

selfbuilder + homemaker

JUL/AUG 2022

Søren's Scandi Fashion House

A dingy west London fashion showroom has been turned into a light delight

A concrete plan for efficiency

MMC isn't just about offsite – ICF can be an efficient and quick way to achieve an airtight build

Ideas & Inspiration: Home Offices

Home working continues to be in vogue, so pick the best products for a productive space

A timber transformation

Animal lovers Jules and Nigel reinvented a tired old bungalow in Suffolk in a project which – unlike their donkeys' names – was neither Chaos nor Shambles

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PUBLISHER

Anthony Parker

MANAGING EDITOR

James Parker

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Tom Boddy

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Laura Shadwell

STAFF WRITER

Roseanne Field

CONTRIBUTORS

Nik Hunter
Jess Unwin
Heather Dixon

STUDIO MANAGER

Mikey Pooley

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Georgia Musson
Kimberley Musson

ACCOUNT MANAGER

Sheehan Edmonds

SALES EXECUTIVES

Nathan Hunt
Steve Smith

PR EXECUTIVES

Suzanne Easter
Kim Friend

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Simon Reed

PUBLISHED BY



Cointronic House,
Station Road, Heathfield
East Sussex, TN21 8DF

ADVERTISING & ADMINISTRATION

01435 863500
info@netmagmedia.co.uk
www.sbhonline.co.uk

EDITORIAL FEATURES

jpark@netmagmedia.co.uk

PRESS RELEASES

editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION & CIRCULATION ENQUIRIES

info@netmagmedia.co.uk



FROM THE EDITOR...

In all the shenanigans around the Conservative Party's attempt to elect its new leader (and by default, our new Prime Minister), one phrase keeps coming up. That of the party being a 'broad church.' This is of course a good line to use when being asked about the very big differences that exist among MPs when it comes to how to tackle the Cost of Living Crisis, alongside other massive challenges like addressing net zero 2050.

However, away from the tax versus borrowing debates bedevilling Parliament, we too are proud of being a broad church here at Selfbuilder + Homemaker. By that I mean that we are fortunate to be able to bring you the widest possible array of content, ensuring you'll find something, or at least interesting, in every issue.

For example in this issue, we look at a self-builder lucky enough to own a small fashion showroom near Hyde Park since the 1960s. This glamorous-sounding life has inspired Dane Søren Ellemann and his partner to turn the building into a home that combines cosiness with space and light in a brilliant way.

At the other end of the spectrum, an equally revealing piece from Graf UK explains how to get around the sewage implications of having to tackle sites that may previously have been off-limits. That's truly a broad church!

JAMES PARKER



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

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WWW.DESIGNLONDON.CO.UK

NATIONAL SELF BUILD & RENOVATION SHOW

23 - 24 SEPTEMBER, SWINDON
WWW.NSBRC.CO.UK/WHATS-ON



ON THE COVER...

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Michael Edwards of Complete Stair Systems shares his expert advice on choosing a spiral staircase for either a new self-build or refurbishment project

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A concrete idea for efficiency

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When David and Lisa Collins' circumstances changed, a tired 1960s bungalow in Leeds offered not only the chance to build their dream house, but also gave them the perfect opportunity to move nearer to their daughter

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When James and Lorna Hamilton made their decision to self-build, their new home had to meet not only the demands of their growing family but also recognise Lorna's family heritage

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Scandi fashion house

A Scandinavian-inspired renovation of a former fashion showroom in a prime west London site has produced a light, elegant home with the Danish owners' sense of style, and a 'Hygge' feel

Connecting with the outside

Considering bifold or sliding doors for your self-build or renovation project? Matt Higgs from Kloeber answers some of the key questions to help ensure you choose the right glazed doors for your home



It's not surprising that bifold and sliding doors are one of the most desired features in any self-build or renovation project. They create the wow-factor homeowners are looking for and are ideal for maximising natural light and connecting your home with the outdoors. Choosing between the two comes down to personal preference and what will work with your project, both practically and aesthetically.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BIFOLD DOORS?

Bifolds are ideal for welcoming the outside into your home. They are made up of multiple, hinged panels that slide and concertina together, stacking at one or at both sides. They have the ability to open

up to 95% of the aperture, so are perfect for smaller openings.

Most suppliers will offer a variety of configurations, with inward or outward opening options to suit the layout of your home. And for those with children or pets, adding a single access door will be useful.

Popular material choices for bifold doors are timber or aluminium. Engineered timber is strong, durable with great insulating values and can be painted or stained while aluminium offers a contemporary, hard-wearing maintenance-free finish.

HOW DO I WORK OUT THE NUMBER OF PANELS NEEDED?

The number of panels you will need is dependent on the width of the aperture and the width of the panels. Bifolds can start with three panels at 2090 mm total frame width or, at the other end of the scale, you can get panel widths up to 1500 mm. Speak to a reputable supplier to review your plans and work out the best options available for your project.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SLIDING DOORS?

If an 'unadulterated' view is important, then a sliding door could be the best choice. Sliding doors work well with larger apertures as they open up by sliding the panels to one or both sides

with the panes fitting behind each other on two, three or four tracks.

This means you can't fully open up the aperture, the maximum opening will be around 70%. But when closed, the view isn't impaired by the frame lines.

Aluminium is the popular choice for those preferring slimline frames and sleek, minimal styling but alu-clad (aluminium exterior and timber interior) is also an option for sliding doors, if a warmer internal aesthetic and higher performance is preferred.

WHAT PANEL SIZES CAN I HAVE?

Sliding door panel sizes start at around 500 mm and go up to a whopping 4200 mm however bear in mind that some cheaper systems may have limited panel size options, so you'll need more panels to span a wide opening. At the higher end of the market, you will find options with ultra-slim sightlines combined with large panels on offer.

WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN INSTALLING LARGE EXPANSES OF GLASS?

The precision of the aperture is very important, the right amount of tolerance is key to installing the frame level and plumb. It's also important to ensure there's the right strength in your lintel above the opening. Other things to consider are how the flooring, and internal and external finishes interact with the frame. Bifold or sliding doors with large expanses of glass will lose more heat, and could let in more heat than you'd like, especially on a south facing elevation, so you need to consider the type of glass used. For example, a south facing home would benefit from solar control glass and for a north facing home, low iron glass would help increase solar gain.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT GLAZING FOR BIFOLD OR SLIDING DOORS?

Try and attain the best U-values that are possible – glass will always let out more heat than a solid wall, so it's always a good idea to consider triple glazing or a high performing double glazed unit. Different frame materials also have different thermal properties with timber usually being a good choice. It's important to pay consideration to how the doors fold or slide, and how they seal up between panels. Thermal and weather testing reports should be available from reputable companies who are selling

The precision of the aperture is very important, the right amount of tolerance is key to installing the frame level

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CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THERMAL VALUES ARE?

A U-value measures heat loss, so the lower the U-value, the less heat lost. Doors have to achieve a U-value of 1.6 or less to comply with regulations for new builds and 1.4 on extensions and alterations.

The G-value, is also important, which is the measure of how much solar heat and

light is transferred from outside to inside. A G-value of 1, represents full transmittance of all solar radiation, while 0, represents no solar energy transmittance. Most G-values will range between 0.2 and 0.7, with solar control glazing having a G-value of less than 0.5.

WHAT DRAINAGE AND WATER-PROOFING CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD BE MADE?

Always ask your supplier for weather testing reports. High quality doors will always have extensive weather testing and will be of a superior quality. How much your house is exposed to weather can be a real factor here in determining your choice. If you're in a very exposed area then it's advisable to go for a low maintenance material with good Pascal (air permeability) ratings.

With regards to the outside it's always best to have a small gap between the paving or decking to allow for water to



drain away from the doors into a drain under the external floor. It's also best practice to have the external floor just slightly lower than the internal, to negate any risk of water ingress. A reputable company should be able to provide details of this and show you exactly how to achieve the desired effect.

Matt Higgs is managing director of Kloeber

If an 'unadulterated' view is important to you, then a sliding door could be the best choice

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www.luxorliving.co.uk




MASTERING BEDROOM BLISS

Bedrooms should be a place to relax and rejuvenate. Rob Lessmann from interior design studio Design'd Living explains how to create the perfect master bedroom ambience

Creating zones for work, relaxation and entertainment is key



We spend a lot of our time in a bedroom, so it is imperative to master the art of creating main bedroom bliss, and for many, a contemporary design works well for creating a place of calm and serenity.

CONSIDER THE SPACE

For the many that plan on totally renovating their main bedroom, it is important to firstly define the requirements of the space. Ask yourself the following question. What is going to be the three main uses of the bedroom?

For example; will you get dressed in it or will you have a dressing room for this? Are there requirements for a space to do makeup and hair? Will you be reading or working from the bedroom? Is the space large enough to create a lounging area too? Often having a space to put your clothes when you get undressed is neglected, so consider having a sofa, armchair, or bench with inbuilt storage.

Once you have the fundamentals, you can start to think about how to make best use of the space to allow for a tranquil flow throughout.

MINIMISE THE CLUTTER

Modern bedrooms generally include neutral wall tones, with clean lines being key to the design, and that is really where bespoke joinery comes in. Fitted headboards made in easy to clean materials, with bedside tables integrated, along with wardrobes that hide it all including internal drawers all add up to create simplicity and a cohesive look. After all, this space is to rest in, so by having minimal clutter on show, you can create a relaxing environment. The space in a bedroom is so important, and keeping it flowing is

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key to making the best use of the space.

BE CREATIVE

Master bedrooms today have very minimal storage, so look for places or void areas in the current space that you can turn into clever bespoke storage solutions during a renovation. Creating a floor to ceiling wall of cabinetry focused on a plan to install a TV or around a window is a really easy way to add storage to store everyday items that you don't want on show.

CREATE ZONED AREAS

We have all had to adapt to spending more time in our homes over the last few years, therefore space in the master bedroom must be more multifunctional. Creating zones for work, relaxation and entertainment is key. Even if the space is small, a clever use of partitions or lighting can clearly define areas to relax, work, and enjoy media; this is crucial for homes in 2022.

LIGHTING

Lighting is vital in a master bedroom, it is probably the most important room in the

house to get the lighting right. You want lighting that serves a purpose; reading lights, makeup lights, wardrobe lighting, backlighting to highlight certain areas as well as soft lighting. Getting your bedroom lighting right is key for ensuring quality sleep and also creating a relaxing ambience. It is important to be able to dim lights in the bedroom, so introduce a dimmer switch or consider a smart bulb or wall mounted bedside lamps.

Consider your bulbs too; warm bulbs are better in the bedroom than cooler LED lights, which emulate daylight and make it harder for the brain to produce melatonin. If your bedroom needs to be multifunctional, consider brighter LED lights in the ceiling and place them in areas where you need light, for instance at a dressing table or in front of a mirror so you can see well while you get ready.

Make sure that all the lighting is able to be switched on and off from a central point, ideally at the side of the bed and by the door.

ELECTRICS

Similarly, sockets in bedrooms are the

one place people compromise on, but they often have the most demand in a bedroom, just think of charging ports, hair tools such as straighteners and hairdryers, as well as being the place for a hidden TV and music system. You can also go a step further with electrics and integrate your curtains. The greatest luxury is to have black out curtains and blinds that close with the push of a button and most importantly keep the light out for a perfect night's sleep. With smart electrics becoming more popular, planning for a central point to switch on all your devices is imperative.

FLOORING

Flooring is also a key consideration when renovating the master bedroom. It is incredibly important to consider materials, especially in high traffic areas, or if there are going to be pets or children in the room. Looking at the renovation holistically will allow you to plan flooring which is liveable and workable throughout the space.

