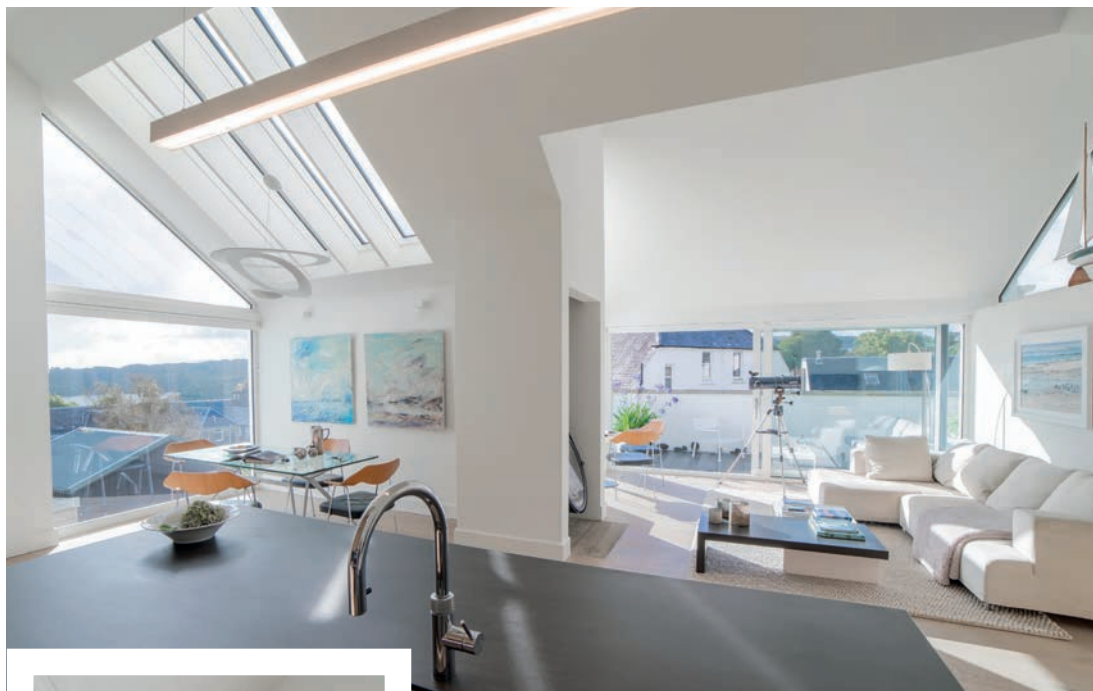




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she cooked dinner for them every night. "It was a small team, and we did the build in three, two-month blocks. The guys would work for two months, go off island for two months and then back for another two and so on."

In actual building time, the project took 6 months, but in real time it was 10 months. For Jane it was the ideal solution as it gave her time to plan, order materials and keep her business going. "It also worked with settling and drying out time. I'm an architect. I don't usually worry about ordering materials or have to deal with shortages and delays, that's usually someone else's problem but in this instance, it was mine!"

## CHALLENGES

Fortunately, there was only one real hold up. "We needed a specific weight of Spanish slate, and a particular setting out for the nail holes, as we're in a high wind area. We had to special order them from Spain and they took forever to come."

As well as the wind, the building needed to stand up to the rain. "You have to take account of the climate here – horizontal rain, 60 mph driving wind. I call them submarine days; it's just like being underwater and you can't stick your

head out." Fortunately, Jane found a product – Illbruck Tape – to keep her building watertight. "It's like a strip of wetsuit material which you glue onto the window frame and then glues onto the masonry walls and plaster it in so you can't actually see it. We've been here two years and not a leak."

Other problems that were posed by island building were things that Jane completely took for granted on the mainland. "Bringing a crane onto the island for a day would have been prohibitively expensive so instead of the big precast flooring unit I usually use, we had to use concrete T-beams and blocks that could be lifted and laid by hand – albeit many hands." There was no concrete pump on the island either and the screeds were mixed onsite by hand, loaded into metal buckets and raised to the first floor using a pulley system. The screeds were then levelled by hand, the old fashioned way. "The heavyweight floors were an important part of the build not only for thermal mass and sound-proofing between floors, but their weight loaded onto the steel frame makes the whole structure stronger."

There was another challenge when it came to the blown-in insulation; the supplier went bust,

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and Jane had to quickly find a replacement. "My neighbour in Ireland remembered he had it done and looked out his contact." The company in Ireland phoned their contact in Glasgow who rang her, "and he arranged to do the job exactly when I needed it." She was "pretty much ready to pay anything" at this point, but he asked how much deposit I had lost, what was the total cost and then asked for the difference. "I couldn't believe it. The kindness of people is just staggering sometimes. They came when they said they would, and I have never been so relieved to see a lorry turn up."

## INTERIORS

Once the dirty work was finally complete, Jane's phase as an interior designer began. "You have to be careful with an open plan living space as you don't want it to look like you have a kitchen in the corner." Working with a supplier she'd

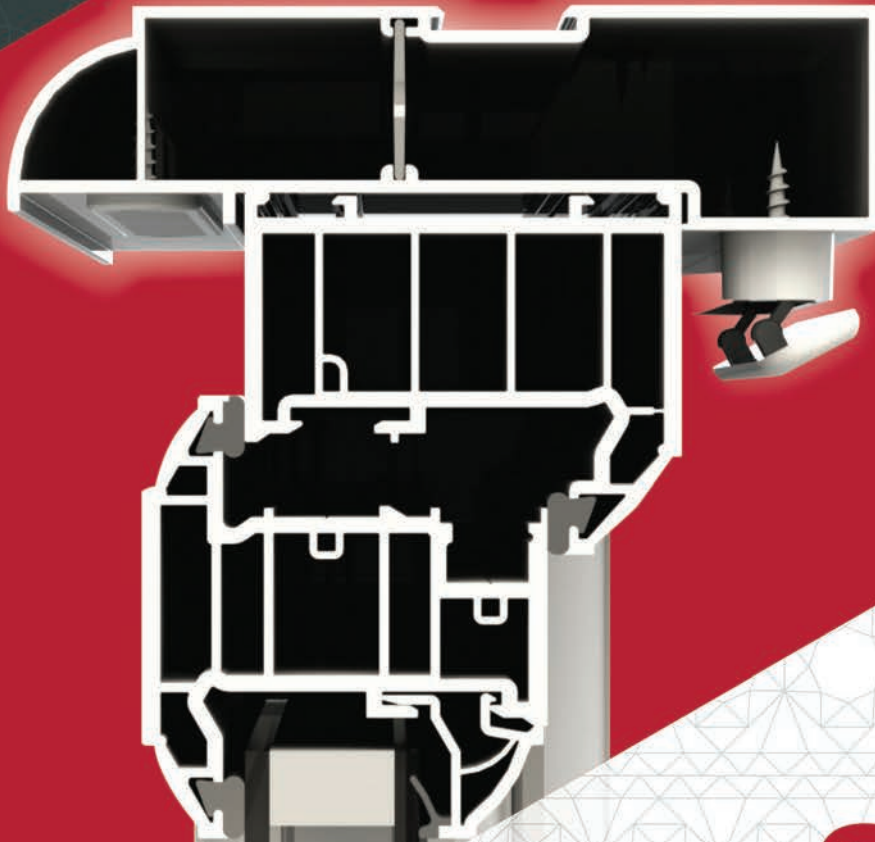
previously used in Northern Ireland Jane chose to go part bespoke and part off the shelf.

"I asked them what was new? The concrete effect on the doors and island was a new feature which I really liked and it worked with the black composite work surfaces."

The concrete finish also complements the fire surround, something that Jane designed with her builders. Made from leftover flooring, Jane took some back to Ireland and had it sandblasted to expose the grain. It was then made into shuttering and backfilled with concrete. "When we took the boards off we were left with the lines of the sandblasted boarding. It's a great effect and we did the same for the hearth. It really sets off the stove which I love. It looks like a big ladle, but it's called The Rocal Drop."

Adjacent to the open plan living/kitchen/dining space is the couple's bedroom which surprisingly isn't as large as one would expect. "My





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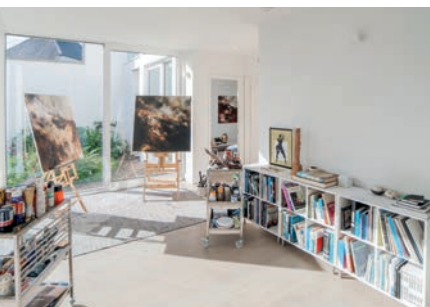
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family used to sail, and I was used to sleeping in very compact little cabins – everything stowed away, and nothing left out. That's the look I wanted to recreate. I put the timber up the walls, there's a small cabin-like window which overlooks the church and a compact wood burner which we've never even lit; the house is too warm."

The bedroom is reached by a large sliding door, an idea that first surfaced in The Art House. "The doors are two MDF doors sandwiched together to get the right width and being MDF they won't warp. The ironmongery came from Hafele Sliding Gear."

Another nod to family life on the waves is the rope handrail on the staircase. "I think metal ones are too office-like. I used a company called Rope & Splice for The Art House and they were really helpful, so I went back to them, and they helped me design and measure what I needed. It arrives in a box, and you simply screw it into the wall."

Throughout this project Jane has had her eye on every minute detail but how did she honestly

find the experience of tackling several diverse roles on her build? She says that it helped her have a better idea of the 'big picture': "Moving from being an architect to a project manager, I now appreciate when a contractor says to me there's been a delay on something. You see everything more in the round, and that was good, but you also realise how much you don't know."

Jane adds: "I can design a window head, but I rely on the builder to properly fit the damp proof courses and extend them the right distance into the wall cavity. When you have someone asking you that question you need to do your research to give them the right answer. I'm a huge fan of YouTube!"

Jane concludes: "Building your own house is an apprenticeship in everything and I would recommend every architect to do it at some point and the earlier in their career the better. The whole process has been, I imagine, a bit like skydiving – I found it thrilling when I was in the middle of it, but would I really want to do it again?" ■





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# A grand affair



Selfbuilder + Homemaker have teamed up with Grand Designs Live to offer our readers 2 for 1 tickets to this year's event, which is taking place at ExCel in London from 30 April to 8 May

This year's Grand Designs Live in London is set to include exciting new exhibitors and features, which will join the long-running favourites that have made it popular with the many thousands of visitors who have walked through the doors during the event's 17-year history. Whether you want to build or renovate your own home or simply redecorate a room, you will find plenty of brilliant ideas and inspiration at Grand Designs Live.

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CASE STUDY

# SAVING FOR RETIREMENT

Outbuildings on the site of a historic farmhouse in rural Hampshire have been cleverly transformed into a 'later living' home, by an owner who was keen to downsize, in a project that triumphed over Covid

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES ALAN WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY











When the owner of a part-17<sup>th</sup> century, part Georgian Grade II Listed building decided it was time to downsize, it came as something of a surprise when she realised the solution was right under her nose the whole time – in her own back garden. Having lived in the farmhouse for the last 40 years, Caroline Abbate had realised that she needed to downsize, and find a more suitable home to meet her changing needs.

Her large, historic home, Northend House, was originally designed as a small farmhouse in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Over the centuries, different sections of the building have been extended, and more recently, a larger, grander Georgian frontage facing the main route through the village was added.

Despite her love for her home, it had become “too big, and unmanageable,” says Caroline, adding: “The house required a lot of upkeep, and needed younger owners with the energy to modernise it.”

When it came to searching for her ‘later living home’, staying in the local area was a top priority. Having been settled in the village for four decades, and with a network of friends nearby, she had no intention of moving to another area.

#### DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

Caroline’s key requirements, when it came to the actual design and layout, were “somewhere small but not too overlooked by neighbours,

characterful but not requiring too much maintenance, and a good-sized garden.” It was also vital that everything was accessible on one level. Aesthetically, she wanted “a place that was warm and filled with natural light.”

But with this fairly demanding brief, and the fact the village didn’t offer much choice of available property, her options were limited. After two years of unsuccessful searching, Caroline’s son-in-law, an architect at London practice Emrys Architects, suggested that she consider something even closer to home.

Neighbouring the farmhouse were two old outbuildings. Originally designed as cowsheds, the structures had more recently been used as horse stables and a woodshed. “My son-in-law explained that there may be a possibility of carving a suitable home from the simple outbuildings on site,” says Caroline.

At first Caroline was sceptical, wondering whether these old buildings which had sat in her garden for so long could be turned into her next home. Her initial feelings were that it would be “far too small and cramped.” However, after drawing up a couple of designs, the architects convinced Caroline of its potential, and eventually, she got on board. “The solution was right there this whole time, and it was also going to cost considerably less!” says Caroline.

If they were going to pursue the idea of converting the existing outbuildings however, Caroline was determined that a new structure

#### HIGH POINT

“The realisation that the outbuildings that I couldn’t envisage being appealing as a home were actually being transformed into something highly desirable.”





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wouldn't compromise the traditional aesthetic: "It was important that a new home looked in keeping with the existing."

Emrys' proposal was essentially to divide the site and create a separate home by refurbishing the outbuildings. To minimise the impact the dividing wall would have on the historic farmhouse, the plan was to build it with traditional methods by local masons using flint, repurposed bricks and natural lime mortar.

Even though she was looking to downsize, Caroline is still an avid gardener, and having a home that provided easy access to a garden was imperative during the design phase.

"It was important to me to keep a good section of the garden that I have worked on for so many years, and to be able to look over it from the house."

She adds: "I also wanted to have good light coming into the house and a view of the south facing garden so it made sense to try and include a large amount of glazing."

#### PLANNING & CONSTRUCTION

Caroline reports that it was a fairly straightforward process to get the design through planning. "The planners were very supportive of our ideas, and felt the contemporary elements worked well with the old buildings." One minor stipulation emerged when a neighbour had concerns about the original plot being divided, and the impact it may have on the listed build-

*"I had no idea how much design and construction would be needed to make something that looks so simple"*

ing. However, because of the team's well-devised designs, this was quickly resolved.

During construction, Caroline left her daughter and son-in-law in charge of project managing the build. Covid disrupted the project, with subcontractors initially being furloughed, and then "not having the capacity to complete the work when required," explains Caroline. Further delays occurred when materials such as plaster became difficult to obtain, causing a knock-on effect of the programme. "Some costs were higher than expected due to the pandemic. Fortunately, there were a couple of suppliers that were able to provide some of the packages – for example the glazing," explains Caroline.

Despite these challenges, the three

#### LOW POINT

"Covid made the process much more stressful as I wasn't able to visit showrooms so had to have all samples brought to me."





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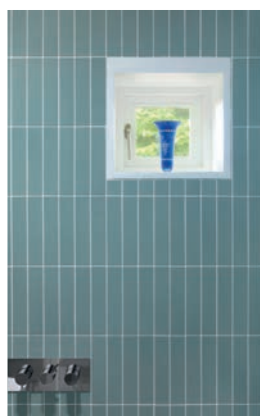
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principal construction workers carried on operations through the pandemic. Caroline says that although "it was difficult living right next to a building site, the builders were very considerate and supportive and were good company while I was isolating in lockdown." Construction started onsite in November 2019 and ran through until January 2021.

### DESIGN

When you think of a 'later living' home, many people would associate them with traditional notions of care homes, assuming a somewhat old fashioned look and feel. But Caroline's and Emrys architects' design boasts a blend of both old and new – combining traditional build methods with eco friendly features and modern elements.

Her home is comprised of both outbuildings – the stables and woodshed have been refurbished to form the majority of the house, with an extension having been added onto the stables facing out into the garden. This has created a 114 m<sup>2</sup>, two to three-bedroom home which has exceeded Caroline's expectations.

A unique feature, and one of the more contemporary aspects of the build, is the glass link which subtly links the two outbuildings together. "This was a clever solution to link the

two buildings with minimal interruption," says Caroline, with the original shape and design of the structures still being visible from the outside. Not only does it provide a passage from the main living area (the former stables) through to the guest bedroom and ensuite bathroom (in the former woodshed), but it also floods the home with natural light throughout the day.

In between the two outbuildings sits the courtyard, which houses the main entrance. "The courtyard is bisected by the glass link – this works well as plants behind the glass are visible from inside and outside – it is useful as a winter garden," explains Caroline. "The courtyard will eventually be more populated by foxgloves and other self-seeding plants that didn't survive the building works."

So the home sits comfortably next to the existing 17<sup>th</sup> century building, a lot of effort has gone into retaining as much of the original structures as possible.

A large proportion of the external fabric has been preserved. The roof of the stable block has been retained and insulated from the underside, while the woodshed's roof has been insulated on its exterior – allowing the retention of the internal roof joists and timber ties. The original stable doors have been renovated and used as external



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doors with new inner glazed doors inside. Where possible the team used traditional materials of flint, re-used bricks, and timber.

#### LAYOUT & INTERIOR DESIGN

To achieve an “easy to run” home, the interior layout has been kept simple and practical. As you walk in through the main door, the master bedroom is on the right, with easy access to the adjacent bathroom. Carrying on down the hallway you come to the utility/boot room with a back door that opens up into the garden.

To the left of the main entrance is the kitchen, which sits as the “heart of the house,” a compact, minimalist space that is “easy to clean and maintain.” The extension is off the kitchen, facing south and forming a dining/garden room with floor to ceiling double glazed windows providing a “full length view of the garden.”

This space creates an “intimate connection with the outside,” says Caroline.

A TV room/snug sits to the east flank, offering a place to relax while also doubling up as a third bedroom when required.

The interior design of her home, named Northend Stables, has references both modern and traditional. Upon entering, you are instantly impressed by the bright white interior that continues throughout the property. “I expected to use more colour but as the project progressed I didn’t feel the house needed much more as it has plenty of characterful features already – so it’s almost entirely painted white,” says Caroline.

The kitchen’s flooring is finished with limestone flagstones which carries on down the glazed link and into other parts of the home, beneath which is underfloor heating. The traditional elements such as antique furniture and recreated timber plank ceilings add a touch of warmth alongside



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*“Some costs were higher than expected due to the pandemic” – Caroline*

the bright white walls. The team were able to retain the existing ceiling timbers in the woodshed by adding insulation externally, and the ceiling in the garden room extension is also of exposed wood.

#### LONG LASTING

As well as reducing embodied carbon by preserving the existing structures, all of the stone and bricks found on the site were salvaged and reused. The building also has high levels of insulation: all of the new windows are double glazed while the internal walls and roofs have been fitted with 200 mm of insulation.

It was always Caroline's ambition to move away from an oil-fired heating system to a more environmentally friendly air source heat pump. It now provides heating and hot water, as well as serving the underfloor heating. "I now have a well-insulated home, which is

welcome after living in a draughty old listed house," says Caroline.

While Caroline has loved the self-build journey, she has been surprised by how much thought and planning goes into each little detail. "I had no idea how much work, both design and construction would go into something that looks so simple. It has been interesting seeing the bare stable walls coated in insulation, electric cables, plaster etc and it slowly turns into a home."

With the build complete, everything the team set out to achieve has been achieved. "I am very happy with the result – my house feels both spacious and cosy and I haven't had to move far. I particularly enjoy the view from the garden room."

Caroline does however conclude with a warning to other prospective self-builders that "it will probably take longer and cost more than you expected! ■



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the ticket in terms of green, speed and cost when considering essential board materials. In fact, MTW Research forecasts a rapid rise in timber frame buildings across the residential and commercial sectors in 2022.

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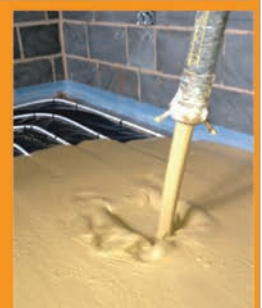


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# A MEETING OF MINDS

Bob and Carrie Forsyth had very different ideas about their 'forever' home until they set eyes on a dated 1950s 'fixer-upper' near Leeds, and decided to compromise, including with the planning department

TEXT HEATHER DIXON IMAGES BEVAN COCKERILL





**B**ob Forsyth was looking for a house with clean lines and big, open spaces. His wife Carrie, having grown up in a Victorian property, was looking for a place with history and character. That in itself was a big ask in the areas between Bradford and Leeds where properties of the size and scale they were looking for are in short supply. But there was an added condition: It had to be within a two-mile radius of Carrie's parents' home – ideally to the point where she might see their chimney pots from the upstairs windows!

"I'm really close to my mum and dad, so this was really important to me," says Carrie. "We looked at more than ten properties before we found one we both liked. It was just outside the radius, but it worked for us both. Well, almost."

First impressions were united. The sweeping drive-

way opened up to a spacious 1950s house set in the middle of a three-quarter acre private garden, flanked by mature trees and not overlooked by neighbouring properties. Over the years there had been two extensions – neither of them particularly complementing the original building – and the interior featured a jumble of disconnected rooms with relatively small windows that failed to take advantage of the beautiful garden.

"We both came away and said we wanted the house, but Bob had serious reservations about the amount of work that needed doing to it and what it might cost, while I was looking at its huge potential," says Carrie. "We were living in an old police cottage with two teenage daughters and wanted more space, but there was no option to develop it. The only way we could achieve more space was to move house and I knew this





one would work on so many levels."

The Forsyths offered the full asking price of £625,000, and contracts were exchanged in April 2018. To give the previous owner more time to find another place to live, they postponed moving in until February the following year, by which time they had already drawn up plenty of ideas for their new home. They had also approached West Yorkshire based architect James Butterworth, of Studio J Architects, to transform their wish-list into a workable, and inspirational, design.

#### DESIGN ASPIRATIONS & PLANNING CHALLENGES

High on their list was more light in the property, a better link between the house and garden, more ensuite bedrooms, and an improved room layout.

"A key part of the design was to replan the existing cramped and dated layout to one that worked for modern family living, with generously sized, light and airy rooms that connected to the garden," says James. "Although often seen as a secondary space, the new repositioned hall and stairs were paramount in making the project work." His interpretation got the thumbs up from Bob and Carrie.

"James came up with a design which we really liked and included an extension running the full width of the house at the back and an extension upstairs to create more bedrooms," says Bob. "The previous owner had gained planning permission for an extension which had expired, so she gave us the drawings and James took it from there."

But as soon as their design was submitted to Leeds City Council planning department, they hit a wall.

"The house is in a green belt area and the

***"We had budgeted around £200,000 but we had an inkling that it was going to be a lot more than we bargained for" – Carrie***

garden fence is right on the border between Leeds City Council and Bradford Council," says Bob. "It was incredibly frustrating because Bradford is very open to development in green belt areas while Leeds were much less flexible. We went backwards and forwards at least three times, making adjustments to the design, reducing the space, restricting the roof height and doing our best to work within their constraints."