Rob Lessmann is the founder of interior design studio Design'd Living



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IDEAS & INSPIRATION: HOME OFFICES

With many people now using a mix of home and office working since the pandemic, self-builders are placing the design of home offices right at an even higher priority. Here are some of the latest ideas

1. Warwick Buildings' Curved Office comes with a set of UPVC French double doors, two side screen windows and a casement window, Redwood Cedar cladding and not forgetting the unique curved roof. This outdoor office is sure to be a talking point within your garden landscape. Pricing starts at £10,000.

www.warwickbuildings.co.uk

2. The new Minimal Lamp by Rose & Grey is designed by Dutch designer, Laurie Roijackers, with the shape inspired by birds. The design of the lamp creates a timeless minimal aesthetic, and the shade can be adjusted to redirect the light. It is also available in beige and as a floor lamp. Priced at £195.

www.roseandgrey.co.uk



3. The Stanford Industrial 2 Drawer Filing Cabinet by Modish Living is a reclaimed wood filing cabinet in a rustic industrial style. The two drawers are set on distressed black metal legs, adding to the industrial feel. The cabinet is perfect for a stylish home office, and is priced at £389.
www.modishliving.co.uk

4. The Boston Natural Solid Oak and Metal Desk by Oak Furnitureland includes a natural oak grain and knot patterns which are set off by metal sleigh legs and accent strips. Three shallow drawers across and two deep ones on the right give plenty of options for organising the home office in industrial style. Currently priced at £574.99.
www.oakfurnitureland.co.uk

5. Step up your storage and style with this Modular Home Office Desk with storage by Shelved. Thanks to the shelving's modular nature, you can assemble this unit to step to either the left or right, meaning you don't have to worry about the design only being suitable for one area of your home. Price: £1274.45
www.shelved.co.uk

6. Cult Furniture's Emily Office Chair uses velvet upholstery and a sleek metal frame for a comfortable yet robust seating option when working from home. The wooden armrests and modern silhouette create a Scandinavian feel to your home office. Price: £129.
www.cultfurniture.com

Building Adhesives and ARDEX celebrate awards success

Building Adhesives Ltd and ARDEX have celebrated award success at this year's Tile Association Awards.

Held at The Hilton Birmingham Metropole on Friday (24th June), this year's awards were themed "Stronger Together", and recognised the best of the best in the tiling industry.

Success began with David Wilson, UK Head of Standards and Specifications at ARDEX and Building Adhesives Ltd being presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his more than 35 years' service to the tiling industry.

Chosen by the TTA Board, this award recognises an individual who has made an outstanding contribution on the growth, promotion, technical or training areas of the wall and floor tile industry during their career.

A respected and leading industry voice, David first joined Building Adhesives Ltd as an R&D Chemist. A member of the Royal Society of



Chemistry, David sits on numerous industry bodies including BSI B539 Technical Committee, CEN (European) Standards TC 67 WG3 and the TTA Technical Committee and has been responsible for helping to formulate many of the British Standards that tilers and contractors work to today.

Success continued for Building Adhesives and ARDEX with Stacey Livett, UK Head of Customer Service, being awarded "Employee of the Year".

Stacey was recognised for successfully integrating customer service and order

management teams at Stoke-on-Trent and Haverhill, while facing major raw materials shortages, COVID restrictions and force majeure.

Despite these challenging conditions, she has helped deliver record orders for customers as well as ensuring end-users are supported with technical and product enquiries now fed into the joint team.

Finally, ARDEX and Building Adhesives tasted success with "Highly Commended" in the Best Domestic Category, for a Dream Pool Project in Staffordshire by Rob Faulkner and his team from Abstract Pools.

A very labour-intensive project, Rob carried out all the rendering, screed works, and installed the hand-built steam room, formed-experience showers, massage room and high-end changing room.

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UK Architects for eco house manufacturer Baufritz

When clients start their self-build project by deciding on a prefabricated timber frame house, the process is very similar to any self-build project. The key differences are that the builder is already known, they are an integral part of the project from the very start, and the house elements are manufactured in a factory using Modern Manufacturing Methods to create prefabricated modules. These modules are transported to the client site and erected, where all the pieces fit together perfectly to reveal the completed house.

Most experienced self-builders will recognise the Baufritz Architectural process. It starts with an initial feasibility study to understand the viability of the project. Here cost implications are understood which means alternative design approaches may be necessary. They then create the outline proposal where Baufritz can work through the client's ideas. Once the design is chosen and initial cost analysis completed, the house price is agreed before the plans are submitted to planning. This ensures that there are no nasty surprises in terms of build costs, once planning consent has been granted. This is where most traditional build projects start to go wrong. As the project price is agreed, the client can proceed, with the assurance that their overall budget will not be exceeded.

Once planning has been granted the client then starts engaging with the Factory to finalise the details of their project.

Baufritz has taken this method one step further to include all the interior elements, resulting in a completed

house which is designed, manufactured and shipped like a giant jigsaw puzzle with detailed plans. Everything from taps to tiles is included. When an architect and client use a pre-fabricator like Baufritz, their approach should be slightly different from other building methods.

A good analogy is with a car configurator. Firstly, you start with an idea about the kind of car you want, then you select all the elements that make up your car (engine, wheels, trim levels etc). Once you've configured your car it's then sent for manufacturing. Sometime later your car arrives adhering to the configurations requested, at the price and date agreed. Baufritz has used this idea for their latest innovation - "My Smart Green Home". This is a digital platform to help clients develop their house. Individual elements are selected and brought together using supported configurations. Room layouts, finishes and the location of elements are completed in a 3D rendered house. The vision here is to allow clients to work through their ideas before incurring costs or making expensive changes to their completed designs.

The Design centre in Germany is where a client can select the materials, finishes, fixtures, and fittings. This is also where they can start to engage with the interior designers to finalise their interior layout. The experience of Baufritz is invaluable to a selfbuilder. Their research and development can optimise materials and space to get the most out of the design. Once the details have been agreed the client will sign a final build contract that considers any changes the client may wish to make during the sampling process.

The Baufritz Architect works with the factory to create a set of handover drawings. These are determined by Building Regulations and include specific details such as wall thickness and type, as well as structural loading information.

The Factory then takes the Building Regulation Drawings and uses these to generate a set of Level 1 manufacturing plans which define the modular elements to millimetre accuracy.

The Computer-Generated Level 1 diagrams are used to manufacture each



modular element, some of which are automated using the factory's robotic tooling, others are completed by skilled craft people on the factory floor.

As the house is manufactured using a certified quality control process, high quality is guaranteed. The creation of each element follows a predefined series of manufacturing steps resulting in a fully tested final product. Quality Control is crucial to ensure that any discrepancies are identified early in the process. It is a well-known fact that any faults that must be corrected on site or later in the build process, cost in terms of quality, time, and money. Baufritz's rigorous Quality Management process ensures any flaws are designed out early on to prevent this. Once the modules are completed, there is a high level of certainty that they will fit together perfectly as the manufacturing process is exact to the millimetre. This is important because low energy houses must not have any air gaps or thermal bridges. When everything fits together perfectly it makes construction a much simpler and quicker process.

Baufritz is continuously improving its houses. Their latest innovation, the modular plant room, is a prefabricated unit containing all the house's technology elements. Namely heating and electrical systems including Battery and PV controller, home networking and entertainment system. It is also possible to include washing and storage space. Completed in the factory and delivered to site, the unit reduces the need for highly skilled on-site specialists.

The best way to understand the process is to book an appointment and meet with our UK team whose offices are in Girton, Cambridge.

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RANCH DRESSING

Animal lovers Jules Hamilton and Nigel Shore have extended and transformed a Suffolk bungalow, using traditional timber cladding and a ranch-style feel to help the home blend with its rural surroundings

TEXT JESS UNWIN IMAGES NIGEL SHORE

"Oh, you're the wooden house with the donkeys!" is the response Jules Hamilton and Nigel Shore are growing used to when the topic of their Suffolk home comes up in conversation with local people.

Jules laughs when she says: "We seem to be a bit famous now in the village – but we've had lots of comments from people who've seen the house and like it, which is very kind."

Nestled in a rural valley, the couple's home today looks nothing like the pink bungalow that could once be seen on their one-acre plot, which is close to the village of Waldringfield and the River Deben.

For starters, at the front of the house, a

sizeable area that stops just shy of a new two-storey extension is now a fenced paddock that's the domain of the couple's miniature Mediterranean donkeys, (who are named Chaos and Shambles!).

The paddock's proximity is a deliberate and charming design quirk of this reimagined property, designed with the animals in mind. Jules, who runs an animal welfare organisation and also breeds dogs, explains: "The donkeys are tame and they're our pets – they come onto the outdoor veranda with us and sometimes come into the house. So, we made sure that they can get close to the house while still being outside, and also that the living room window is

HIGH POINT

"When they craned the bath into the upstairs bedroom. Not much else had been done in the room at that stage but I got in the bath – fully clothed – and looked out at the view. At that moment, I thought to myself: this is really going to be great."

— Jules Hamilton



“It was important that internally we have living space that was ‘broken-plan’ rather than open plan”

LOW POINT

“Probably when our builders had to quit the site at the time of the first pandemic lockdown. Covid was a complete unknown at that point, and we just didn’t know if they were coming back. That was when we were grateful that we hadn’t knocked down the bungalow and still had somewhere to live! But it was still a really miserable couple of months of not knowing whether we’d made the biggest mistake of our lives or if it would all come out right in the end.”

— Jules Hamilton

low enough for them to see us.”

Jules says the donkeys regularly attract the attention of people in passing cars, but the house itself gets just as much interest: “People have knocked on the door to tell us how much they love it or even offer to buy it!”

At least some of that interest is because of the couple’s decision to use wood to clad both the original bungalow and the extension. Jules says: “We’re in a very rural spot, and we wanted to use natural materials wherever possible.” A popular alternative to wood cladding that they could have selected is fibre cement cladding, which has a finish that looks like wood, but is a composite material made of cement, cellulose, sand and synthetic fibres. Advocates claim it can be fitted in less time than wood, and needs less maintenance.

Not everyone agrees with that, and Jules and Nigel, who work in the financial services sector, are definitely happy with their choice. Pressure-treated and planed, their Scandinavian Redwood

cladding is guaranteed for 10 years, and in terms of aesthetics, will silver as it ages. Jules says: “We have had people coming and asking for advice because they’ve seen what we’ve done, and are doing something similar themselves.”

MAKING THE MOVE

The couple’s self-build story would be very different if they’d gone ahead with ambitions to extend their previous home, a semi-detached house in Halstead, Essex. However, in 2015, they sold up and paid £385,000 for the Suffolk plot, which Jules discovered almost by chance while looking for property in the area for a relative. They moved into the existing three-bedroom bungalow straight away and then began the process of coming up with redevelopment plans – and the finances to pay for it.

Jules reveals: “I always knew that I wanted to build a house from scratch, and I had been gathering ideas like a magpie for years. We wanted to marry three design themes: a kind of



a Texas ranch feel, traditional timber cladding and Cotswold stone."

She adds: "It was also important that internally we have living space that was 'broken-plan' rather than open plan. That's because we needed to be able to zone it a bit so that the space would work for just us two but also for when we had family here to stay."

A local architectural design company helped bring the couple's ideas and plans into focus but also, crucially, persuaded them to reposition the new-build extension at one end of the bungalow so that it would fill the space provided by demolishing an existing garage.

The couple secured the services of a recommended two-man building team, who also shared the task of project management: "We were very lucky to get them because we were the last house they did before retiring," says Jules. "Not only were they skilled at the tasks they took on, but they knew the right roofers to get in, and they introduced us to the most amazing electrician – they just had a working lifetime of good contacts that we benefited from."

WORK BEGINS

With the couple continuing to live onsite in the

bungalow, construction work on the extension finally began in December 2019. While they had been fortunate to find good builders, they were then unlucky in the timing of their self-build project, as March 2020 brought the first Covid-19 lockdown.

Jules says: "It was a bit frightening at first when work stopped because none of us knew what would happen next, but eventually everything got going again in earnest. When the cost of materials then went up, we realised we'd been fortunate once again, because our builders had pre-ordered all the wood and plaster. In fact, we had to hide everything because of all the theft that was going on at building sites around the country."

Although a lot of time was spent chasing various suppliers, construction of the extension didn't suffer a serious delay, and was finished in September 2020. Activity shifted in 2021 to significant landscaping, installing wooden decking and stone patio around the house and creating off-road parking space. A wooden shepherd's hut on wheels, supplied by Dutch company Tuin, was installed next to the house as Nigel's office, while a stable block has also been built for the donkeys.

Jules and Nigel's preference for wood goes

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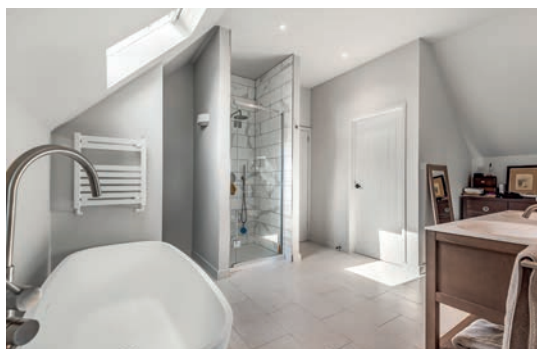
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beyond the cladding that so effectively unifies the old and new structures of their new-look home, which is now more than twice the footprint of the bungalow at 221 m². All the doors and window frames are wood, and they commissioned a bespoke wooden stairway at a cost of £4,000.

Another wooden feature, and something that was a must-have when the couple designed their self-build, is the veranda at the front of the house. Jules explains: "Having a veranda – which is the main Texan design influence – was important to us, because we're outdoor people, and we wanted a covered outdoor space we could occupy all year round to take in the view." The veranda is topped by the same Spanish slate that roofs the rest of the house and which helps to visually unite the bungalow with extension.

A 'BROKEN-PLAN' LAYOUT

Inside, Jules and Nigel have the 'broken-plan' layout they were after. The main living space

takes up most of the extension downstairs, but also spills into a lounge area that is part of the footprint of the old bungalow. Beyond this, through a connecting door, the rest of the bungalow has been reconfigured to be self-contained with three bedrooms and two bathrooms – perfect for visiting family and friends.

Returning to the main living space, the standout features include the ground-to-ceiling double-sided log burner and the stylish kitchen with its white units and granite working surfaces. Delivering another of the design themes on the couple's wishlist, there's also what looks like a Cotswold stone wall, but is in fact cleverly disguised composite stone cladding that's just as striking as the real thing. Behind that wall is another mini extension that's home to two further spaces: a pantry with a walk-in larder and a utility room.

Saving the most impressive space for last, upstairs in the main extension is the couple's open-plan master bedroom, complete with a

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TOP SELF-BUILD TIPS FROM JULES & NIGEL



- Everyone says it, but the benefits of being onsite just can't be over-estimated. You must do your homework on the details of what you want and make sure it gets done. On our build, for example, when we were putting up the timber framework, I noticed we were missing an aperture for a window. A quick check of the plans confirmed it.
- Your relationship with the builder is so important. Ours was a continuous dialogue with a healthy amount of give and take. A good builder will have ideas worth listening to – for example, it was our builder who suggested a timber frame for the extension would be quicker and more cost-effective than using brick.
- We are grateful that we took time to decide what we wanted to do and find the right architectural professionals to work with. Inevitably there will be adjustments during the build, but you should be happy with what you're going to do before you start.



stone bath, ensuite toilet and shower, and walk-in wardrobe. It's topped off by a fantastic countryside view through the French doors and a Juliet balcony.

Besides industry-standard insulation, 'green' features at the property include underfloor heating, which along with the rest of the house's hot water is heated by an air source heat pump. The pump cost £13,000 to install but a government grant means the couple will eventually be refunded £9,800 of that outlay. Roof-mounted solar panels to generate electricity for a new swimming pool are among plans for the future.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

Jules and Nigel borrowed £300,000 from Suffolk Building Society for their self-build, but had to find additional funding elsewhere when

the final cost was £85,000 over that budget. Jules says: "Going over budget was by choice – we just didn't want to compromise too much on materials and finishes. The result is a larger mortgage than planned, but we're comfortable with that decision."

The couple are delighted with their reinvented home, which has now been valued at £1.25m. Jules says: "We like the exterior finish, and it caters to our outdoor lifestyle. Inside, the house delivers what we wanted with its very clever layout."

She concludes: "When there's just the two of us, we live very comfortably in the new-build extension. When we have family and friends here, we have the self-contained bedrooms where the old bungalow was – so as a property it works for two people, and it works for 10 people. We love it." ■



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Drain care or beware

Self-builders face particular challenges when it comes to wastewater drainage options, says David Stagg from Graf UK

While the self-build sector proved more resilient than the wider new housebuilding market during Covid, new challenges are making themselves felt.

Although there are signs the exodus of people relocating from cities to the country during Covid is reversing, there is still great demand for properties and plots of land in the rural areas that have traditionally been the popular hunting grounds for self-builders.

This has reduced the number and quality of plots available to self-builders to such a degree that many are now having to consider land they may have dismissed before. This includes land with drainage challenges such as unstable ground, a high water table, poor percolation in, for instance, clay ground, the availability of a well-percolated drainage field, or even suitable site layout as ideally a gravity fall is recommended on pipework to avoid having to use a pump. This can be further complicated if the plot is in a protected area requiring a special discharge licence from the Environment Agency.

Wastewater management is a top priority for any property – but different property types often have distinct drainage requirements, and new builds can pose a number of specific challenges that need to be taken into account and handled carefully, particularly when it is a first-time project for the self-builder.

Many of the issues that arise with self-build properties are a consequence of the fact they are more often than not built from scratch, with no previous residents to stress-test the drainage or past history to establish how the new pipes and plumbing will cope with the realities of day-to-day use.

Drainage is one of the first elements of a self-build, with much of the subsequent construction sitting on top of it. Therefore, a mistake with the drainage may only become apparent once the build is complete and the owners have moved in, making these problems difficult to rectify.

Common mistakes made during the drainage installation process include the selection of incorrect pipe sizes, wrong pipe gradients, erroneous

cross-connections and poor backfilling. These problems can increase the risk of displaced pipes causing blockages, poor drainage, flooding or foul water being accidentally discharged into open watercourses, which is why it is so important to get this process right.

Many of these issues come up frequently when self-building and can cause considerable inconvenience and expense so it's essential to bear in mind a number of best practice tips when designing a self-build drainage system.

One of the most valuable tips is to plan for the long term. The design of the drainage system should be future-proofed – building in the correct capacity to meet foreseeable future demands and any peaks and troughs in demand, and creating plenty of access points for maintenance and pumping out the sludge.

It's also advisable to be proactive about drain care from day one. Self-builders moving into their newly completed property have a rare opportunity to make use of a drainage system that's completely new, without any wear or blockages caused by the bad habits of previous tenants. And it is important to keep it that way as there is no worse problem than a sewage problem!

Self-builders could consider arranging for the drainage groundwork to be carried out by the ground workers at the same time as, or straight after, the foundations. Diggers will be onsite and the same lorries that remove the foundation spoil can take away the excess from the drainage trenches.

The groundwork element of a drainage installation is the most expensive, as the equipment, be it a cesspool, septic tank or wastewater treatment plant, is typically a fraction of the cost, so it's important to optimise this. A soakaway may also be required if the system is not connected for surface water run-off.

Manufacturers of wastewater treatment systems who offer an approved network of fully trained installers (specialist contractors who install, commission, service and maintain systems), as well as extensive warranties in the event of an issue, should be a self-builder's first port of call.



Some are even prepared to visit sites to analyse all aspects of the scheme so the most cost-effective long-term solution can be designed. This is the time when specific site issues such as high-water tables/tidal waters can be identified and accounted for.

Bear in mind that while an intelligent wastewater treatment system may have more up-front costs, it is designed specifically to minimise long-term running costs. Those using the SBR (Sequence Batch Reactor) process control effluent quality discharge while being efficient on energy consumption. They can also automatically adapt to a system becoming under or over-charged, so performance is kept to a high standard and energy efficiency is not compromised.

Manufacturers can also advise on the latest legislation such as the update to the General Binding Rules which is a bid by the Environment Agency to reduce the level of sewage pollution in the nation's watercourses. Under the new rules, anyone with a septic tank discharging into a watercourse must replace it or upgrade the foul water solution.

Another is Natural England's "advice" to local authorities to halt the determination of planning applications unless the developments can prove they will be nutrient – nitrogen and phosphate – neutral. High levels of these nutrients, which come partly from wastewater treatment discharges, cause excessive growth of green algae which smothers rare habitats and wildlife.

David Stagg is technical product manager at Graf UK

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Architect chooses Yeoman Rainguard for home renovation

Spatial Design Architect, Sharron Dobrev, when renovating the exterior of her late Victorian home, chose Yeoman Rainguard rainwater systems for both functionality and design capabilities to achieve a desired finish.

Having started by completely gutting and refurbishing the home's interior, attention was turned to the fading grandeur of the property, which was originally built c.1910.

The addition of an attractive bright white rendering brought vivacity back to the house where Yeoman Rainguard's gutters, pipes and soil pipe products were chosen.

Colour matched in harmony with the white wall finishes, Yeoman Rainguard XL aluminium 125 x 100 mm MOG gutters and 75 mm dia. downpipes were installed by the Yeoman Rainguard team to the majority of the house.

A high functioning system, the XL



is light weight with a powder coating, offering a traditional looking product with modern benefits, such as robustness, long lifecycle, very low maintenance and recyclability.

GRP guttering was bespoke manufactured in the MOG profile to accommodate a radius required over a bay. This, being compatible to the XL range, was able to feed into the XL Aluminium run of guttering at either side.

Cast iron TX Soil Pipes in the same white colour to maintain aesthetics were also installed.

Experience, skills and a comprehensive range of products, enabled Yeoman Rainguard to accommodate all the specific requirements for this older property renovation project.

Ms Dobrev commented "The installation team not only did a great fit but were very tidy and considerate in cleaning up afterwards.

"I would certainly use the product again and have already recommended them and the team to others."

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CASE STUDY

THE TRAILS ALL LEAD HOME

Calum and Gladys Trail looked at a lot of options for pursuing a self-build, and they managed to find the answer under their noses, on their existing site in the north east of Scotland

TEXT TOM BODDY **IMAGES** NEIL GORDON







Even when they moved into their bungalow – built by Gladys’ parents in Inverurie, Aberdeenshire – over a decade ago, the chance to build their own place was on her and partner Calum’s minds.

In fact, one of the main reasons why they moved here, as well as the sentimental value of keeping the building within the family, was that the half-acre plot of land had potential for another home to be built on it. Finally, after 13 years living there, the Trails decided it was time to fulfil their dream.

Having both grown up in Inverurie, moving out of the area was always going to be hard for the couple. At one point they contemplated moving to more rural parts, but quickly dismissed this idea; Gladys was “concerned that it wouldn’t be a good idea as they got older,” explains Calum.

In addition, their existing home was in the ideal location; “We had easy access to Aberdeen as well as having great shopping facilities.” Whatever the next step in their journey was, it was going to be in Inverurie.

Although a self-build was their big ambition, they did consider some other options along the way. “We had a look around some new builds in the area, but they all seemed to be very close together,” says Calum, adding: “We were used to living in a large, open plot of land.”

They also nearly went down the route of selling the land to a developer, but in the end, because of the location’s convenience and potential, they finally decided that they were going to build in their own back garden. “We knew that we had enough space for a new house in our garden,” says Calum, “building on it would be an opportunity that we couldn’t afford to miss.”

FABRIC FIRST

Having never designed a house before, the Trails weren’t entirely sure what they wanted, but this meant they approached the project with an open mind. They did however have some preferences in mind. “We wanted an open plan living, kitchen, dining space, as well as lots of glass so the house is flooded with light – those were our main requirements,” assets Calum. A bonus would be to have a music room for Calum, who is a guitarist, and an ensuite dressing room for Gladys.

But before any of the designing started, without planning to do so, the project ended up taking a fabric first approach. As a way of enhancing their self-build knowledge, the couple attended a variety of self-building events. At one of the exhibitions in Glasgow, the couple recognised some of the representatives on a stand. The company was Scotframe, one of the largest suppliers of timber frame kits in the UK, and who happen to be based in Inverurie. “We were very impressed by the quality of the materials and build quality, and by the fact that they were a local company!”

As well as discovering a kit home’s ability to achieve a high insulation rating, they say they were also “wowed” by the cross-sections they saw, which showed “how much insulation goes into the walls.” Also they were keen on how the standard kit designs could be adapted to meet their requirements. With the couple being new to the whole kit building arena, having a company with strong credentials just around the corner was hugely appealing.