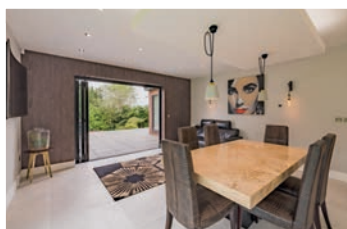
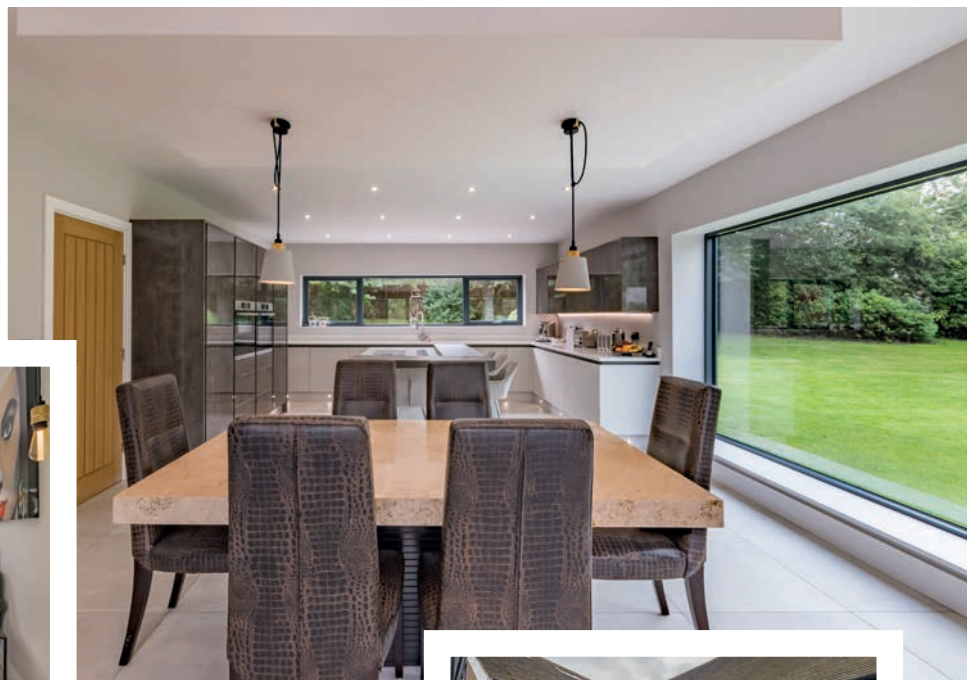
They were informed that the previous two extensions had already used up most of their quota for permitted development, and that any further extension would be granted in light of the permission that had expired.

"We considered bringing in a solicitor to fight our corner, but the architect advised against it and, in hindsight, it was right not to launch into a legal battle, even though it was incredibly frustrating," says Carrie. "Bob even appealed the council's decision, but to no avail. We became so disheartened that, at one point, we actually considered knocking the house down

#### HIGH POINT

"Climbing a ladder to get up to the newly created bedroom at the back of the house and seeing the view for the first time. We could see Leeds city centre in one direction, and open countryside in the other."





## LOW POINT

"Overspending. Some of the expenses were unavoidable and some were of our own making, but we put down a big deposit and also tied ourselves into a mortgage which meant we couldn't remortgage without a huge penalty, so finances have been a challenge."

and starting again. It would probably have been cheaper and easier in long run, but we knew we wouldn't have been able to build as much character into a new home. The better internal layout was a good compromise."

By the time planning permission was granted, Bob and Carrie had the build team ready and waiting. The plan was for Bob, Carrie and their daughters to move in with Carrie's parents while the structural work was completed – an estimated six months – and then they would move back in when the dust had settled.

### THE COMING OF COVID

But no-one bargained for a pandemic and when lockdown was announced all their plans went out the window.

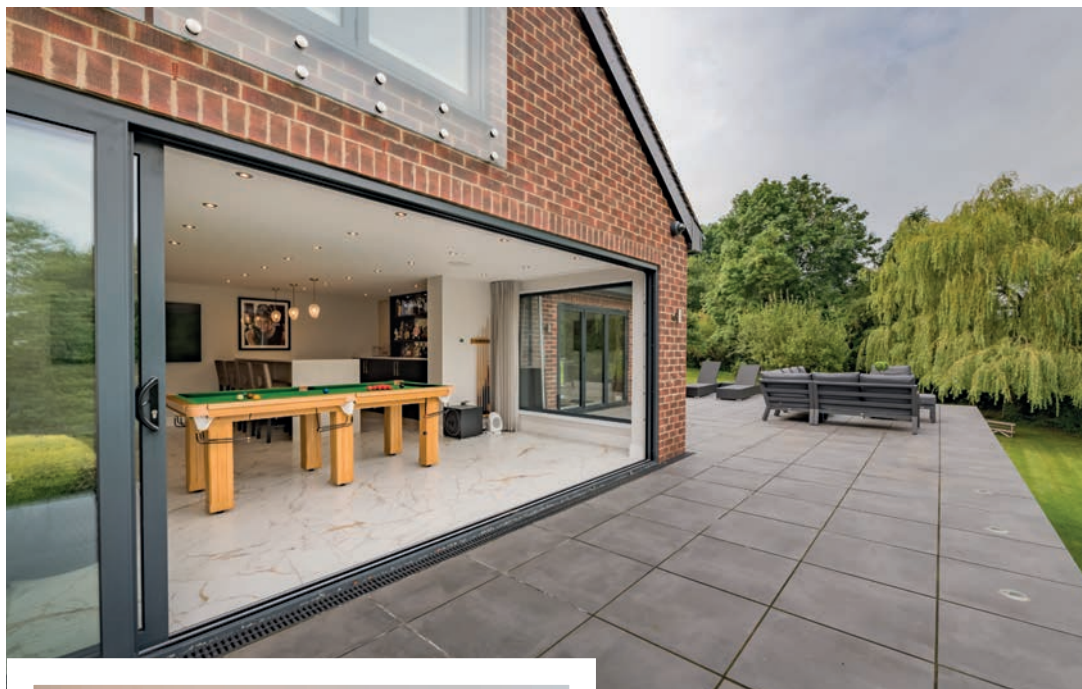
"My father wasn't in the best of health and we were working for a security company, which involved mixing with others, so we didn't want to put my parents at risk," says Carrie. "We had just a few days to find somewhere we could rent so the builders could start work on the house. We struggled to get hold of estate agents or to view anything, but in the end we managed to find a one-bedroom bungalow to rent just a couple of miles from the site. It was far from ideal, especially as we were often working from home while the girls were home schooling. We were often trying to teach, hold meetings and keep family life together from the conservatory. How we survived I shall never know!"

***"We had no idea what challenges we were about to face when we bought the house but it's been worth the challenges and extra expense" – Bob***

### TREES A CROWD

Their frustrations were further compounded by a major problem that came to light very early on in the build process. The original building inspection had failed to highlight the fact that the new foundations for the rear extension would have to be deeper than originally planned in order to hold back the roots of the numerous conifers standing close to the property. Instead of 2.0 metres deep they would need to be pile driven to around four / five metres deep, which





involved bigger digging equipment and more time – at a total extra cost of around £10,000 to the Forsyths.

“It made us very nervous because if we were incurring huge unforeseen expenses at this stage, what would we uncover further down the line?” says Carrie. “We had budgeted around £200,000 for the renovation but we already had an inkling that it was going to be a lot more than we bargained for.”

### SWITCHING ROOMS

With the foundations in place, the builders started to strip out the internal spaces, leaving just two original walls and taking the rest back to bare brick. The floors were dug up to allow for water-based underfloor heating and new timber and plasterboard walls created according to the new layout. At this stage the builders insulated the walls, floor and ceilings where applicable – including kitchen walls which hadn’t been stipulated by the building inspector but needed doing to future proof the property.

“It was a further unexpected expense, but it made sense to do things properly while the house was in this state, rather than cut corners and live to regret it,” says Carrie.

By switching the location of key rooms and moving the garage from one side of the house to the other, Bob and Carrie were able to achieve their goal of creating a spacious family home which flowed naturally from one space to the next. The original kitchen, which was a long thin room in the middle of the ground floor with just one external window, became part of a new spacious entrance hall. The original garage and dining room behind it became a light-filled, open plan living kitchen, and a series of small rooms – including a living room – became one large recreation area. Planning restrictions meant their dream of extending right across the back had to be curtailed, but they were still allowed to extend outwards in part and install large glazed areas to link the house to the garden.

Upstairs involved greater compromise. Planning limited the height of the roof lines so that their original idea of creating more bedrooms was knocked on the head and they opted, instead, for four ensuite bathrooms and extra storage space in the eaves.

“We changed our minds about things as the building work progressed,” says Carrie. “We added storage in the eaves, for example, and we also decided to install large sliding doors in-

## CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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stead of windows at the back of the house. None of the changes were huge in isolation, but they soon added a further £15-£20,000 to the overall budget.'

Fortunately the Forsyths did not have to replace the roof or rebuild exterior walls, but they did source reclaimed bricks and roof tiles for the extended and remodelled areas so they matched seamlessly with the original.

"James, the architect, and the builders were brilliant and rose to the challenges posed by the pandemic," says Bob. "James kept an eye on the build throughout and the builders were really helpful when we were changing our mind about things as the renovation progressed."

The biggest challenge was getting deliveries of materials. Plaster was in short supply, the staircase and windows were really difficult to get to site and Bob and Carrie had to order everything online without actually seeing it first – including the kitchen units and bathroom fittings – which was a huge gamble. One of the largest windows was delayed by five months and the opening had to be secured with plywood until it arrived.

"Because of the unusual sizes of some windows and the glass dimensions generally, there was quite a delay," says Bob. "Some of that was

***"A key part of the design was to replan the existing cramped and dated layout to one that worked for modern family living" – James Butterworth, architect***

down to transport. Everything was affected by the pandemic."

The bonus, however, was that the builders had no other jobs coming in to distract them from the renovation, so they gave it 110% and finished in four and a half months, instead of the predicted six.





## LEARNING ON THE JOB

'Neither of us had done anything like this before so it was a huge learning curve,' says Carrie.

'The hardest part was having to make decisions on every last detail. By the end of it we were incapable of making any more choices, so we agreed to ask an interior designer to come in and take over when it reached the stage of choosing floor coverings and decor.

We needed advice on key finishes like floor and wall tiles. I knew that if I chose something that didn't look right we would have to live with that mistake for years, whereas the designer had the experience and contacts to make sure we made the right choices.'

The family moved back into the house ahead of schedule and before everything was completed.

'It was still a building site really,' says Carrie,

'but the kitchen units and bathrooms were all fitted and it was 100% better than trying to cope with life in a tiny bungalow. I made the mistake of trying to get some of the rooms completely finished while work was still going on. Everyone had different footwear for different parts of the house so that the dirt and dust wasn't getting pulled from one room to another, but it didn't work. I should have waited literally until the dust had settled before trying to decorate and furnish the house.'

But the pain has been worth the gain for Bob and Carrie, who have now had a chance to really appreciate life in their new-look home.

'It's definitely been worth it,' says Bob.

'We had no idea what challenges we were about to face when we bought the house but it's been worth the challenges and extra expense to achieve our forever home.' ■



# Charlie Luxton partners with Samsung

**Samsung Climate Solutions** believe that in order to reach the government's decarbonisation targets for heating, it is essential to increase the awareness of greener heating options such as heat pumps. To help achieve this aim, they have partnered with architectural designer Charlie Luxton to communicate the importance of this technology. Best known for presenting TV programs such as *Building the Dream* and *Homes by the Sea*, Charlie's own architecture practice channels his passion for the environment and sustainable building. His expertise and innovative approach to design make Charlie a natural ambassador of Samsung Eco Heating Systems. Samsung are constantly innovating, developing, and optimising their air source heat pump offering to support the transition to cleaner and greener energy. Traditional gas boilers operate on fossil fuels, such as gas or oil, to heat buildings or provide hot water, whereas Samsung's air source heat pumps use electricity and energy available in the outside air to generate heat.