Finding an architect was next on the list, and Scotframe recommended architectural technician Martin Cobban. “He was the ideal choice,” says

HIGH POINT

“After watching the house take shape in our back garden for a year, the high point came the day we moved in. It is such a pleasure to live in the house and it delights us every day. Walking into the open plan living space is a continual pleasure.”



LOW POINT

"Finding out that getting a connection to services was going to be difficult and expensive."

Callum, "as he lived directly across the road from us! He was very well placed to keep an eye on the build." Following their brief, Martin "came up with something that we both liked. He was great to work with."

PLANNING PROBLEMS

Obtaining planning permission was slightly more sticky than they had anticipated. The local authority were concerned the proposed design overlooked the Trails' old bungalow, and were "very firm about not allowing that to happen." As this meant revising the original designs, it cost time and money.

To prevent any more hitches, before the second set of plans were submitted the couple organised a site meeting with Martin and the planning official to collaborate on the redesign. "In the new plans the house was moved around by 90 degrees and the bedrooms were switched to the front, leaving us with a south-facing living space, overlooking the garden."

Their case was based on the fact that the house is next door to the regional office of Aberdeen Council, which may be closed at some time in the future, when the site could be given over to housing. Calum explained to the planning official that if the home was orientated in the direction the planners wanted, they could potentially overlook the whole new development. "He took that on board, and after that meeting, the planning department approved our new plans."

BUILDING AROUND OBSTACLES

After appointing local contractor Michael Duncan Builders, who had worked with Scotframe before, the team broke ground on 5 November 2019. The Trails assert that the builders did a "superb

job of coordinating everything" and "making sure that the right people and materials were on hand when needed." Keith Duncan, who handled the build, showed them around homes that he had worked on, pointing out features and making suggestions about what they could do. "It really helped us to get an idea of how we wanted our home to look."

But when Covid hit in March 2020, all work stopped – resuming in September. Fortunately, because of the "incredible" speed in which a Scotframe kit goes up, says Calum, by the time lockdown came around the home was already wind and watertight, meaning the structure wasn't affected by having to sit in limbo. "I was heading to work in the morning when the kit turned up on the back of a lorry, and by the time I got back at 5.30 pm the walls were up and the roof trusses were on!"

On top of Covid, connecting to the utilities was another unforeseen obstacle. "We thought it would be easy to connect to services as we already had a house on site, but it wasn't that simple. In the end, they had to tunnel under the road to get us connected." As this involved putting temporary traffic lights in the street for a week, it was a significant cost which ended up pushing them over their planned budget.

Despite these challenges, Calum says the rest of the process was "reasonably smooth," and that the "level of service that we got from the builders was exceptional." The Trails moved into the new home exactly one year after starting onsite, on 5 November.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Despite the three-bedroom bungalow being constructed using a timber frame, the exterior



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doesn't give this away. The house has been rendered in light roughcast, with black tiling on the roof. The porch housing the large dark front door has been constructed from 'black' granite, which is grey but becomes glossy and black when it rains.

The layout of the home is slightly unusual; the three bedrooms are located at the front where you would usually expect to find the living areas. Two of the bedrooms are ensembles, and the master bedroom features Gladys' dressing room. As you travel down the corridor leading from the front door the home opens out into an open-plan living area with the dining and kitchen spaces.

The aesthetic choice of using elements of black on the exterior, including the anthracite window frames, continues inside. The furniture, lighting, and bathroom walls are finished in black, a strong contrast with the brightness of the walls as well as the oak flooring throughout the home. "We knew that we wanted a clean, contemporary look," says Calum, which is echoed in the floors and 'streamlined' kitchen. A feature in the living space is a large, gable-height window with 'self-cleaning' glass, due to the difficulty of reaching its extremities.

"Our new house is far more efficient, and that makes a difference to fuel bills and our level of comfort," says Calum. It does include gas and electricity, but there are two solar PV and two

solar thermal panels on the roof, the latter to heat the hot water. The home is heated with underfloor heating, but as Calum explains, because of the high solar gain from the windows, "even in winter we hardly ever need to switch the heating on." The high levels of thermal insulation trap the heat, making it warm even in the depth of winter. He adds: "Here in the north east of Scotland winters can be very harsh, but the moment the sun appears the house becomes warm, and it stays warm."

THE RIGHT CHOICES

Although the Trails faced some challenges on their self-build journey, they are over the moon with the final result. "We love the whole look of the house, in particular the open plan space, the amount of light that floods in."

Opting to build with a kit frame was definitely the right choice for the project, explains Calum. "The standard of the kit was exceptional, and it is exactly the house we had hoped for." For the pair, despite Covid, it simplified the construction process and he would recommend anyone who is thinking of it as an option, to go ahead with a timber kit.

With the importance of achieving a low energy home never being so important, particularly now as gas and electric prices are rising, the selection of a timber frame was definitely the "sustainable choice," says Calum. ■



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Coat of many colours

Home colour choices can say a lot about your personality. Lisa Grosse from Cedral discusses how to use the 'colour wheel' approach to get the look you want for a new build home or a makeover

Colour is one of the most important elements in any design scheme to set tone and mood. When choosing colours for your home, it makes sense to go for those that you are naturally drawn to.

COLOURS THAT SUIT YOU

Blues and greens, the colours of nature, signify harmony and stability and surveys suggest that if you are drawn to these colours, you favour serenity and order. People who like blue are thought to be generally quite sensitive, while lovers of green are considered to be open and loyal.

On the other side of the scale, vibrant red denotes passion and excitement, while purple is generally considered an artistic and spiritual colour. White means you are organised and logical while black suggests you value your privacy. Those who like brown are said to be dependable and reliable and yellow is the colour of sunshine and happiness.

White is a clean and sophisticated choice for any home exterior and works well in every setting, but a sun-facing wall may be blinding at certain times of the day. Consider creating an accent wall with a different coloured cladding or creating a textured finish with a patterned colour scheme, mixing in additional colours to break up expanses of large white walls. Here you could let your personality shine – by choosing sophisticated shades of charcoal, red or blue.

Greys and blues are very contemporary and will appeal to lovers of nature, creating a calming house to come home to. Or you could combine complementary shades of these colours side by side to add interest and texture.

When we recently asked 2,000 homeowners about their dream exterior property colours, the top three choices were white/coastal whitewash, red brick and light grey. The primary reasons for white were that it looks smart, timeless and traditional. In the case of red brick, these reasons were also significant but being in keeping with the surroundings was shown to be important. For the grey,



another key factor was that it's 'trendy', and blue grey and sage green were seen as inviting.

WHAT'S THE COLOUR WHEEL AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

The colour wheel is one of the most tried and trusted design tools used by experts to help you update your facade. Sir Isaac Newton created the first colour wheel, proving that light contains the full spectrum of the rainbow. All colours in the spectrum are created from the three primary colours of blue, red and yellow, and the colour wheel shows the relationship between them. Cool colours sit on the blue/green side of the wheel, while warm reds and yellows sit opposite. The most important thing to remember is that the position of colours on the wheel shows how they will work together, and colours are grouped according to this philosophy.

In the early 19th century, the German artist and poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, took this one step further, studying the impact of colour on human psychology. We now understand much more about the subconscious and physiological human responses to colour: for example, how green is the most restful colour to the eye and that blue will lower the pulse rate.

Contrasting colours – such as blue and orange, red and green or yellow and purple – sit on opposite sides of the colour wheel and create a dramatic effect when used together. Harmonious colours – like blue and green and orange and red – sit close to each other on the colour wheel and create a tranquil,

balanced effect when used together, perfect to create a restful, pleasing exterior. Their receding qualities are also a great way to give a smaller building more 'oomph'. A way to create a vibrant home with strong visual appeal is to choose a colour such as red for the facade and then add accessories or outdoor plants in contrasting colours. Another is to use 'pops' of contrasting colours for the trim.

Tonal schemes combine several shades of one colour for a look that is easy on the eye. The different shades work perfectly together as they are all from the same colour family. A tonal exterior in beautifully matched shades of greys, charcoals or pale blues for example, will create a very pleasing visual effect.

Other elements to consider when choosing your exterior colour include your home's natural environment, the local landscape, colours chosen by your neighbours and how light affects the colour throughout the day. Durability is another key factor to think about when making your colour choices, particularly when it comes to outdoor colours at the mercy of the environment.

OPTIONS FOR FACADES AND COLOUR

The various options for a facade include timber, stone, vinyl, external foam, metal, weatherboard, fibre cement, concrete and glass, and these offer a range of different colours. Fibre cement cladding – for example, comes in a choice of colours and wood stains with a choice of finishes including wood grain and smoothness. The planks can be mounted vertically or horizontally to create different effects when working with a tonal colour scheme. A low-maintenance facade in a material such as fibre cement will not need regular re-painting in the way that wood will.

With so much choice available, the first step is to decide on your colour scheme, and then to make use of the various tools, including digital ones, to find the perfect look.

Lisa Grosse is brand manager at Cedral



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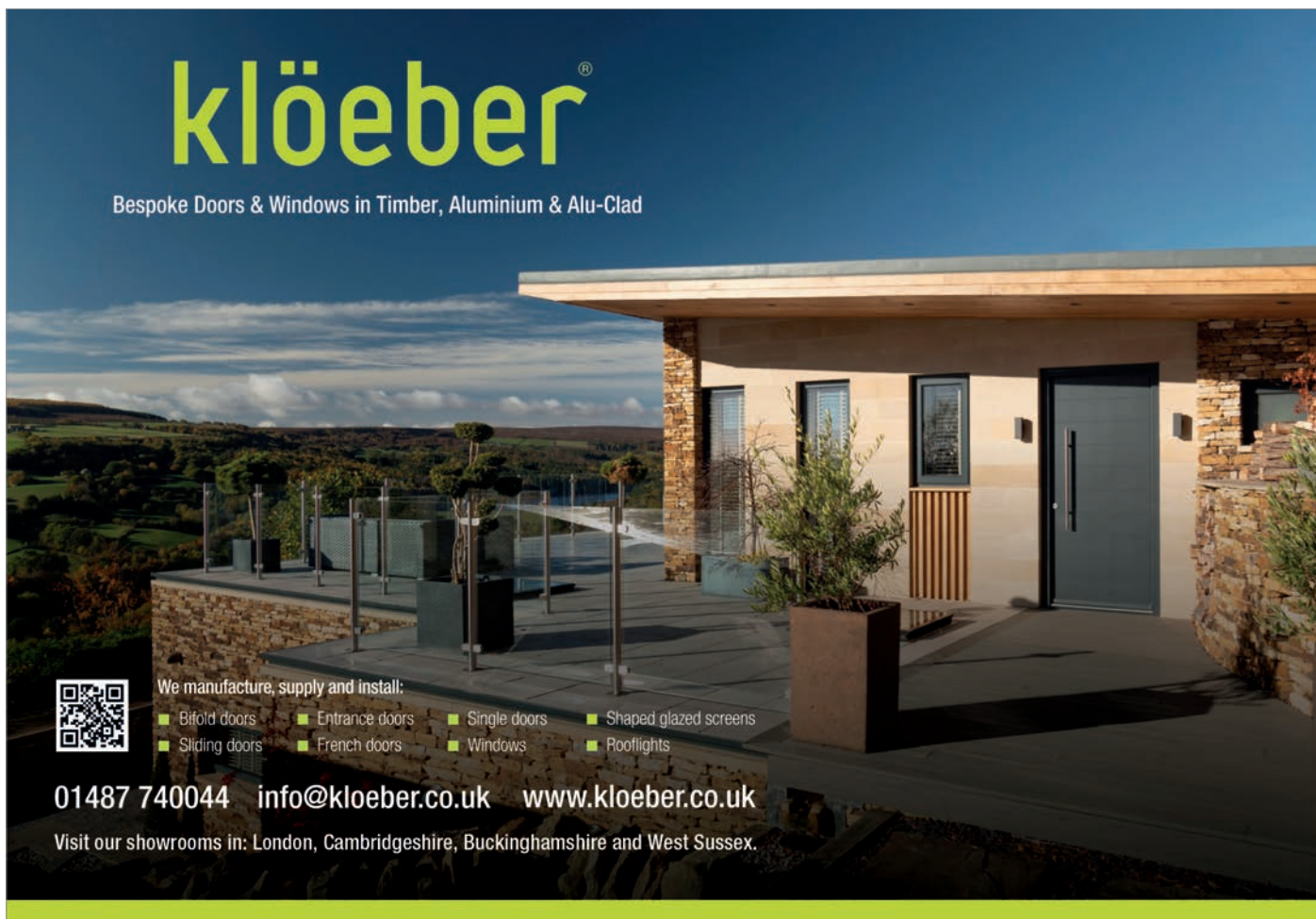
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CASE STUDY

RAISING THE ROOF

When David and Lisa Collins' circumstances changed, a tired 1960s bungalow in Leeds offered not only the chance to build their dream house, but also gave them the perfect opportunity to move nearer to their daughter

TEXT HEATHER DIXON IMAGES BEVAN COCKERILL



When David Collins developed an eye condition that left him unable to drive, he and his wife Lisa knew they would have to move house. They had lived for 30 years in a rural Nottinghamshire village and relied heavily on their own transport, so they needed to find somewhere closer to local amenities. It was also the perfect opportunity to move nearer to their daughter in Leeds. "We were looking for a new-build house on the outskirts of Leeds but soon discovered that it wouldn't really work for us," says David. "We like big rooms and open spaces but the only way we could achieve this was to buy a six-bedroom property, which we didn't want."

Then Lisa came up with a "wild card," a very tired 1960s bungalow with a largely unworkable layout and some quirky features – including attic bedrooms David could barely stand up straight in, and an internal patio door dividing two living spaces on the ground floor. "It needed a lot of work, but we were not concerned about that. We renovated our last home and knew what we wanted to achieve, and what to expect. We also

really liked the location of the house and the area in general," says David. "That it was very close to a golf course was a bonus!"

THE MASTERPLAN

Lisa and David agreed to buy it with the aim of extending and modernising it as soon as possible. They moved into the bungalow in December 2018 with the minimum of furniture – plus 200 bags of leaf mulch for the garden (Lisa is a keen gardener) and six large bags of logs for the fire – knowing they would have to move out again when the building work started.

There were plenty of things wrong with the property – the thermostat had been incorrectly wired and the central heating did not work. There was a strange extension over the garage containing two small bedrooms and a WC, all with low, sloping ceilings that severely limited the headroom. An old-fashioned hot air ducted system occupied even more space, and there was very little storage anywhere in the house. But the large garden, ideal location, and clear potential outweighed the negatives.

HIGH POINT

"Working with the architects to discover the most efficient way of gaining that space and realising that not only was it possible, but it was also over and above anything we had hoped for!"





Initially they were going to turn the first-floor rooms into a large ensuite bedroom, until David pointed out that it didn't fully solve the issue of headroom. Then they tried to get permission to build a two-storey extension, but their plans were turned down by Leeds City Council because the roof would have been too high in a conservation area and out of keeping with the original style of the bungalow.

So Lisa wracked her brains and came up with an ambitious idea that would solve all the problems in one go: to literally raise the roof. "It was ingenious," says David. "A real game changer." Working closely with their architects Richard Laycock and James Butterworth of Studio J, they began to rethink the whole design. "We can't praise the architects enough for the ideas and expertise they brought into the mix," says Lisa. "You think you have a good idea, but they were able to take our ideas to a whole new level while understanding and delivering what we wanted to achieve."

By raising a large portion of the roof they were able to stay within planning regulations and maintain the same footprint, while gaining large amounts of living space. "It was a long process with lots of adjustments along the way," says David, but adds that "it was worth

it to finally achieve the spacious rooms that we wanted for our home."

A NEW LAYOUT

As well as creating more practical sized bedrooms and ensuites upstairs, they also rearranged the layout on the ground floor. The original L-shaped kitchen – which was far too small and in the middle of the house – was turned into a boot room and cloakroom so that Lisa could use the facilities straight from the garden without having to remove muddy boots. The rest of the old kitchen, old living room and dining area were knocked into one large living space containing a spacious new kitchen and an island overlooking the outdoor areas through bi-fold doors. "The old kitchen was small and dated and didn't even look out over the garden," said Lisa. "We wanted the house and garden to work together and complement each other."

A ground floor bathroom was turned into a utility/kitchenette next to an ensuite bedroom, so that Lisa's mum, who lives with them, could maintain her independence. The remaining two bedrooms on the ground floor were turned into a snug and a larger entrance hall – complete with a feature staircase leading to the upper

LOW POINT

"Dealing with the hurdles involved during the planning process and wondering whether we had made a mistake in buying the property if we couldn't achieve the space we wanted."



floor with its three new ensuite bedrooms and an open landing/office area.

With planning permission finally in place by August 2019, David and Lisa moved into his mother's home in Huddersfield ahead of the builders moving in at the beginning of October. Within a very short time the building company had removed the roof over the main part of the bungalow (excluding the garage area), demolished internal walls, and reduced the bungalow to a shell. They also removed a line of overgrown trees to the front of the property to bring more natural light onto the site and improve the property's kerb appeal, before covering the front lawn with hardcore. "The builders, (Feathered Edge Joinery and Builders) were brilliant," says David. "We live in a cul de sac and wanted to keep disruption to our neighbours to a minimum, so we created space in the front garden for the skip and parked vehicles to avoid blocking the road. We hired a small shipping container which created a small onsite office for the builders and storage for us."

Inside, the original floors – which were mainly wood over concrete – were taken up and the new steels craned into place to create the

structure for the raised section of the bungalow. "We were travelling every day from Huddersfield at this point to see how things were progressing," says Lisa. "It was very exciting to see the speed at which the original bungalow was partly demolished and the new structure started to take shape." The exterior walls and roof were raised by one metre over the main part of the bungalow in what turned out to be a very straightforward process. "It was really pretty simple," says David. "The builders took the roof off and then built another metre of stonework and blockwork on top of the exterior walls to raise the height." They didn't have to do any digging to check or strengthen the foundations as the extra height was minimal and would not cause undue stress to the existing footings.

In fact, "the hardest bit was convincing the planners that this was a good idea," says David. "Fortunately I knew that a nearby house had done a similar thing and they had employed a planning consultant, Andrew Windrass of ID Planning to get it through. We contacted him, and he used the fact that there was a local precedent to make the case. It sailed through without a problem."



With the roof raised, the internal walls were built to the new design. At this stage the couple considered introducing eco aspects, including solar panels and an air source heat pump – but their budget wouldn't stretch that far. However, they haven't ruled it out in the future. "It's certainly something we might consider at a later date," said David. "When you are working to a budget you have to make decisions about what to include and what not to include, and what you might be able to add further down the line."

David and Lisa were fortunate to have builders who were flexible, reliable and consistent. "They were amazing. They worked through the winter without a break, even when it was wet and freezing cold. Things turned a corner when the roof went on and they were able to make progress in better conditions."

Within the six-month build the property had first and second fixings, it was plaster-boarded and skimmed throughout and bifold doors and new windows installed. Everywhere was highly insulated with Kingspan, and water-based under-floor heating was laid throughout both floors. Between the two floors there is now a 'sandwich' construction of joists, insulation, boarding, a second layer of insulation, heating pipes and more boarding which slightly reduced the head height in the lower rooms but dramatically increased the soundproofing.

Only two things went wrong during the entire process, one being a cork floor. "I was keen to include natural materials wherever possible," says Lisa. "I found a lovely cork floor which was laid over a screed and a waterproof membrane, but before long it started to buckle. It was soaking up water because the screed had failed so that had to be redone. One of the showers had also been plumbed in the wrong way round but it was nothing that couldn't be fixed."

The new kitchen has been a triumph but

the new units in the utility were delivered and installed while David and Lisa were on holiday and they returned to discover that they were the wrong colour! "It's not a big issue but it wasn't what we asked for," says Lisa.

One of the many bonuses of the revamp was the inclusion of extra storage space. "We thought through everything in fine detail," says Lisa. "We have no loft because that space was incorporated into the bedrooms, so I had to think very carefully about where everything would go. No space went unused."

A GARDEN TO LOVE

From the outset, David and Lisa wanted the quarter-acre garden to become an integral part of the overall renovation. Lisa – with her passion for gardening – had clear ideas of the way she wanted the garden to evolve, but she called on daughter Katy, an art teacher, for design ideas. The first task was to take up an oversized area of decking and turn it into a classically segmented combination of well-designed growing areas, pathways, structural features and raised vegetable beds. A path between a 'pleached' hedge leads to a wildflower area, greenhouse and potting shed. "One of our favourite features of the whole project is the Accoya cladding on the exterior of the house, which weathers to a beautiful grain and colour that links the house and garden in a very organic way," says Lisa. "It was another example of the architect's ability to think out of the box and achieve more than we ever could within our scope and budget."

Now the house is complete and David and Lisa have had time to enjoy its benefits, they are delighted that they had the vision and conviction to buy the property in the first place. "It was an unusual project but it fulfilled everything we had hoped for, and more," says Lisa. ■

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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Blue Sky thinking transforms disused barn

Blue Sky Barn is a fascinating conversion of a disused barn into a four-bedroom family home. Architects 31/44 have used form and materials to preserve the memory of the original agricultural structure in order to create a stunning new residential and leisure environment with enhanced levels of comfort and refinement. The house presents a quiet facade of corrugated metal walls and roof with vertical larch louvres. With such a large spacious interior, including a 15 m long swimming pool, the architects needed to find a solution for reverberating sound and acoustic dampening. As a result, **Troldtekt's** wood wool panelling has been used throughout the living and pool areas to combat and soften elevated noise levels. Troldtekt is a perfect choice for this kind of application. Consequently, Troldtekt Fine panels were specified for their sustainable characteristics coupled with superior acoustics to provide a comfortable interior environment. Troldtekt's natural and inherently sustainable panels are available in a variety of different surfaces and colours and contribute positively to a building's BREEAM, DGNB and LEED ratings. In addition to their high sound absorption and tactile surface, they offer high durability and low-cost lifecycle performance. Available in various sizes and in four grades, from extreme fine to coarse, the panels can be left untreated or painted in virtually any RAL colour.

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CASE STUDY

A LABOUR OF LOVE IN LANARKSHIRE

When James and Lorna Hamilton made their decision to self-build, their new home had to meet not only the demands of their growing family but also recognise Lorna's heritage, sitting on the family farmstead

TEXT NIK HUNTER IMAGES DAPPLE PHOTOGRAPHY



The couple were keen that their new home would echo the language of its past and complement the surrounding landscape

James Hamilton originally hails from Inverness, where he and partner Lorna set up home when they got married. However, when his parents moved to The Channel Islands a few years ago the couple decided to move closer to Lorna's family who live in Lanarkshire. "It made sense to move but it also provided an opportunity to explore the idea of building our own home," James explains.

The couple moved in with Lorna's parents while they looked for a building plot in the area but nothing suitable came up. "In 2017, following the passing of Lorna's uncle, the family farm became available. Although tinged with sadness, it was a good opportunity to bind everything

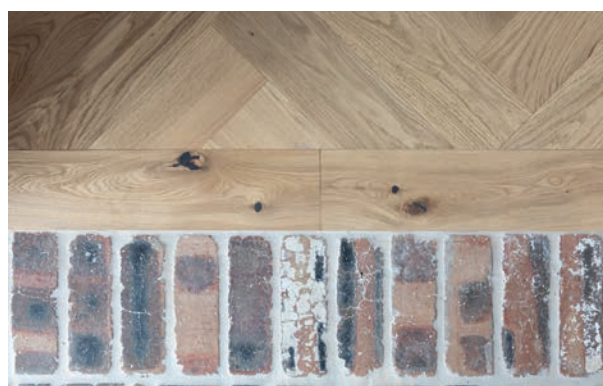
together. Lorna was able to move onto her family farm and we now had a plot we could consider building on."

The couple were keen that their new home would echo the language of its past and complement the surrounding landscape. To do this they enlisted the help of architects, Iain Monteith and Matt Loader at Loader Monteith in Glasgow.