Jon Brigly, Marketing Manager at Samsung Climate Solutions, added: "Charlie is a great partner for us due to our shared passion for driving the switch to low-carbon heating. We look forward to working together on content to raise awareness of air source heat pumps and how to heat homes more sustainably."

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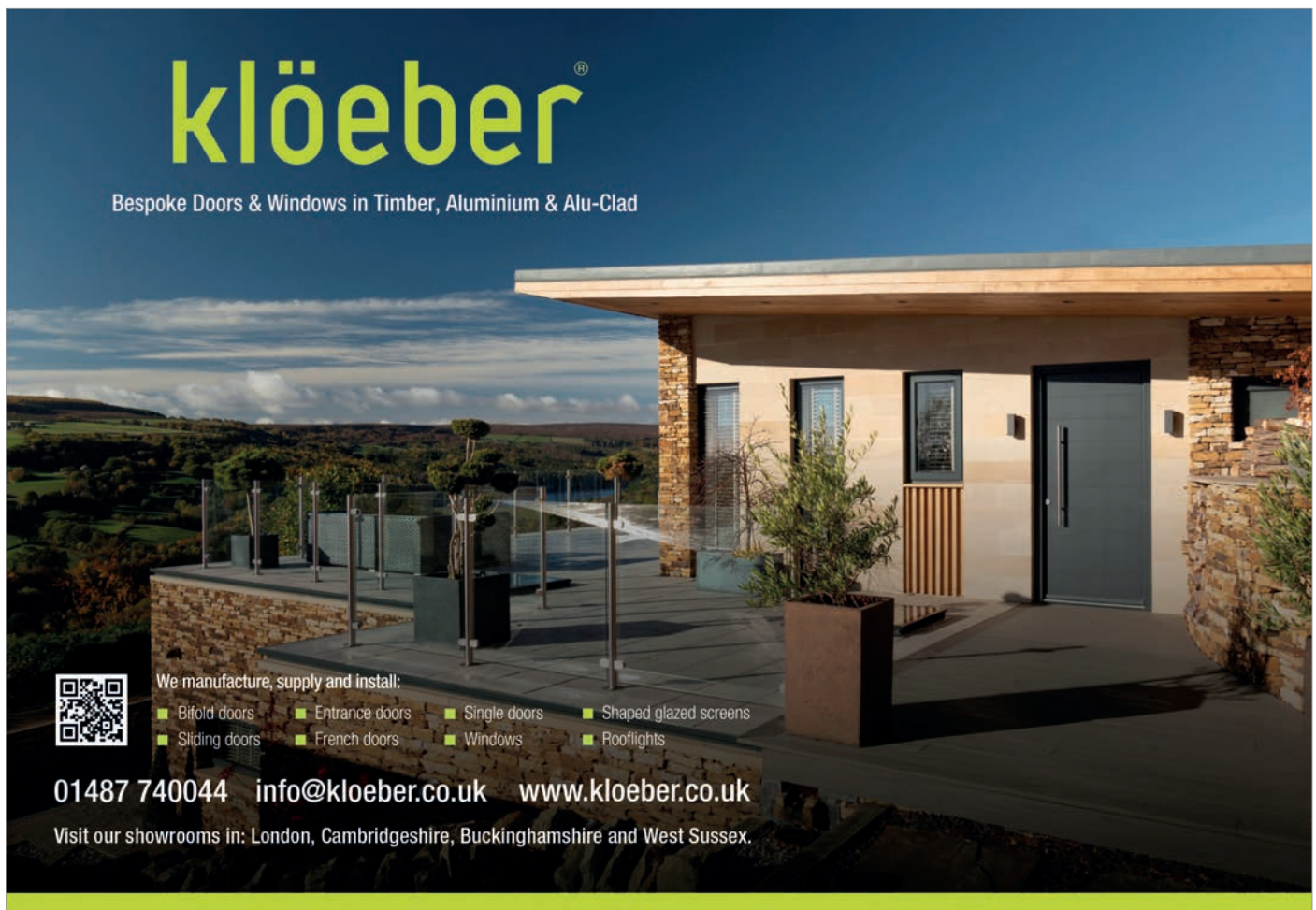
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Member companies of the **Steel Window Association** have been enjoying a boom in business. This is thanks to the general upturn in activity across the housing market, with the focus on the acquisition and refurbishment of rural properties having resulted in higher than usual demand for the replacement of the traditional W20 style windows. The W20 closely replicates the appearance of the older universal suite of sections and can therefore be found providing reliable service from country cottages to dockland warehouses


and in commercial, as well as industrial buildings. Not only do the slimline sections offer slender sightlines compared to PVC-U and timber frames, but their strength also provides good security and long-term robustness.

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# Insulating a better future

Quentin Bassieux of Huntsman Building Solutions explains why minimising air leakage must go hand in hand with better insulation



Icynene H2 Foam Lite spray applied insulation from Huntsman Building Solutions



Spray applied insulation effectively seals the complex voids in a building structure.

**B**etter insulation of domestic households is seen as one of the most important ways of reducing carbon emissions and slowing the effects of climate change.

A recent environmental audit select committee report says that 19 million UK homes are poorly insulated and that unless urgent action is taken to improve energy efficiency of homes, the UK will fail to meet its climate targets.

Unfortunately, as over 60% of our current housing stock was built pre-1960 when little thought was given to heat-loss prevention, the challenge is significant.

Overall, roughly 20% of UK carbon emissions are generated through heating, hot water and cooking in domestic properties. Even more troubling was the fact that in 2017, emissions from buildings actually rose by 1% over those of the previous year.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

If we go back to basic principles, heat loss in a building occurs through a combination of four processes: conduction,

convection, radiation and mass transfer. The colder the outside temperature, the warmer the inside, and the worse the thermal insulation of the building envelope, the greater the heat loss will be.

In the UK, the construction industry focuses primarily on U values – sometimes referred to as heat transfer coefficients – as a measure of conductive heat loss. These are used to measure how effective elements of a building's fabric are at insulating against heat loss. The lower the U-value of an element of a building's fabric, the more slowly heat is able to transmit through it, and so the better it performs as an insulator.

Very broadly, the lower the U-value, the less energy is required to maintain comfortable conditions inside the building.

Unfortunately, measuring the thermal efficiency of a structure by U-value alone fails to take into account heat loss through air leakage. If you spend any time in high mountain environments you quickly realise that it is the wind that strips the heat from your body. And it is the same in buildings. It doesn't matter

*High performance insulation, effective control of air movement and air quality, in combination with low carbon heating are interconnected elements that need to be addressed as one in the design of new-build housing to ensure heat loss mitigation*

what your U-value is if there are draughts.

Traditional forms of insulation are relatively inefficient in preventing air leakage through draughts. They can't completely fill the complex voids and cracks in roof structures or seal the interface between the insulation and the building components. They can also struggle to cope with small structural movements which can lead to air gaps.

When 40% of a building's heat loss is caused by air leakage, an insulation



system that works to prevent air leakage – effectively creating a sealed environment – is essential to minimise heat loss.

#### SPRAY APPLIED, OPEN CELL INSULATION

Breathable, open cell spray applied foams are highly efficient insulators against both conductive and convective heat loss as they control air movement and eliminate air leakage. Spray applied foam insulation is also extremely flexible; it moves with the structure, maintaining its insulative properties for the lifespan of the building.

The most widely used spray applied foam insulation used in domestic buildings is “open cell” composition. Open cell systems such as Huntsman FoamLite provide outstanding insulation but also allow the building to breathe naturally, resisting internal condensation – particularly important when insulating heritage-type buildings and avoid mould proliferation.

#### CONTROL OF AIR QUALITY

Heat loss through mass transfer is more complex and relates to how much moisture is held in the air (humidity). The more there is, the more energy it takes to heat it, so to feel warm, damp buildings need more energy than dryer ones.

To control humidity, you need to be able to control the air movement and



Better insulation of domestic households is an important way of reducing carbon emissions.

you can only do this if the building is relatively airtight. Spray foam insulation does this effectively and quickly by sealing air gaps, enabling controlled ventilation and mechanical heat recovery systems to perform efficiently.

#### A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEAT LOSS MITIGATION

High performance insulation, effective control of air movement and air quality, in combination with low carbon heating are interconnected elements that need to be addressed as one in the design of new-build housing to ensure heat loss

mitigation. Until Building Regulations take a holistic view of this complex picture, the industry will continue to build housing that performs well in one respect but fails in others

From a wider perspective, bringing the UK's legacy of pre-1960's, poorly insulated housing stock up to a sufficiently high performance is a whole different ball-game, one that needs urgent attention at the highest level.

*Quentin Bassieux is UK country manager for Huntsman Building Solutions*

## Yeoman Rainguard crowning glory on development

Property developers Golden Eye Group, augmented their latest residential development with a high-end exterior finish incorporating a rainwater system from Yeoman Rainguard.

With a mantra of “a quality finish that will stand the test of time” Golden Eye ensured that quality was reflected not only internally but for all parts of the external building envelope too.



As part of the function and design criteria of the house facade, Yeoman Rainguard were able to provide a sophisticated, quality rainwater system to fulfil technical and aesthetic requirements.

To dovetail into the contemporary look, Yeoman Rainguard SL Aluminium gutters and downpipes were chosen. The 75 x 75 mm flush-fit SL Aluminium downpipes provided a modern clean line coupled with 125 x 100 mm MOG gutter.

Aluminium Fascia and Soffits from Yeoman Rainguard's new Squareline range were fitted to complement the sleek lines. All were finished in a smooth RAL 7022 Grey colour to perfectly match the shade of the windows and doors.

The aluminium products give a hardwearing, maintenance free lifecycle of 30 years or more, making this



recyclable material both an ecologically and economically sound choice.

The rainwater system was installed by Yeoman Rainguard's experienced installer, ensuring the perfect finish.

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## Winning new work with CIRCOFLOPRO

Northampton based JD Plumbing and Heating has been growing its business in recent years after discovering the multiple benefits of buying the ready-to-install underfloor heating systems offered by **CIRCOFLOPRO**, part of the Ridgespear Group. Founder and Director, John Drew explained: "I have been using CIRCOFLOPRO for all of my underfloor heating installations for the past three years, after a builder I do some work for was using it on a job and I was just really impressed with the flexibility of the approach. It appeals because you can't always put pumps or manifolds where they should be ideally and CIRCOFLOPRO makes things easier in a lot of circumstances." The most recent project where JD Plumbing and Heating has chosen to employ CIRCOFLOPRO is an old farmhouse at Brigstock in Northants that had been substantially refurbished following a flood, where another underfloor heating system was installed, but unfortunately hadn't performed well. With a new 40 kW gas boiler already in-situ, John measured up for laying CIRCOFLOPRO ClipRail across the whole of the reconfigured ground floor. He continued saying: "The client is very happy with the way it is all working and we're hoping to do a lot more jobs with CIRCOFLOPRO in the future."

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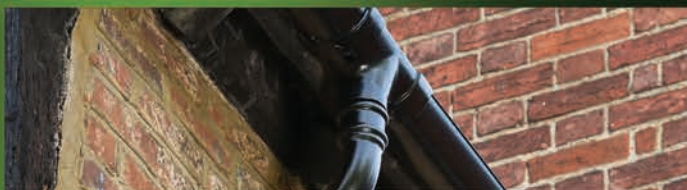


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# The right rainwater system

With a varied choice of rainwater systems on the market, there should be no problem in finding the perfect product for your self-build project, says Sally Moores from Yeoman

**A**esthetics, though important, should not be the only thing that is considered when selecting gutters and downpipes. The environment the system is going to be fitted in (conservation or heritage area), water flow from the roof, rainwater harvesting, snow load and life cycles are examples of some of the considerations that should be taken seriously to ensure you have a rainwater system which will work efficiently and last for many years to come.

## GUARDING AGAINST THE ELEMENTS

After all the hard work, decision making, and expense that will go into a self-build project, it would be wrong to cut corners when it comes to installing a rainwater system. This piece of kit will protect your property from the ingress of water, guarding the structure against dampness and water damage.

Having a durable rainwater system that will withstand the great fluctuations of the Great British Weather, yet which also adds to the design of the exterior of the property, is a paramount concern for self-builds.

A system that will not crack or discolour when the temperature rises is essential as well as one that can withstand a heavy snow load if required without becoming misshapen, and which is also the right size to take the water flow from your roof.

## SYSTEMS THAT SHOW THEIR METAL

One extremely durable option would be a metal rainwater system offering properties which can overcome the issues



mentioned above. With an assortment of materials to pick from, metal gutters and downpipes allow style and function to collaborate nicely.

## ALUMINIUM

Available in an attractive paint or mill (raw) finish, aluminium rainwater systems complement both the traditional or modern house. The range of gutter profiles, pipe shapes and sizes along with a choice of colours and ornate accessories such as ear bands, will help to tailor this product to the character of your dwelling.

A deep flow gutter is available to cope with high volumes of water flow from the roof, avoiding overflow and splashing –

online guides can be found to calculate flow rates from roofs, or a reputable supplier will be able to advise you.

The gutters will also be strong enough to accommodate heavy snow loads – though the addition of extra fixing brackets in areas of concern is recommended.

Look for an aluminium product that offers a joint clip fixing method on the gutters. Not requiring mechanical fixings or welding joints will make it quicker and easier to install, and UV stability and 100% recyclability are also available.

## CAST IRON

This classical rainwater system which has been popular since the 1700s is acceptable for use on listed and

*Having a durable rainwater system that withstands the fluctuations of the Great British Weather – yet which to the design of the exterior of the premises, is a paramount concern for self-builds*



heritage buildings.

A heavier material than aluminium, cast iron offers the same durable properties with a 40 year or more life expectancy, however a small amount of maintenance such as repainting can further extend this. A range of traditional gutter profiles, decorative ear bands along with the addition of stylish rainwater hoppers can certainly ensure that the feel of old and historical buildings are reflected in the use of a cast iron rainwater system.

100% recyclable, cast iron when oxidising produces iron ashes which being carbon based aid the growth of green and planktonic life helping to counteract the effects of global warming.

#### COPPER, ZINC & STAINLESS STEEL

These materials are chameleon-like, changing patina over time which adds depth and colour to the rainwater system. A great choice for structures that are timber clad, oak framed or indeed garden houses whose exteriors also change colour as the wood ages, adding to their beauty.

The attractive patina caused by oxidation also functions as an exceptional, natural defence against the elements, making them a good choice of material to be used on coastal properties where erosion by the salt in the atmosphere can be a concern.



Copper gutters and downpipes have proven durability having been used successfully for many generations offering an almost unlimited life service. A natural, truly sustainable and 100% recyclable material, copper also acts as an algacide and fungicide helping to keep moss and lichen growth to a minimum, proving to be a maintenance free system. It's also a great choice for those wanting to harvest rainwater.

A zinc or stainless steel rainwater system will bring a contemporary feel to self-build projects, again having

outstanding durability and requiring minimal maintenance.

#### SEEK ADVICE

Sometimes there is more to selecting a rainwater system than meets the eye, so it's important to take time to investigate what's available.

There are plenty of shows and exhibitions specifically for the self-build and renovation market around the country throughout the year, which showcase the latest in building materials. Experts will also be on hand at these events to offer advice.

Online blogs and websites can be a great tool as people divulge successes and pitfalls, the rights and wrongs of their own projects. However, for fool-proof advice and information on the right rainwater system for your particular project it is best to seek out a reputable manufacturer and supplier.

Some of these companies offer free site surveys or take offs from architect drawings that they can then turn into an itemised, easy to understand quotation. Take advantage as these helpful services will ensure that you get the rainwater system that is befitting of your prized home.

*Sally Moores is marketing manager at Yeoman*

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## CASE STUDY

# BRAVE NEW HOME

After an almost traumatic experience with her first self-build, Poppy Robinson bravely decided to take on another, conquering her fears to produce a bright and eco-friendly forever home

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES NICK AUSTWICK PHOTOGRAPHY & ORIGIN





**O**n the Lincolnshire coast sits an unusual but practical home, designed with sustainability and later-life in mind. While designed as an annexe to meet building requirements, the build has still achieved everything Poppy Robinson set out to achieve, and more, despite her nearly being put off self-building from her previous project.

She embarked on her first self-build project back in the early 80s. With her father's help, she created a large, five bedroom detached house that has accommodated her family ever since. But while they loved the final result, she found the whole process extremely stressful, so much so that it took her almost "five years to recover."

"It completely took over my life," says Poppy, adding:

"trying to juggle two children, a full-time job, and project manage everything, was just exhausting." There were also complications with contractors: "I was constantly having to chase people who sometimes just didn't turn up, and having to dismiss people who were incompetent!"

The incessant research and constant decision-making became overwhelming, and on top of the long hours, she was living in a poorly insulated caravan. "It drove me mad, and initially I had no intention of ever doing a self-build again."

However, with her two children now having flown the nest and her being "semi-retired," it was time for Poppy to start looking for a new home, her current place being too big for her to manage efficiently. "I wasn't enjoying myself and







thought; while I'm still fit, I want to move and find a forever home."

Determined to not self-build again, she began searching for homes locally. But there was a double-edged sword with a house having stunning views and a sizeable private garden, as finding somewhere which would be as good as what she had was proving difficult. After months of searching, Poppy's daughter and son-in-law, who had built their own home, made a suggestion – "If we can obtain planning consent, you can build on the land next to our house."

Previously this wouldn't have crossed Poppy's mind, but having visited many "dreadful places," in her house hunt, it became a more appealing prospect. "The decision to self-build was really taken for me. I realised designing my own place was one of the only ways I could get what I wanted." So, with some misgivings, she embarked on self-build project number two.

#### WISH LIST

As an experienced self-builder and having learnt what she definitely didn't want from her lengthy search, Poppy went into the project knowing exactly what she was looking for.

At the top of her list was living in a 'future-proofed' home – a place that catered for her needs now, but which would allow her to live there on her own for as long as possible. "I wanted the facility to have easy rise stairs throughout

as well as the option of installing a stairlift if need be," says Poppy.

Ensuring the home is filled with natural light throughout the day was another priority. "I wanted the building to 'follow the sun' as it rose in the east and set in the west. Mainly because as you get older, you can't see a thing!" With the site practically on top of her daughter's home, achieving privacy was a necessity. Poppy wanted to ensure that they were not overlooking, or overlooked by, the nearby house.

From the outset, Poppy put a strong emphasis on sustainability. "I wanted a renewable heating system, and high thermal and energy efficiency wherever possible i.e. windows, doors, insulation etc." Educating herself on the latest products and what was now available, she visited local new builds and self-builds with eco-credentials to inspire ideas, and help her find locally sourced materials to reduce the overall carbon footprint.

#### PLANNING

Significant in Poppy's decision to embark on a second self-build was the fact that her son-in-law's uncle, a retired architect who designed her daughter's home, offered his services to work alongside her throughout the process.

"He was able to sit down with us to draw up some initial plans that we took to pre-planning advice. This was an invaluable exercise as it gave us a feedback report of what was acceptable,

#### HIGH POINT

"Experiencing the wonderful constant heat system from the ground source heat pump. There were no cold corners!"





## LOW POINT

"The constant minutiae of decision making was exhausting. I remember spending a lot of time working out where I needed plug sockets in the house – and at the same time trying to be economical because I was always conscious of cost."

and what needed revision," says Poppy.

Following this feedback, it was clear the planning application needed further consideration, and architects Lincolnshire Design Consultancy (LDC) in nearby Louth, were recommended to Poppy. "They were a pleasure to work with," she says, "listening to our needs and requirements, and coming up with innovative designs for us to look at."

As the site formerly held a well-established farmhouse, it included a set of outbuildings that piqued the team's interest. Originally the team earmarked the old milking parlour – a single storey red brick and Lincolnshire pantile structure – for conversion. "At first I wanted to live in the milking parlour, I would have been very happy in there," says Poppy.

But a challenge was raised by the fact the site fell into a zone 3 (high risk) flooding area, meaning any habitable floors had to be at least 1 metre above ground level. "We haven't had a flood here since 1953, so finding this out was difficult to comprehend. But you have to go with [the planning department's] flood maps, you can't get around it."

Co-operating with the planners, the team rejigged their whole thought process, and realised that demolishing the outbuildings and building new was their only option.

Knowing of its sustainable benefits and shorter build time, Poppy was eager to build with a

timber frame from the start: "I thought; 'I'd never done a timber frame before, let's go for it'."

However the flood regulations also meant they were restricted in terms of where they could use timber. To solve this problem, the base of the home has been constructed using traditional concrete lintels up until ground-floor level (meeting the 1 metre requirement), and a timber frame then sits on top of this. "The whole building has been put on a raft, if you like," says Poppy.

Another bump in the road came when the team discovered that there was a planning constraint with developing a residential building outside the authority's Local Plan. But with LDC's planning expertise, they worked out that if they met certain requirements, they could submit the project as an annexe.

Under the guidelines at the time, designing an annexe required the neighbouring property to have shared facilities. Therefore their plan was to incorporate shared amenities such as electricity, water, and garaging. Not only did this help meet specifications, but also ticked the box in terms of supporting multi-generational living.

## CONSTRUCTION

Actively taking on the role of project manager once more, Poppy was determined to avoid the pitfalls of her first self-build, and so needed to appoint a trustworthy and competent team.

"I wanted a local contractor who was reliable,





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## CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

### DESIGNERS

**Lincs Design Consultancy**  
www.lincsdesignconsultancy.co.uk

### LARCH CLADDING, BALCONY COMPOSITE FLOORING

**Bennett's Timber**  
www.bennettsttimber.co.uk

### KITCHEN

**Dream Doors**  
www.dreamdoors.co.uk

### ELECTRICS

**FOX Electrical**  
www.foxlec.co.uk

### WINDOWS, BI-FOLDS, AND FRONT DOOR

**Origin**  
www.origin-global.com

### ROOFLIGHTS

**Velux**  
www.velux.co.uk

### GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP

**Vonart Developments**

### ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

**Willson's Electrical**

### MAIN CONTRACTOR

**JHA Winter & Sons Ltd**  
www.jhawinter.co.uk

enthusiastic, and wasn't hassled about putting in extra hours in planning meetings. I didn't have to look far, because if I look out my window now I can see his house." The chosen builder was Phil Winter of J.H.A Winter & Sons, who spearheaded the team and was the key to making sure the project was up to her standards.

To keep ahead of the game and ensure their choice of suppliers were made in a timely fashion, Poppy, her son-in-law's uncle, and Phil held Saturday morning meetings every week (or fortnight) onsite, to agree a work programme over the following weeks and months.

By the time it came to construction (which began in early 2016), Poppy had already sold her house and was planning to rent out a nearby property. Fortunately however, her daughter and son-in-law conveniently came up with the idea for her to live in their front room during the build, which meant Poppy could be on hand for any key decision making.

"During construction, I would do all my research online in the evenings, and in the day, I would visit places such as other recently built houses, eco and Passivhaus projects, and

installations of technology like ground source heat pumps.