"The client came to us in 2017," Iain recalls. "They were quite particular about reusing the site of a dilapidated steading/cottage, dating from the 1800s which was already on the farm. The proposed site had keen connections out into the landscape both physically and visually and they wanted to build a new family home for

HIGH POINT

"I loved being able to go to the site every day and see the project develop. And I loved reviewing the architects' initial ideas – it was really exciting and fun; it really got the imagination going."



LOW POINT

"We chose our own supplier for the windows, and we were unlucky. If I was doing it again, I would stick with the contractor's choice."

themselves and their three young girls who were all under eight at the time."

THE VISION

James and Lorna's brief was to design a modern steading with an abundance of light and lots of room for their three small children to play. However, James explains how they're the "kind of family that likes to break off and have time to ourselves." He adds: "So, while we wanted to create warm, family-friendly areas we wanted to offer everyone their own space if they needed it."

Family-friendly areas didn't necessarily mean open plan, as James is keen to point out: "Lorna and I had that conversation and Lorna decided that the kitchen and dining room should be more enclosed, so she didn't have an audience when she was cooking dinner."

Loader Monteith carried out a site and character analysis of the area and using the site of the existing steading albeit slightly larger, the design that Iain and Matt came up with was not what James was expecting. Taking their inspiration from the strong geometry that is often found on agricultural sites, the architects drew on this to

split up the roofline of the new steading. Instead of having one long profile, they played with the skyline to suggest three pitched red gables which increase in volume from east to west.

"The three buildings and the three peaks were a curveball," James recalls. "When I said modern steading, I also wasn't expecting a walled garden and a courtyard with a well in the middle. The well had been discovered during the demolition of the steading. I think these ideas came from the architects visiting other sites in the area and seeing what used to be there. It was totally unexpected, but as a design it worked so well."

Another exterior feature that James hadn't envisaged is the practical pergola – a semi-covered walkway that links the house to James' karate studio and office. "It's a very exposed site and very windy. Most of the farm buildings in the area tend to be horseshoe-shaped to shield the workers from the wind," says Iain. "Choosing a courtyard design not only echoes the buildings that were there but offers protection from the elements." However, while James wanted to be protected from the weather, they also wanted to see it and that's why the architects specifically lo-



cated the reading room at the south west corner. "It has dual aspect glazing so you can watch the weather passing by while remaining warm and cosy," says Iain.

The reading room is a pivotal part of the property and demonstrates the clever ways in which the house can easily 'expand and contract.' The L-shaped design starts at the entrance vestibule and utility room which leads into the kitchen, dining area and sitting room with the reading room in the corner. Then, the north side contains the sleeping accommodation with four bedrooms and a guest bedroom on the upper level of the largest gable, providing privacy from the working side of the farm. Each ground level bedroom also connects directly into the private courtyard by way of glass doors.

"The initial plan for the guest bedroom was to locate it on a mezzanine level but we felt it wasn't private enough," says James. "Then Iain and Matt came up with the idea to use sliding doors and partitions which allows us to balance privacy with open plan design."

It's an effective solution and provides the

family with the options they require. Slide the partitions back and the reading room becomes part of the sitting room and likewise with the guest bedroom. Move another partition and guests have more privacy and space to access through a lobby rather than directly into the main living space.

This open/close effect is also accentuated by the change in ceiling heights and divisions. The interesting exterior profile has been mirrored inside, creating the separation that James and Lorna were keen to capitalise upon. "Following the roofline internally and exposing the ceiling lets the volumes kick up and over the partitions," Iain explains. "At eye level you have a degree of enclosure, but you have the volume at roof height."

INTERIOR AESTHETICS

While the design and layout now worked in tandem, deciding on a finish that would flow through each space took a bit more consideration, and the initial proposal to line the ceiling in Douglas Fir was prohibitively

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECTS

Loader Monteith
loadermonteith.co.uk

MAIN CONTRACTOR & JOINERY

Lawrie Construction
lawriegroup.co.uk

KITCHEN

Archispek
archispek.com

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

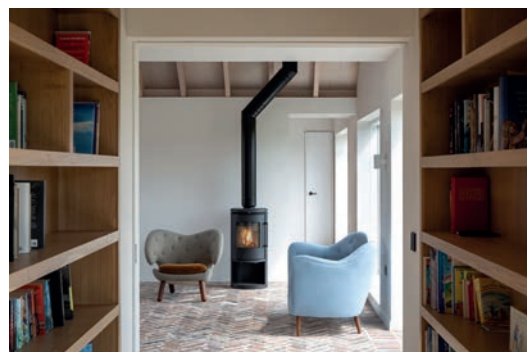
Entuitive
entuitive.com

TILES

Mandarin Stone
Mandarinstone.com

WOOD FLOORING

Atkinson & Kirby
akirby.co.uk



expensive. "The quote was enough to buy a very nice car!" James remembers. "However, everyone went back to the drawing board and the contractors tried pine and standard plywood, and once the base fire coating had been applied the effect was exactly what we wanted."

Indeed, looking at the completed build, the material palette has been kept simple, but it's incredibly effective. The walls are plasterboard, the floors are brick or oak, and the ceiling is timber. The staircase which looks like solid oak is made from an MDF carcass and covered in oak flooring. "It's a very stripped back palette but we spent a lot of time getting the little details right," Iain explains. These were things like getting the bond of the oak floor and the herringbone brick just so, and ensuring the timber treatment on the ceilings matched the kitchen finishes. "Lorna designed the kitchen with Archispek, but we worked closely with them to ensure that the kitchen surfaces worked tonally with the ceiling."

"The kitchen is exactly how Lorna wanted it to be, but it wasn't intended as a design statement," James explains. "It was her idea to build a peninsula rather than an island so that we could all sit around it, which works brilliantly for

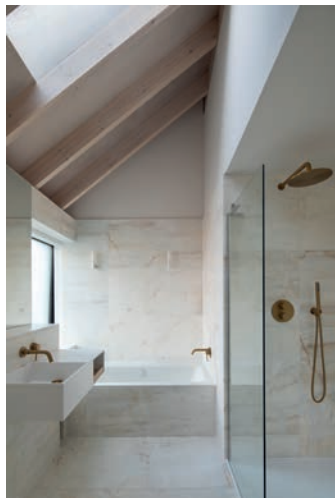
us as a family. It just so happens that it looks really good as well."

Externally, the materials have been chosen for two distinct reasons. Firstly, to reflect the heritage of the site and secondly to mirror the existing buildings in the environs. "On the west side we took the red sinusoidal cladding down onto the elevation because it's still a working farm and that's where the storage barns are and that effect replicates them," Iain explains.

James continues: "The architects did suggest many of the materials, but I requested the 'sinusoidal' roof as it reminds me of my Highland roots. Much of the masonry and stonework came from the original steading and we made the brick floor from its bricks."

A LABOUR OF LOVE

The reclaimed brick floor became a lockdown project for James and quite a significant one too. With the build starting in March 2020, the project hit lockdown at its peak. James spent eight weeks hand cleaning 4000 hand cast bricks and actually remembers it as quite an idyllic time. "The weather was nice; in some respects, it was a quiet relaxing task. However, Lorna says I often returned to the house at lunchtime moan-



Whether an idyllic time or not, the hard work has paid off and the reclaimed bricks juxtaposed with the oak flooring create a pleasing flow and uniformity throughout the house

ing that I was nowhere near my daily target of a hundred bricks!"

An idyllic time or not, the hard work has paid off and the reclaimed bricks juxtaposed with the oak flooring create a pleasing flow and uniformity throughout the house. This lovely feature posed a few problems for the architects and Loader Monteith had to overcome the challenge of incorporating underfloor heating beneath the layer of thick brick by digging foundations of 90 cm. However, this solution allows the brick floor to act as a thermal store throughout the day while radiating a gentle warmth during the night.

In the vestibule the bricks take on a more significant aesthetic role, firmly rooting the property's 'Ceangal', which means Gaelic for bond or link in its landscape. A display of bricks from the different quarries has been created and there's also a full wall of Hamilton bricks at the entrance – Hamilton being the family's surname. "To be honest, I was a little nervous about that feature, but now it's finished it works well with the exterior and most people get the joke."

The vestibule provokes opinion from both client and architect alike. "James and Lorna were quite keen about how they came in from this rural setting into their home. The vestibule is

like a little ante chamber. There's this tension in coming from the open landscape into this little chamber which embraces you. When the door is closed you don't know what's beyond and then it opens up to the light and the view right through the house. It's floored with glazed dairy bricks, which are more practical and have a darker and smoother texture than those used elsewhere in the house.

James adds: "You come from the outside into this dark room, and you go from there into the main house and it's all bright and airy again. It's a bit like going into a tomb and coming out into the light. It's a very dramatic effect. I liken it to a Resurrection Motif."

Despite the pandemic, the house was completed in August 2021 and now that the family have had time to bed in, does James feel that Ceangal House delivers as expected? "The connection between the rooms and the roof divisions was definitely something the architects brought to the table that I hadn't envisioned, and the courtyard space is something different that really works. This farm has been in Lorna's family for generations, and I wanted this house to be comfortable but a stimulating place to live in, and Iain and Matt have achieved that." ■

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Premium British bathroom manufacturer **Elisa™** has announced the introduction of a completely customisable, modular shower collection based around Aquahub™ – a unique, concealed valve technology innovated in-house at Elisa. This stunning new mixer range offers a fully personalised choice of facias, shower outlets, heads and accessories, all compatible with the central Aquahub valve. Each component is available in a brushed brass, polished chrome or matt black finish. Mike Simpson, chief marketing

officer at Elisa, commented: "The Elisa Emilie and Rosa collections can be as individual as the homeowners themselves, with the reassurance that the technology will be reliable and sustainable for years to come."

01959 560003 www.elisabathrooms.com

New Saniflush extends Saniflo WC range



The brand new Saniflush from **Saniflo** is a complete ceramic toilet that features an integrated macerator and provides a stylish solution for installing a WC into spaces where gravity drainage isn't an option. Whether it is a bathroom in a basement or loft, or a cloakroom under the stairs, the installation of a Saniflush is possible with just a water supply and electrical connection. Thanks to its two outlets, a basin or a shower can also be connected. The modern rimless design and traditional bowl base is as

practical as it is attractive. And because the macerator is contained within the ceramic it's a compact, space saving option that perfectly conceals the macerator unit from sight.

sales@saniflo.co.uk www.saniflo.co.uk

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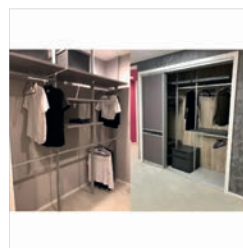


Everything needed to work quickly and cleanly in the kitchen is all in one place with the new **BLANCO UNIT**, a space-saving, timesaving, creative hub in the heart of the home. Sinks, taps and bins are the most frequently used items in the kitchen; so the BLANCO UNIT combines these premium kitchen products in flexible packs that let the buyer choose a mix to suit any style and lifestyle. Water is key in the kitchen; from drink and food preparation to washing, hygiene and cleaning. The BLANCO UNIT

offers the choice of feature-packed smart taps, ultra-safe true-boiling water taps, and stunning semi-professional or classic mixer taps in a variety of finishes.

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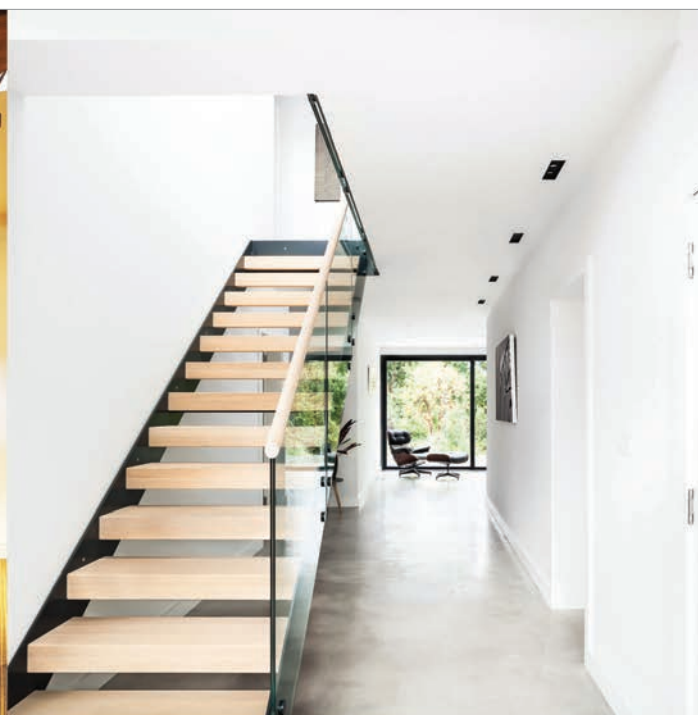
A partnership made for the home haven



Draks is well known as the expert in creating beautiful, clever storage for the home. Loved equally by savvy homeowners and prestigious developers, the creations can be seen in wardrobes, dressing rooms, walk-in wardrobes, room dividers, sliding doors and cabinetry. When the beauty of Draks' creations meets with the talent of the Laings team, the results are gorgeous, efficient, functional spaces in every room of the house. Laings is well known for designing bespoke interiors with inspirational kitchens, bathrooms and

bedrooms; along with boot rooms, home offices, laundry rooms and any other living spaces, for example. Now, the Laings showroom in Aberdeen displays the ingenuity of the Draks/Laings collaboration.

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Take your stairs for a spin

Michael Edwards of Complete Stair Systems shares his expert advice on choosing a spiral staircase for your new build or refurbishment project

With so many choices available, choosing a spiral staircase can seem like a daunting task, but it is often much easier than you might think. One of the most important factors to consider is the intended use of the spiral staircase. With a spiral staircase being suitable for both internal and external use, knowing whether you want to use it to access a small external balcony or create an impressive main feature staircase within your home will help you initially narrow the range of options available to you.

Aside from their unique sculptural form, spiral staircases are often attractive for their space saving qualities. While it is true that a spiral staircase will generally have a smaller footprint than a conventional or 'straight' staircase, it is important to make your building designer or architect aware of your desire for a spiral staircase. The reason for this is that the opening for a spiral staircase is very different to that of a conventional staircase and this will need to be considered when positioning doors, walls, and floor joists in the design phase of your new build or refurbishment project.

As part of the design process, you will also need to make sure that your spiral staircase will comply with building regulations. While your architect and most suppliers will be able to offer you general guidance on the building regulations relevant to a spiral staircase, it is always worthwhile contacting your local authority's building control department to ask any specific questions you may have about the suitability of the spiral staircase you are considering. For extra peace of mind, ask for written approval for your proposed spiral staircase design.

In a private single-family home, there are two categories of spiral staircases that are relevant: Category A, and Category B. A Category A or 'secondary'

Available in a wide variety of styles from the classical to the contemporary, there is a spiral staircase to suit every setting

spiral staircase is typically used to access a single habitable room, a small mezzanine area, loft storage space, or external balcony or terrace. In contrast, a Category B or 'primary' spiral staircase is intended to be used as the main stair in a home, accessing multiple bedrooms or living areas. As a rule, a Category A staircase will have a diameter of circa 1500 mm, and a Category B staircase will have a diameter of circa 1900 mm. It is important to note that these measurements will vary slightly between different suppliers' offerings. Whether for primary or secondary use, the finished opening for a spiral staircase, be it square or circular, should always be 100 mm greater than the diameter of the stair. This allows for onsite tolerance in fitting, and space on the outside of the handrail as it passes through the floor.

Even if your spiral staircase won't be inspected at the time of installation, any areas of non-compliance can cause problems later in time. For example, if you were to sell your home, a building surveyor may well identify any aspects of the staircase that do not comply with building regulations. These situations can often be costly to rectify and can add

more difficulty to the process of selling your home.

Available in a wide variety of styles from the classical to the contemporary, there is a spiral staircase to suit every setting. For most people living in traditional homes, timber is the popular choice as it often complements existing flooring, doors, and architrave; however, for those wanting to be a bit more adventurous, materials of stainless steel and glass can be combined to create a very clean, ultra-contemporary look. With advancements in LED technology, it is also increasingly easy and cost effective to integrate lighting into the staircase itself, or the surrounding area, further enhancing the look of a spiral staircase.

The cost of a new spiral staircase can vary significantly and will largely be determined by three main factors: height, diameter, and materials. Whether for internal or external use, a simple 'off the shelf' kit system can start from as little as £1000, while a fully bespoke glass and stainless-steel primary spiral staircase will cost more than £15000. As a general guide, the majority of 'off the shelf' kit systems will fall into the £1000 - £2500 price range, whereas £6k is a realistic starting point for a mid-level specification bespoke spiral staircase.

Purchasing a spiral staircase is a significant investment in your home so, once you have decided your requirements, take time to make sure you choose the right supplier. Some of the more specialist suppliers will have a showroom where you will have the opportunity to view and try various spiral staircases. This should be an important consideration in your decision making process as seeing and trying the physical product will give you a greater feeling of confidence in choosing your new staircase.

Michael Edwards is the sales and project developer at Complete Stair Systems



Going with the flow



Sika Everbuild has introduced an alternative packaging design for its SikaCeram®-621 FlowFix Jointing Compound to make life easier for both merchants and trade. SikaCeram®-621 FlowFix Jointing Compound is available in sturdy 15kg buckets as well as bags, which will be easier for merchants to store and display outside. Trade customers will also benefit as it'll be easier to transport and, because each bucket contains three separate 5kg sealed pouches, it doesn't all have to be used at the same time, meaning

it's less wasteful. The SikaCeram® FlowFix system is designed for use with porcelain tiles, and as the trend for installing patios using tiles rather than traditional stone flags takes hold, it is becoming a popular choice.

0113 240 3456 www.everbuild.co.uk

COOL! – That's Wallform



Building with **BecoWallform** is not only practical and quick, it's also highly energy efficient. The system is designed to give maximum insulation, meaning it not only keeps the home warm in the winter but it also keeps it cool in the summer, something other building systems find difficult to achieve.

Climate Change means there will be many changes to lifestyles, whether keeping cool or warm, or even dry as the risk of flooding

increases. The insulation of Wallform construction, proven over the years to keep our customers dry, comfortable and cool, also insulates against the rising cost of energy.

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Setcrete LVT subfloor preparation system



Setcrete has created a subfloor preparation system for luxury vinyl tile (LVT) installations to optimise both the aesthetics and longevity of the flooring. The system comprises Setcrete High Performance levelling compound, Setcrete Acrylic Primer and Setcrete Rapid Set DPM. Because LVT flooring is particularly susceptible to subfloor imperfections and undulations showing through to the final finish, it is essential to use a high quality levelling compound to create a super smooth and level base onto

which vinyl tiles and planks can be laid. Setcrete High Performance levelling compound utilises a fibre-reinforced cement formulation to deliver enhanced performance in a variety of light to heavy-duty applications.

01538 361 633 www.setcrete.co.uk

Keller launches new brochure



Keller has produced a new Inspiration brochure for 2022/23 which showcases an impressive variety of options for today's stylish, flexible kitchen; with Dutch quality, sustainability and creativity at the heart of all. For a copy of the brochure, visit Keller's website where a PDF version can be downloaded. Alternatively, printed copies can be collected from Keller dealers; the website's dealer locator gives details. Full of beautiful imagery – such as the new Marbling Moods kitchen model (pictured) –

the brochure also features bonus elements such as XXL cabinets, handles, hinges, drawers, waste systems, lighting and more! For further information, please visit the Keller website.

www.kellerkitchens.com

Norcros Rock-Tite is a hit with landscapers!

Norcros Rock-Tite Exterior Porcelain & Stone System was developed specifically to appeal to landscape designers, tilers and DIYers who want an easy-to-use system for installing the increasingly popular 20mm porcelain tiles externally for patios and terraces. One of the latest recommendations from a landscaper indicates that the product is certainly making life easier for workers in that profession.

Landscaper, Brett Corcoran of TC Fencing & Landscaping, has recently used the product on a patio job in Staffordshire and was full of praise once the project was completed: "After using the Rock-Tite range of products throughout a recent project completed I can strongly recommend it," he said. "I can recommend the Rock-Tite products to not only the building trade but DIY customers too due to their



simplicity to use."

This project was an ideal candidate for Norcros Rock-Tite. The home owner wanted to extend their living space into the garden with the installation of porcelain tiles to form a new outdoor leisure area, making the transition from internal to external space as seamless as possible.

The end-result is highly attractive and definitely a very worthwhile

improvement to the property. The tiles on this project are Johnson Tiles, 20mm porcelain, 600 x 600, from their Boundary collection in colour Dune. Laying the tiles was made much easier than it would otherwise have been without the assistance of Norcros Rock-Tite.

The system comprises a Primer, a choice of Mortars (either with or without sand) and a Brush-In Grout. The product provides a high strength mortar for bonding concrete, natural stone and porcelain paving slabs to a hardcore or solid base. The Rock-Tite additives improve performance, workability and freeze/thaw resistance of the finished mortar mix. The choice of mortars allows customers to purchase their sand separately if they wish.

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A concrete idea for efficient builds

Chris Stride from the Insulating Concrete Formwork Association explains why this type of modern method of construction could provide the answers for your self-build when it comes to speed, efficiency and air-tightness

Building your home can be a challenging task. Obviously, you want to make the best choices but with a multitude of design and product decisions available, it can be hard to know where to start.

As construction technologies advance so does your choice of techniques, especially in the area of MMC. This umbrella term covers any non-traditional construction system that typically offers numerous benefits including a reduction in construction time, improved energy efficiency and increased build quality.

Self-builders, fully aware of the numerous benefits MMC can offer, have led the way in adopting these innovative methods. It's worth doing your research to find out which technique is best for you. There are a wide range of methods available, including offsite manufacturing and also innovative onsite techniques such as ICF.

ICF

An insulated solid wall construction method like ICF can offer numerous additional advantages when compared to other modern methods. This tried and tested construction system has been around since the Second World war when a simple build method was needed for rebuilding various badly bombed European cities.

Today, the application method and materials remain largely the same. Typically, two panels of insulating material connect to create a building block structure (these are either a pre-moulded form or connected through



plastic ties). Concrete is then poured into a cavity between the panels which creates an incredibly airtight, energy efficient and resilient structure.

BUILDING WITH ICF

It is the simplicity of ICF that makes it particularly appealing and incredibly fast to work with. A standard, single-storey structure can easily be constructed in as little as three days!

This method also has a lot of similarities to traditional construction methods that contractors will already be familiar with. The ICF blocks are stacked, like blockwork or bricks, but instead of needing a bedding material such as mortar they instead lock via a raised profile along the edge of the formwork. The walls are usually built in stages, typically to a ground floor height at first, before concrete is poured into the blocks. The process repeats until full building height is achieved.

WILL ICF RESTRICT MY DESIGN?

Despite their dimensions, ICF blocks have the capability to create almost any design – from a traditional farmhouse through to a contemporary home with bespoke shapes or curved walls. This gives you and your architect the opportunity to set your creativity free! We would always recommend getting your supplier involved at this stage in the process – they have the expertise and technical resources to maximise the potential of your ICF.

Concrete is well known for delivering an incredibly strong build. ICF offers the additional advantage of allowing the concrete encased within the formwork to set quickly but cure very slowly, and tests have shown that an ICF building is around five times stronger than a concrete block structure.

Combining the ICF with steel rebar increases the overall strength of the structure making it suitable for the entire

It's the simplicity of ICF that makes it particularly appealing, and incredibly fast, meaning a standard single-storey structure can easily be constructed in as little as three days

build, including cantilever structures and basements.

EXPENSE

When you consider the entire process, ICF presents a very cost effective option. Upfront material costs may be slightly higher, but these are quickly offset by savings made during construction, and through ongoing energy savings once you've moved in.

Labour costs are reduced by the speed of the ICF build programme and usually fewer contractors are needed onsite. The insulating property of the blocks allows the build to continue through winter with the ability to assemble and cast in most weather conditions. The combination of these factors can result in labour cost savings of up to 60%.