With natural light being central to the design, finding the right window and door supplier was of the utmost importance. Poppy also wanted to avoid going overseas, however part of their design involved bi-folds, and "a lot of companies buy them from abroad and then market them here" – so she faced another challenge.

Then Poppy discovered Origin – a doors and windows supplier who manufacture all their products in Britain. Following a visit to their showrooms "out in the wilds in Lincolnshire," Poppy was sold, and explains how their "enthusiasm and welcome was infectious."

Origin supplied the two double panel bi-fold sets in the upstairs of the home, and the stunning five-panel set downstairs. Apart from the Velux rooflights, they also supplied the remaining windows as well as the front door.

### LAYOUT & INTERIOR DESIGN

The main entrance to the home sits alongside the three garages (two for the main farmhouse and one for the annexe). On entering – at the





© Origin

## POPPY'S SELF-BUILD TIPS

- Try to choose contractors whose work ethic and standards match your own.
- Research, research and research – so that you are able to talk knowledgeably with your contractors and if necessary pay that £1k extra to have your architects prepare a Building Regs spec.
- Spreadsheets and timelines are invaluable. They ensure that supplies and materials are on hand for the next task.
- Establish your own 'black book' in which you record your research, contact numbers and names.
- Make time for 'management meetings' with contractors and agree the timelines and requirements for the next weeks.



© Origin

ground level – there's a downstairs toilet, a boot and cloakroom, and direct access to the garages.

A custom-made 'easy rise' stairway, designed and made by the son-in-law and his uncle, ascends to the upper ground floor and the large, open plan kitchen/living room. "I wanted the next part of the journey to be an exciting passage, and it is!"

With the property being raised to adhere to flood resilience requirements, through the three, identical windows there are elevated views over the adjacent fields and farmland. "It is a constant joy to see the changing colours of the countryside," says Poppy. Other glazing such as the rooflights, high cathedral window, and Origin's five door bi-fold allows natural light to fill the space.

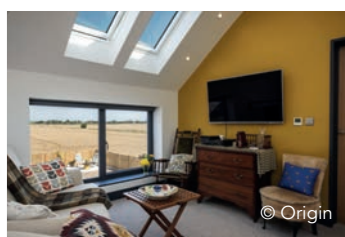
When it came to designing the kitchen, Poppy says she "could have gone for a very modern kitchen which on its own would look great, but in the greater picture of the open plan area with traditional furniture it could have stuck out like a sore thumb." Instead, she selected a composite material with a wood grain finish.

More easy rise steps offer access to the first floor. The architects made clever use of the landing area here, incorporating an office/hobby space, a "relaxed" cinema area, and access to the first balcony. Also on this level are two double bedrooms, one with a shower room and one with a bathroom and dressing area with access to the second balcony.

As Poppy used the traditional furniture from her parents' bureau, there was the constant task



*“I realised designing my own place was one of the only ways I could get what I wanted”*



of marrying different styles and ages of furniture together. “I overcame this by paying particular attention to the open plan areas which I did not want to become a jumble of styles.”

As the team had to demolish the old milking parlour, an important design aim was to give a nod to it in the new design. Internal examples are the red ceramic tiles, and the downstairs toilet which includes a small round marble washbasin sitting on an original milk churn.

#### EXTERIORS & HOME COMFORTS

Externally, the home has been finished with red Ibstock brick – again reflecting the appearance of the old parlour – as well as larch cladding, and Lincolnshire pantiles on the roof. “Seeing the external materials gradually being built up was exhilarating, and confirmed that I had made the right choices.”

The ground source heat pump provides “constant, pleasant heat” throughout the house. The system is controlled in six zones, with the water coming into the house at varying temperatures throughout the year. The home also

has high levels of thermal efficiency, with airtight windows and doors.

Poppy has now been living in her new home for a couple of years, and is overjoyed with the final result, after braving the self-build challenge a second time. “I always look forward to coming home and enjoying the wonderful views that the home has given me,” she says.

She says the three vertical windows in the lounge are one of her favourite features. “It’s like having three changing landscapes throughout the year.” Demonstrating the uniqueness and quality of the design, the project was runner up in the Midlands region at the Small House of the Year Award 2021.

Would she be keen to do it all again? “Only if the same support system could be in place,” says Poppy, alluding to the family help she had, as well as the rest of her team, adding “I am not sure that would be possible.” However, she concludes optimistically: “It certainly hasn’t put me off; it was a great learning curve that I could draw on. And I would like to have a go at a Passivhaus.” ■





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## Closet fascination



Now that homeowners can enjoy socialising indoors once again, the downstairs cloakroom will be taking centre stage in terms of a Spring spruce up. It is the one intimate space in which guests spend time – and judge!

**Thomas Crapper** has launched a new range of beautiful closet suites to answer the demand for imagination in this special place.

Pictured is the new Bentham basin and high-level 814 cistern WC set.

For further information on Thomas Crapper, please visit the website.  
[www.thomas-crapper.com](http://www.thomas-crapper.com)

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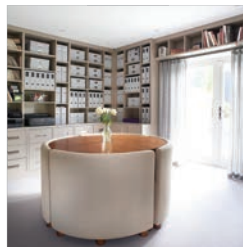


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# Bathrooms with longevity

Like most of the building industry, the bathroom sector has changed over the last two years. James Sketch from Keuco explains what people are now focussing on when it comes to planning and designing their bathroom



The combination of Brexit and Covid has meant that many self-builders have had to adjust their plans; this is not just because of adaptations and alterations to the supply and delivery chain, but many are looking at the longevity behind their projects.

You may be building to create your own forever home or to use this as an opportunity to venture into the homebuilding sector, with a view of selling and then creating additional homes. Whatever the reason, the rationale behind what you are building will probably have changed since 2020, especially in terms of bathroom design.

The keyword is longevity – the

property may currently be at a premium but buyers are looking for specifics. Aesthetically pleasing, hotel-style bathrooms are no longer the go-to. Design and quality are important but the bathroom now has to be extremely easy to clean as hygiene has gone up on everyone's priority list and it must be adaptable for residents of all ages.

Multigenerational living seemed to be the catchphrase to cover families with young children through to teenagers; but now it covers a much wider age bracket. House prices are increasing and as it becomes harder for the younger generation to get onto the housing ladder, families are building and buying properties that

can cater for all. This may mean sections of the house are divided for individual living, but bathrooms may still have to be shared.

Living with an ageing relative does not mean you have to lose out on stylish design. Brands who work within the care home sector are designing and manufacturing products that can be adapted to residential living too.

Bathrooms can now be designed and crafted to cater for all ages, taking into account current and potential needs without creating a look that is 'institutionalised'. Shower surfaces that are floor level, with no ridge or side to step over are on-trend in terms of bathroom



# The options available to self-builders allow them to create elegant bathrooms that will encompass and cater for the needs of every family member

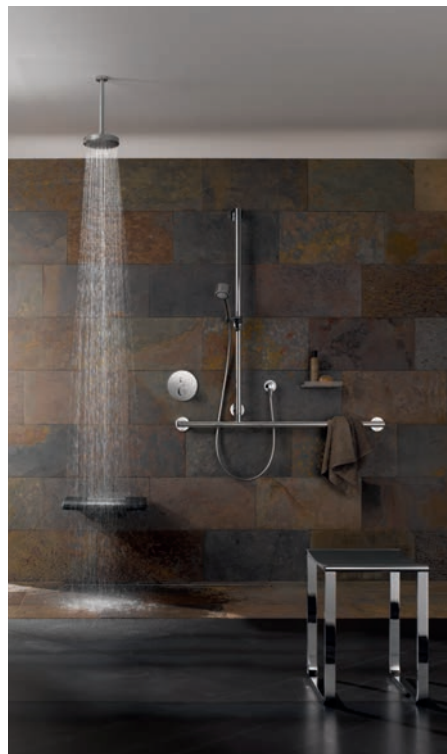
and fittings.

The stylish design continues with the addition of multi-purpose accessories, such as towel rails that double as a grab rail or a shower rail that can be used to support a detachable shower seat. The seat can be hooked over the rail, offering secure seating which can be folded up or removed after use. The seat is available in three colour options and covered in a warm-to-the-touch skin friendly thermoplast (permanent options can also be fitted).

When it comes to sanitary ware, shower toilets are becoming an increasingly popular choice; not only because of the increased hygiene options, but because they offer so many other options. With the touch of an app, seats can be heated, toilet lids lifted, night lights programmed. All of which can benefit family members of all ages and abilities.

If additional support is needed, support bars can be added alongside the toilets, these can be raised and lowered as needed. Grab rails and support rails can also be added to the bath which can double up to be used for towels or as part of the shower rail system. They come in a variety of options chrome plated or aluminium silver with an anodised finish, to co-ordinate with the other bathroom fittings.

The combination of options available



to self-builders and developers alike allow them to create elegant functional bathrooms that will encompass and cater for the needs of every family member.

James Sketch is country manager UK at Keuco



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WARM TO TOUCH



# VitrA launches exciting Root brassware range



Root Square deck mounted mixer in brushed nickel.



Root Round medium monobloc basin mixer shown in chrome.



Root Round, built-in basin mixer shown in copper.

International Bathroom brand VitrA has launched Root, a striking and wide-ranging bathroom brassware range.

Created by Design Studio VitrA, Root is a comprehensive collection of brassware with over 130 skus including basin, shower, and bath mixers, all in four different finishes.

The range offers two design choices – Root Round and Root Square. Root Round has smooth, rounded curves for a softer look, while Root Square has defined geometric edges for a bolder look.

Every product within the range is available in chrome, gold, copper, and brushed nickel, which means all elements of the bathroom can be co-ordinated for maximum impact. The hardwearing colour is applied using an advanced VitrA process that gives a

resilient and beautiful finish.

The range is enormously versatile, with basin mixers available as deck-mounted or built-in, and in a range of sizes including compact, standard, and tall. The range also includes several bath and shower mixer options, including deck-mounted and floor-standing bath mixers and a range of built-in shower mixers, diverters, and spouts – complemented by wastes and bottle-traps as required.

The bath and shower mixers in the range are compatible with VitrA's V-Box concealed thermostatic valve.

Root brassware features an exclusively designed flow regulator and the collection's Unified Water Label certified mixers reduce water usage by 60% even in the lowest consumption category (5 litres/minute water flow). The basin

mixer cartridge with heat regulator and flow rate control provides extra savings in both energy and water consumption. Being able to control the amount of water and energy used helps to conserve natural resources and reduce heating bills.

"We believe that Root brassware will be a great success in the UK market, says Margaret Talbot, VitrA Marketing Manager for UK and Europe. "The Root range is elegant and stylish, and the sheer breadth affords retailers maximum design potential. The Root collection will be joined by new bathroom furniture later in the year – a range like the brassware that will be comprehensive, striking, and hardwearing."

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## Sustainability, choice and flexibility key



Providing choice, flexibility, value and design prowess – and latterly, environmental conscience – have always made for a winning combination for developers when it comes to kitchen schemes. From a high-end penthouse to an affordable apartment, and everything in between, **Keller** has a wholly sustainable solution. All Keller kitchens, whatever the level, are produced by the most sustainable means in the kitchen universe. Working through the most expansive range of kitchen furniture options

available in the contract sector today, Keller has a kitchen for every project. Be it a slim budget or sheer opulence, the design concepts will flow with freedom thanks to a vast array of choice and flexibility.

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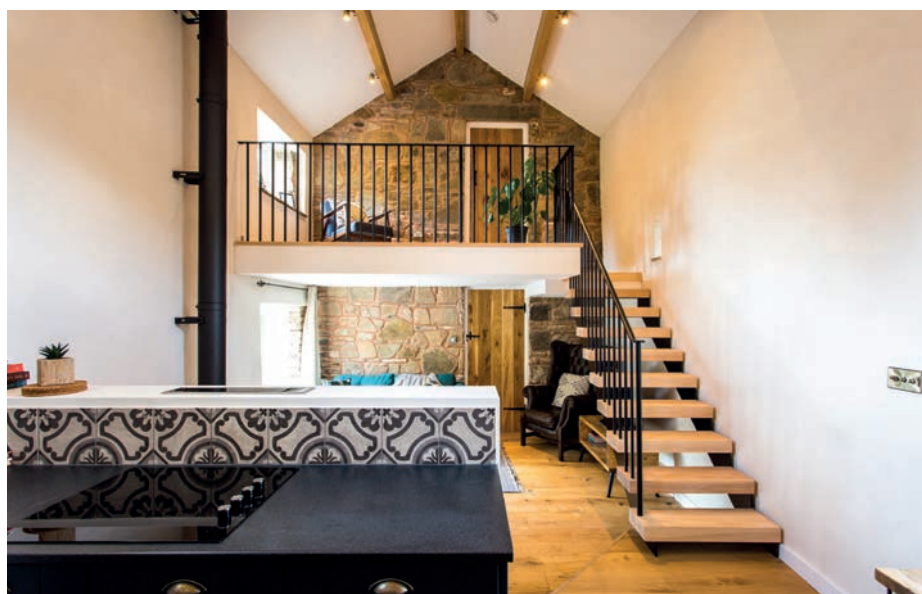
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# The next step in your project

Richard Harding from British Spirals and Castings discusses the different regulations you need to consider when choosing a staircase for your project



*By giving your staircase some proper thought early on in your own project, you can create a beautiful feature that enhances your whole property*

**S**taircases can be a home's key feature, helping to communicate the style and feel of your property. For best results, take a step back and think carefully about how the staircase will fit within the flow of your home.

Before looking at the different staircase options, it's worth laying out some of the key Building Regulations relating to staircases as these may impact which designs work within your space.

## COMPLYING WITH REGS

In almost all cases, you'll need to ensure there is at least 2 metres of headroom above every tread on your staircase. This can be particularly crucial if you're looking to fit a staircase beneath a pitched roof as headroom may be more limited at the room's edge, in these situations you are permitted to have 1900 mm on the stairs providing you are walking into 2 metres headroom when walking into a pitched roof area.

To ensure a spiral stair isn't too steep, the Building Regulations include minimum and maximum lengths for the tread depth (going) and the step-up between treads (rise). For comfort, it's generally recommended that the total measure-

ment of two rises plus 1 going is between 550 and 700 mm. The rise and going also need to be identical all the way up the staircase. For straight stairs, the maximum pitch is 42 degrees.

Spiral stairs will need to have a clear width of at least 800 mm if they serve more than one room or a kitchen or living room (900 mm in Scotland). If you are only serving one habitable room, this will reduce to 600 mm.

All landings will need to be at least as deep as your staircase is wide. This means if a staircase is 800 mm wide then you'll need to account for an extra 800 mm at the top and bottom of your staircase.

Finally, any gaps between balusters or treads will need to be designed to prevent a 100 mm diameter sphere from passing through them. You'll typically need two or three balusters per tread depending on diameter or going.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SPACE

Your choice of staircase design will define how large the footprint of the staircase is on the lower floor, and the size of the opening needed on the upper floor.

Straight staircases are by far the most

common design. They have a long, linear footprint which works well in a typical hall. Keep in mind that in addition to the length of the staircase, you'll need to account for the extra landing space at the top and bottom.

If the length of your space is a little limited, then a kited or combination staircase can be a good alternative. These feature a quarter turn either at the top, bottom or both. This L shaped footprint can be useful beneath a pitched roof as it allows the staircase to follow the direction of the roof pitch (leading up into the area with the most headroom).

Where space is at an absolute premium, or you simply want to retain as much ground floor space as possible, spiral staircases are often the best solution. With their winding design, these staircases are both an attractive and practical option for loft conversions or access from external balconies.

Finally, if you want to make an



impression in a big room a helical staircase may be the answer. These curve around a void and will require a lot of ground floor space.

#### OFF THE SHELF OR BESPOKE?

Many manufacturers offer mass produced kit staircases in a variety of styles and dimensions. These staircases can be a good option if you're working with a very limited budget as they tend to be relatively cheap. You will, however, be limited on the aesthetic of the staircase and will need to measure up carefully to ensure that the dimensions available work for your space.

The alternative is to order a bespoke staircase. These obviously come with a larger initial outlay but will give you much greater control over all aspects of the staircase. This can include everything from the choice of materials, depth and width of treads and the patterns used for features such as balusters, letting you create something which precisely matches your vision, and is manufactured specifically to fit within your home.

Bespoke design is especially beneficial when you're working within older properties as walls will rarely be entirely plumb, making measuring up difficult, and your staircase design will need to respond to the existing room dimensions. If needed, bespoke manufacturers can often



provide measuring services and some even offer laser scanning. These technologies create a digital version of your home with millimetre accuracy, capturing every undulation in the walls.

These scans can then be used by a staircase manufacturer to create precise 3D computer models for the staircase, helping to refine the design until you have something which perfectly matches your expectation. This approach means that once the staircase is manufactured, the whole installation should be straightforward and stress free, keeping

your project moving along.

Keep in mind that if you want to go bespoke, there can be a fairly long lead time for manufacture so it's important to start looking at the design at an early stage of your project to avoid delays.

A staircase is the heart of your home. By giving it some proper thought early on in your own project, you can create a beautiful feature that really enhances your whole property.

*Richard Harding is director of British Spirals and Castings*

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Earthborn's new Bonding Primer



## Silicate Masonry Paint for all surfaces

A newly formulated Bonding Primer from **Earthborn** can now be used alongside Silicate Masonry Paint for exterior masonry surfaces that do not need to breathe. Bonding Primer provides a mechanical bond between a 'sealed' wall and the paint, allowing Silicate Masonry Paint to 'stick' to the pre painted surface.

And in places where there is a mix of painted and unpainted masonry, you can now spot prime the patches where the previous paint cannot be removed with Bonding Primer and prime the rest of the unpainted area with Silicate Primer.

The updated Earthborn product range means that Silicate Primer used on uncoated masonry with Silicate Masonry Paint will create a highly breathable and permanent chemical bond.

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# What makes a good paving surface?

If you're thinking of upgrading an existing paving surface or simply designing a new hard landscape area, how do you know which is the right one? Alasdair McMillan from Sureset looks at the options available

**B**efore deciding on your paving material, it is important to take into account which base would be most suitable by considering its intended load and use after installation. It's not so much the weight of the paving, but rather whether the selected paving can withstand its intended traffic type such as a driveway for vehicles.

Another factor is the number of joints in the surface – either day joints for very large areas or expansion joints for base materials that may be prone to move or crack, such as concrete. Tarmac bases are good examples of sturdy surfaces that don't have many joints.

With that in mind, let's explore suitable surfaces for laying a resin drive. Some of the best surfaces for resin driveways DIY or professionally installed include concrete, tarmac, and grid systems.

The different suitable surfaces available each have their own characteristics and individual base requirements.

## BLOCK PAVING

Block paving has become very popular over recent years and is the main growth area in the UK. The price of the blocks has been reduced due to mass production and a stunning driveway can be created while getting value for money. Ideal for driveways, patios, and pathways, it can also be sealed to protect the surface. Block paving can be highly durable and attractive, and can also come in many different colours, textures



and styles.

However, there are some downsides to block paving such as it is prone to moss and weed growth, requiring a fair amount of maintenance.

## IMPRINTED CONCRETE

Pattern imprinted concrete is very common and is one of the most popular decorative stamped concrete techniques used in the UK. It is also known as stamped and pressed concrete. It's probably a surface that needs the least attention as it is very low maintenance.

Ideal for many areas including driveways, patios, and pathways, it allows you to have the look of stones, cobbles, brick, or slate.

You do have to take into consideration however that this surface can be very slippery when wet.

## TARMAC

Tarmac will provide the ideal surface for most driveways. If it is going to experience heavy usage, then tarmac has the properties required to endure large amounts of activity which is why it is used

*It is important to take into account whether the selected paving can withstand its intended traffic type*

on most roads. The surface can provide a flat surface with sufficient 'grip' in most conditions. It is naturally dark coloured, consisting of tar and broken stone bituminous material and can be laid on almost any surface with the right preparation.

## RESIN BOUND PAVING

Resin bound is a single layered material that is mixed with a UV resin and applied





to a smooth compacted finish. Ideal for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, it's incredibly hard wearing.

Resin bound permeability means that water simply drains through the surface back to the natural water table, making it an ecofriendly option.

Its design capabilities are probably the most flexible out of all of the surfaces allowing for incredible designs, emblems and logos. The result is an extremely hard-wearing surface that is fairly resistant to weeds and requires relatively low-maintenance.

The only downside is that it can be expensive as it is said to be the most durable and long lasting surface.

#### RESIN BONDED

A resin bonded surfacing system is a coloured two-part surface dressing adhesive that is designed to bind to natural aggregates. It is available in a variety of colours to suit any particular application, and the finish is considered attractive and quick to install.

Resin bonded surfacing systems are designed to have the appearance of natural, loose stone, but are bonded. It can be applied to many different substrates, including concrete, wood and steel.

A disadvantage of this material is that over time the stone will become loose.



#### MAKING A DECISION

Aside from general maintenance, when looking for the right surface for your home, make sure you research all of the options. Once you have decided on your surface, look for companies that are proven to have delivered a good product and service and are registered

with awarding or trade bodies. Ask for recommendations and read online reviews of the companies. If their websites have a case study section, make sure you read those too.

*Alasdair McMillan is head of sales at SureSet*

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## CASE STUDY

# THE ART OF RESTORATION

A historic 100-year old house designed by a St Ives artist has become a decade-long labour of love for the owners to save it from demolition

TEXT & IMAGES EWEN MACDONALD



Ty Bryn was built in 1928 in a Modernist style

## HIGH POINT

"Discovering Bernard Leach fireplaces. We took out the plaster and realised there was tiling that went right back"

It is a sad truth that it is often easier to raze a property to the ground and begin again, than to undertake the painstaking job of renovating something that has become dilapidated. Add into the mix the spectre of housing developers looking to cram profit-making properties into a large plot overlooking one of the country's most sought after holiday spots, and you have Sheila Scholes and Gunter Schmidt's project, Ty Bryn.

Ty Bryn – which means Hill House – is an Arts and Crafts-era house overlooking the iconic harbour of St Ives in Cornwall. It was grasped from the jaws of redevelopment thanks to an artist's determination to recognise the building's importance, both as an architectural curiosity, and its place in the story of this famous artistic colony.

The house was built in 1928 by renowned artist Borlase Smart, who was a pioneer of the modern British Art movement in St Ives. For more than a hundred years this ancient fishing harbour has attracted artists drawn by its

incredible natural light, and the unspoilt, often extreme landscape. Demand for holiday homes is high in this part of the world, which has put many of its most interesting architectural gems in jeopardy.

This unique home was built in a modernist style, and was in much need of a major but sympathetic renovation when it came to the attention of artist and designer Sheila and husband, Gunter, a scientist.

Among its other more unusual charms, the shape of the building means there are seven external walls. All of this makes for an unusual and sometimes difficult to navigate home, which was crying out for a creative touch. But being an experienced renovator, Sheila was excited by the challenge. Much of the promise of Ty Bryn could be seen in its unique exterior, says Sheila. Inside many of the rooms were basic and run down and at the very least needed to be stripped back to their original state.