SUSTAINABILITY

At first glance ICF doesn't appear to be a particularly sustainable build method due to the extensive use of concrete. However, the concrete industry, through the UK Concrete Roadmap it has developed, is working hard on the adoption of new methods with the aim of removing more carbon from the atmosphere than it produces.

When considering sustainability, a recent report by the Environmental Audit



Committee 'Building to net zero: costing carbon in construction' encourages the adoption of Whole Life Carbon (WLC) assessment. This offsets the amount of carbon created during construction over the emissions created in heating or cooling the building.

ICF's ability to combine insitu concrete walls sitting in direct contact with the insulating formwork maximises



airtightness and thermal efficiency, meaning it can deliver U-values down to as low as 0.10 W/m².K. Monitored energy usage of a semi-detached four-bedroom home with a basement with a usable floor area of 110 m² demonstrates that heating and hot water costs works out as little as £5 per week.

BUILDING IN A FLOOD RISK ZONE

Increasingly, the UK is seeing the effects of adverse weather events. Under BS 85500:2015 Flood Resilient Construction guidance, ICF is a recommended external wall method. If correctly designed and installed, the resulting concrete structure has no voids and creates a watertight shell. In the event of flood damage, the insulating material in the walls remains water resistant with months of delays caused by drying out avoided.

The insulated solid wall structure also creates its own natural fire suppression system. The solid concrete core will not burn and can withstand extremely high temperatures that prevents fire from spreading internally or externally. Most ICF walls offer a fire protection rating of up to four hours.

Chris Stride is chairman at Insulating Concrete Formwork Association (ICFA)

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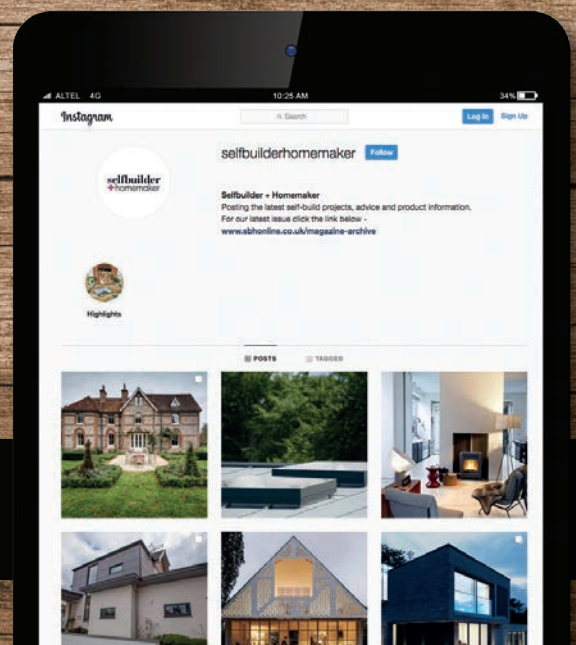
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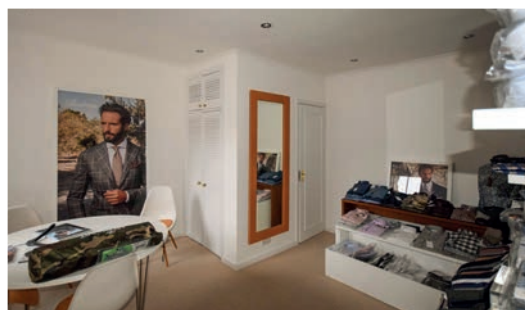


CASE STUDY

SØREN'S SCANDI FASHION HOUSE

A Danish minimalism-inspired renovation of a former fashion showroom in a prime west London site has resulted in a light, elegant home which has its owners' sense of style, and a 'Hygge' feel

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES RACHAEL SMITH, STÅLE ERIKSEN, NEIL DUSHEIKO



Tucked away in a mews in Lancaster Gate, just off Hyde Park, is a former fashion showroom which has been refurbished as a light-filled, Scandinavian-inspired home.

The building has been owned by Dane Søren Ellemann since 1963, who has long worked in the fashion industry, running the building as a showroom for the last 60 years. But in 2017, Søren and his wife realised they could transform it into their perfect London hideaway.

Previously a dark and fairly bland space, the couple, with help from their architects, have reimaged the property into a contemporary home immersed in natural light.

Born just north of Copenhagen, Søren always had a passion for fashion. This led him to up sticks for London in 1957 to start working for clothing retailer Simpsons of Piccadilly – once one of the largest menswear stores in the UK. "My life has been centred around my love for clothing and design," explains Søren.

Søren and his wife realised that they could transform the former showroom into their perfect London hideaway

He launched his own brand distributing Danish fashions in the UK in the early 1960s – Ellemann Design Company, and found the Lancaster Gate property in 1963, soon acquiring it as the company's base. Since then, the old mews building, which was originally used to house coaches for

HIGH POINT

"Hearing back from the local authority that we'd be able to go ahead in some way or other was very exciting! This space which had been such a central part in our lives was going to undergo a radical transformation."





Georgian properties behind it, has not only been the place for showing fashions for Søren's company since the days of 'Swinging London,' but others such as Oscar Jacobsen of Sweden.

Over the years, parts of the showroom were re-designed to accommodate Søren's needs, which led to the property being adapted for occasional residential use. "We had already made some adaptations to allow us to spend a night if needed."

However, the property was still in need of "quite an overhaul," says Søren. The structure was in poor condition and internally, there were "a warren of partitions, side rooms and storage areas." An adjacent hotel and church overshadowed the primary facade, restricting the amount of natural light, leaving the rooms dark and gloomy. Additionally, as a way of obtaining privacy from the hotel, the first floor windows were at high level, further compromising daylight. Søren knew that if they were going to turn this building into their home, this was one of the first things they would need to address.

DESIGN & PLANNING

With Søren having grown up in Denmark, he'd developed a fascination for how the Danish approach contemporary design, and wanted to bring this into the project. "I wanted the home to have a sense of tranquillity, with clean lines, and a mix of warm natural materials," explains Søren. As well as Dinesen timber flooring (a "must have!") and underfloor heating for comfort in colder months, a wood burning stove and a Martin Moore handmade kitchen were high on their wish-list.

To make all this happen, the couple needed to find an architect who was accepting of their ideas but also brought their own creativity to the project. Through a friend's recommendation, they discovered Neil Dusheiko Architects. "I visited

their studios and later Neil himself came out to the site to discuss how we could merge our design sensibilities to create a home that was exciting and spectacular," explains Søren. He adds: "Neil and his project architect Pamela were fantastic to work with. They had a very creative partnership, and we all worked extremely well together."

Despite the building sitting in the Bayswater Conservation Area, the team had a fairly straightforward experience with the planning department. "We anticipated there would be some conditions applied during the detailed design phase as the architectural team worked through the drawings." The team saw it as essential to get constructive feedback and support from the council before submitting a full application, so the architects worked closely with a planning consultant to develop what Søren says was a "very robust" pre-application submission.

"They suggested a few minor adjustments to the scheme which we felt were completely acceptable and took on board," says Søren. "The process was extremely well managed and we received approval for everything we applied for."

While not taking an active role in project management, the couple visited the site every weekend to keep an eye on progress, as well as ensuring the neighbours weren't being disturbed. "We always let our design team know we were there, and would often send them photos of the amazing progress achieved week on week."

Work started in 2019 and continued throughout the pandemic, "while taking every precaution," assures Søren. ABC were the chosen contractors to turn these designs into a reality. "We introduced ABC to our architects who checked out their credentials for us," says Søren. The couple were happy to discover they were a team of "enthusiastic craftsmen" who helped manifest the

LOW POINT

"I remember when the pandemic started to set in, and supply chains were going haywire. It was hard not to be a little nervous, so I'd say that was a low point."



ABOVE
The open stair and Crittal-style glazing separating it from the dining area further maximises the amount of light filtering, and gives a sense of space

overall vision of the project, Søren adds.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. Even though work continued through the pandemic, there were some delays with delivery and supply. However this was "not a major issue" with the project completing in December 2020.

LAYOUT & LIGHT

The three-bedroom mews home is arranged over three levels, and has been rendered in a subtle white externally as a sensitive response to the conservation area.

As the property is L-shaped, when standing on the quiet mews street, the building appears very compact. But entering, you are met with a spacious, modern design which has met all of the owner's expectations and more.

The ground floor includes a "great deal of storage" says Søren, along with a kitchenette, garage, bathroom, laundry room, and a study with views down the mews. The couple knew that their mobility may be limited in the future, and that ensuring the home was future-proofed was essential. The ground floor therefore also features an accessible bedroom with easy access to the kitchenette, which can double as a guest bedroom in the short term. The home also includes a fully functioning lift which provides easy access to the upper floors.

The bottom section of staircase, ascending to the first floor, is constructed of Douglas fir, with recessed sidelights that accentuate the craftsmanship of the wood panelling. The key material for the interiors, Douglas fir, was used throughout the property.

The kitchen, dining and sitting room are situated on the first floor. These rooms benefit from being double aspect with the windows to the rear overlooking the churchyard garden.

Two bedrooms of the three in the property

An adjacent hotel and church overshadowed the primary facade, restricting the amount of natural light, leaving the rooms dark and gloomy

are located on the first floor, each being ensuite. The top floor, reached by an open riser staircase, contains one important illustration of how the architects brought in precious natural light, with a top lit winter garden found in the smaller of the two bedrooms. Not only does it fill the space with light, but sitting in there feels like you are "almost outside," says Søren, and offers "lovely views over the church garden."

In a project with various design constraints like the conservation area and the nearby, imposing hotel meant that solving this issue of natural light required a series of creative solutions like this from the architects.

The central staircase void is capped by a large skylight which allows light into the top floor as well as travelling down to the first floor where the main living spaces are. The open stair and Crittal-style glazing separating it from the



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dining area further maximises the amount of light filtering through to this level, and gives a sense of space and connection to the sky. This "helps to create a visual interplay between the two spaces," says Søren.

Nine other skylights on the roof as well as large dormer windows on the front facade further maximise light coming in from above, augmented by bespoke artificial lighting throughout the home. In the kitchen a discrete strip of lighting is mounted on the splashback, "which helps to create a clear zone for the kitchen work areas." The combination of different lighting aspects has achieved a highly tailored quality of light for the home.

'HYGGE'

From the start, Søren's Scandinavian roots also influenced the interior design. More specifically, achieving a Hygge feel (Danish, meaning something like cosiness and contentment), in the design was a priority. "It's a way of life for the Danes," says Søren.

Each section of the home has been carefully designed to try and promote this feeling. In the sitting room, a fireplace with heavy logs – along with the different variety of timber types lining the house – adds visual texture while creating a strong connection to nature.

The Douglas fir, as well as being used to construct the stairs, features throughout the property. The team used Dinesen fir widely, which is all sourced from sustainable sources in the Black Forest and other European forests that have been family-owned for generations – and "sustainably managed for centuries," explains Søren.

The use of the solid timber planks add a sense of robustness, and "will hopefully be in place for many generations to come," he adds.

"As Hygge revolves around taking joy in quiet simple moments, the design could not be overly fussy." Therefore the interior is free from clutter, with a minimalist approach evident in all rooms. "This restrained design allows us to enjoy the essence of the space, the way the light changes between summer and winter, the feeling of the heavy rugs beneath your feet and so on," says Søren.

Their love for Danish furniture meant interior styling enhanced by different pieces by Montana, Carl Hansen, Hans J. Wegner, with lights by manufacturers including Klimt and Louis Poulsen.

The accomplishment of transforming what was a dark showroom into a light-filled, comfortable home is one of the couple's favourite aspects of the project, and they attribute this to the architects. "The natural light makes a big difference, and we are thankful that we were working with an architect who shared our vision for what the home could become," says Søren. Having a home that also incorporates Hygge design philosophy, and with Scandinavian natural materials that will develop a 'rich patina' over time – including the oak and simply finished Douglas fir, are other aspects of what makes this build distinctive.

Søren's advice to other self-builders taking on a refurbishment project like this is to "find an architect that you can work well with." He adds: "It's important that you share a similar vision and excitement for what you are ultimately hoping to achieve for the final result." ■

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