The kitchen maintains a low tech slow cooking feel







Ty Bryn overlooks St Ives harbour in Cornwall

Plans were already underway to demolish the house and replace it with five houses when Sheila and her husband bought it and began their restoration 10 years ago. Meanwhile the homes surrounding it have been replaced by modern houses – mostly obscured from their view by mature trees. The new buildings are a reminder of how fragile Cornwall's architecture can be, in the midst of the race for space to build on. The developer's deal "was just about done," says Sheila, when the couple came along and bought it from under their noses.

#### ARTISTS' LEGACY

Ty Bryn was an immediate draw for Sheila, who was fascinated by its history. "I have always wanted to be an artist, my dream was to be a painter, but I always got sidetracked," says Sheila, who had her own successful textile printing business in the US, and now exhibits at galleries in St Ives. "We have always renovated houses, and I have always taken on hopeless cases," she admits. "I enjoy bringing them back to life; rescuing them. It's what we have always done, but I didn't know what I would do with this house."

"In 1928 it would have been very modern," continues Sheila. However, she has managed to modernise it to 21st century standards, while keeping the best of the house's original design intact. "It was run down and in a terrible state,

but it had historic importance. I had never heard of its original owner Borlase Smart; It was only after we bought it that I found out who he was."

Smart was a painter, writer and founding member of the artistic collective the 'St Ives School,' after World War I, who worked as an art critic and taught a number of important St Ives artists – including Peter Lanyon, whose work today sells for six figure sums. With Smart having enthusiastically promoted other artists, it seems only fitting that the house has been brought back to life by a fellow artist.

"He was a real conservationist," says Sheila; "if it wasn't for him the old town wouldn't exist anymore." She adds: "It was a real irony that now his own house was almost gone. It's a part of history and once gone, it would be gone forever."

#### RETAINING THE BEST

The house had been untouched for many years by the previous owner who had lived there for more than three decades. While this created a challenge in the renovation, it also meant there were many valuable elements and features that had been left intact.

"In the first year, we initially intended to camp outside for the first phase of the refurb but the weather was so bad that we camped inside instead," says Sheila. "All our furniture was in stor-

#### LOW POINT

"Renovating the crittall windows that are so much a part of the building's character. It took two years!"





The house has six exterior walls

## SHEILA'S FAVOURITE FEATURE

"The library which was created from a dark sitting room. It's perfect for cosy evenings. I love the rustic simplicity"

age. It was all open fires and candlelight, very romantic. But I found living in the build helped me to understand the layout."

Part of the skill of renovation is knowing what to keep and what to replace. "We kept everything that we could and that was worth keeping. And we got things locally if we could." For Sheila, keeping the original crittall windows was non-negotiable, despite advice from a builder to rip them out and replace them. The steel framed windows formed part of the Art Deco and Modernist architectural movements of the 1920s and 1930s and were designed with slim frames to cause minimum disruption to the view. Sheila admits the numerous windows were hard work and incredibly time consuming to restore, while also meeting building safety regulations. The work involved stripping, resetting and repainting them, and took more than two years to complete.

"It was really hard work," she says. "Stripping them down alone took six months. It was painstaking to get the paint off." But she has no regrets. These huge windows are a major feature in every room of the house and all look out onto a fairly priceless view.

While much of the outside remains unchanged – inside, the house has been gutted and the living spaces redesigned. Windows have been

*It was grasped from the jaws of redevelopment thanks to Sheila's determination to recognise the building's importance*

added to previously solid walls, and plumbing and wiring was completely replaced. Three bathrooms were added to create ensuite bedrooms, and meet the expectations of luxury modern living.

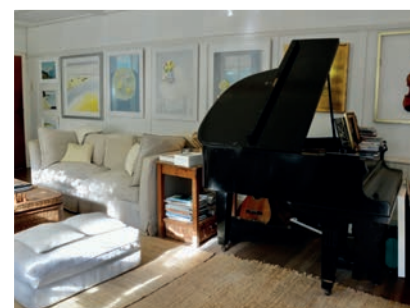
## KITCHEN & LIVING SPACES

The kitchen was the hardest part of the project, admits Sheila. Both the floor and the ceiling had to be completely replaced, and they had to track down salvaged crittall windows to add to a





A small open plan orangery off the living room is used to showcase art



previously solid wall. "There wasn't a view from the kitchen before," she explains. Now a dining area by the new windows looks out onto St Ives harbour, and the alteration is seamless from both outside and in.

Sheila has used the low-tech kitchen she inherited to inspire the layout and design to reflect a slower pace of life in the kitchen, where antique pieces mingle with industrial accessories from the 1950s. It's a reminder of the age of the house, which was the home of a geologist for 35 years before the couple bought the property. The kitchen is functional and beautiful, with white stained wooden walls and a hint of 1950s industrial chic that reflects the era of some of the original retained features, including the cooker. A woodburner has replaced a cavernous hole left by the boiler, and in front sit two welcoming sheepskin-draped chairs. The work surface is largely unmarred by the modern gadgets of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. This is intentional, says Sheila, whose décor aesthetic is more akin to that of the 1920s.

The interiors reflect Sheila's taste for natural and organic colours and textures. Nothing has been wasted; furniture and accessories have been kept or repurposed. During the work, the couple uncovered original valuable features, including impressive tiled fireplaces.

Her approach is to reuse or repurpose furniture and features where possible. "Each house that we have renovated, we put in the same furniture or recycled it," says Sheila. Even turf that was removed from the garden was reused on the roof of her new design studio, created in 2017. Its shape mirrors part of the house – a hexagonal tower that juts out from the main building: "I wanted to make the studio contemporary by incorporating a grass roof to the design."

Sheila has added a library in the tower, replacing what was a dark, uninspiring sitting room. The bare and dilapidated curved walls are now covered in well-stocked bookshelves that still follow the curved walls. She created the room for her scientist husband Gunter – even adding display cases holding assorted curiosities. But this





The main bedroom has a monochrome feel with period furniture



The circular library is one of Sheila's favourite rooms



cosy room has become a favourite of the couple, where they often relax in front of the fire. This was another find uncovered during the work on the house, which also has wooden floors throughout.

But it is in the living room that the house fully reveals itself. A giant fireplace sits at one end of the room, while the opposite end hosts a curiously shaped glass house that has been cut into the corner of the room – where plinths display sculpture and tables are filled with the familiar accoutrements of an artist.

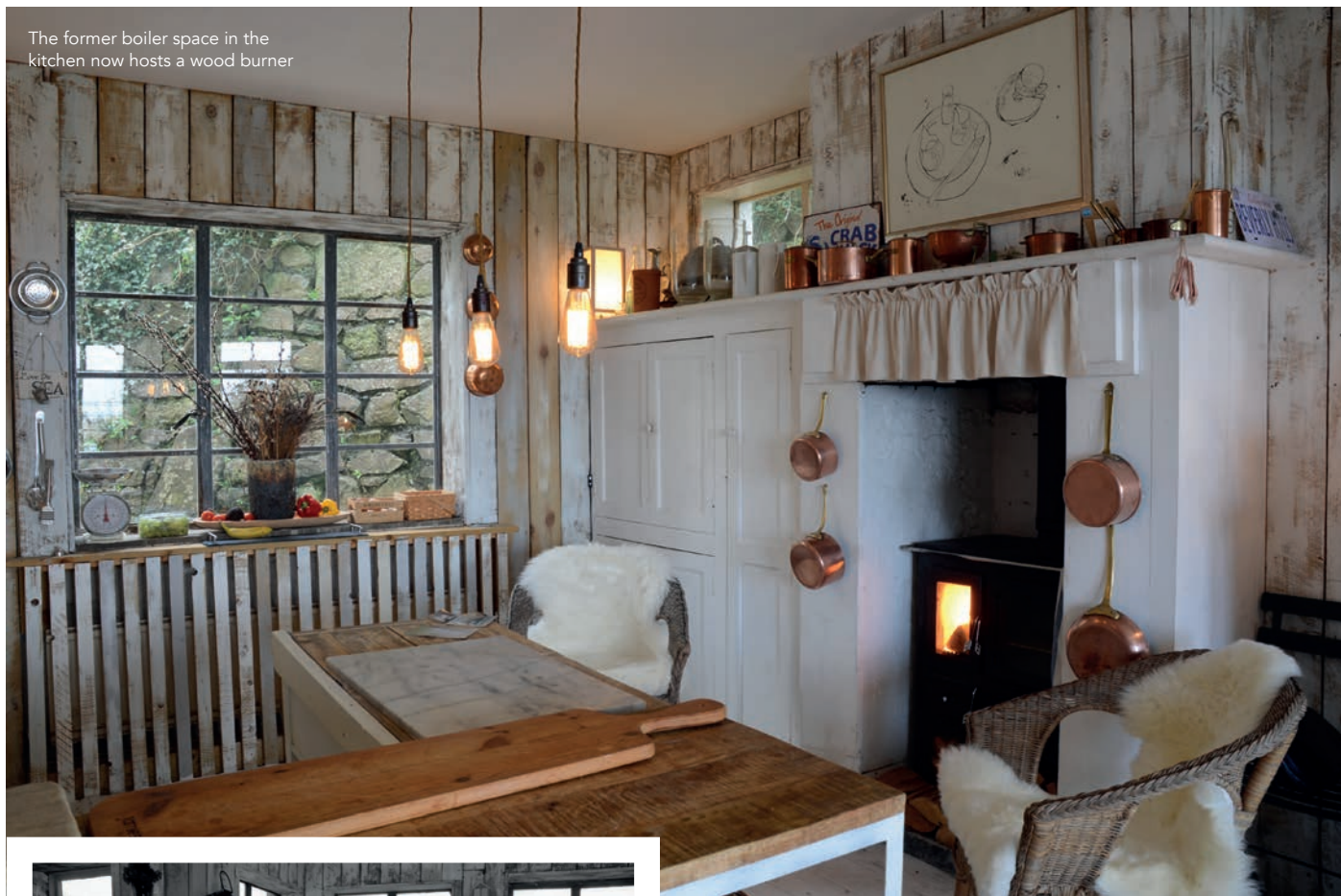
"We think the fireplace in the living room is by [St Ives potter] Bernard Leach," she says proudly. "When we bought the house, it was all blocked in. There was a tiny space but the proportions looked odd." Exploring further they found a

## *Being an experienced renovator, Sheila was excited by the challenge*

large fireplace filled with rubble. "We noticed the tiles went right back," she explains. And, so they continued to excavate the hole until the century-old tiles and original fireplace revealed itself. It has now become the centrepiece of the room, which has been designed as a



The former boiler space in the kitchen now hosts a wood burner



The crittall windows are a major feature in every room in the house



The kitchen had been untouched for 40 years when the couple bought the house

social space to be enjoyed by the couple and their extended family, including their four grandchildren.

Upstairs a light filled hallway acts as a link between the two wings of the house. At one end sits a guest suite for her daughter and grandchildren, while the other end houses a master suite that boasts a monochrome design and period furniture reflecting its 1920s origins. The long hallway between has become an overspill to Sheila's studio where she can work while taking in the incredible views of the famous harbour and the light that surrounds it.

## LEARNINGS

Ty Bryn is her sixth project, but she thinks it

will definitely be her last. But her experiences have left her ideally placed to offer advice. For her it has been about following her own style, and reusing as much as possible.

"It's tricky," she says of updating such a classic and important house. "You need to keep the feel of the house, but you have to be able to live in it now."

Looking back a decade since she started the project, Sheila is still reticent about it being finished. "We are still renovating it," she admits. "Seeing all the before photos makes me realise what we've actually achieved and it makes me so grateful to have this amazing house with such iconic views of St Ives. I can't imagine what would have become of it if it hadn't been rescued." ■



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