

selfbuilder + homemaker

MAY/JUN 2023

Rural rides

Animal crazy Melanie and her husband give us a Selfbuilder Diary about their journey on a picturesque rural build in Gloucestershire

In praise of Crittall style

Some expert tips on how to seamlessly incorporate doors in your project to get that Crittall look

WHEEL OF GOOD FORTUNE

Laura Shadwell speaks to a young couple who have crafted a modern dwelling on the grounds of a former water mill



Unexpected views

Little did Julie Ann Clements and her husband Richard know that their new home would bless them with three breathtaking views



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1. Leaving water temperature, when the outdoor temperature is between -15°C - 43°C. Results may vary depending on the actual usage conditions.

2. Based on internal testing of the EHS Mono HT outdoor units. The noise level is measured 3m away from the front of the outdoor unit, in an anechoic room with an outside temperature of 7°C. Results may vary depending on environmental factors and individual use.

*Efficiency ratio of heating output (capacity) versus power input (electricity). Internally tested under lab conditions based on EN 14511, results may vary depending on the actual usage conditions.

3. Based on internal testing on an EHS Mono HT outdoor unit (AEI20BXYDGG), compared to a conventional EHS outdoor unit (AEI20RXYDGG). Results may vary depending on the actual usage conditions.

The Quiet Mark certificate is applicable for UK & EU territories only.

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Hello, I hope you are well, and enjoying the weather now that summer seems to have arrived (I think we may have missed out spring this year.)

Recently I was having a quick look through the new Levelling Up Bill which is currently going through Parliament (as you do). I was actually hunting for mention of how the Government is trying to drive the industry towards compliance with the Future Homes Standard (a daunting 75% cut in current carbon emissions in new builds, as a minimum).

There doesn't seem to be anything – it's being left to the industry, clients, and poor old Building Control to sort all that out, it seems. Regardless of the whole heat pump debate, just how we can incentivise homeowners and builders to work to a much higher standard appears to be too complex and interventionist for the politicians to want to engage with, but they need to, fast; the FHS is less than two years away.

The Bill does include a new push for local authorities to give permissions to self-builds, tightening the definition of what that means so councils can't include what are clearly not homes under 'self-build.'

This is stoking demand. What we really need is more on affordable eco-building delivery, as 2025 is looming.

JAMES PARKER

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NSBRC GUIDE TO SELF-BUILDING

22 - 24 JULY, SWINDON
WWW.NSBRC.CO.UK/WHATS-ON

**ON THE COVER...**

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A young couple seeking their first home together in Cumbria brought in family help to maximise the benefits of a site that once housed a water mill, and on which now sits their four-bed property

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View to a hill (and a river, and a woodland)

Securing one priceless view was an adventure for Julie-Ann Clements and her husband Richard, but what they didn't realise is that they were getting three

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Product displayed: OB-72 Bi-folding Window and Single Door, Colour shown: Anthracite Grey - 7016M



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selfbuilder *Diaries*

Melanie Pigott and her husband Darren, along with their two teenage daughters, have embarked on self-build to not just accommodate them and a labradoodle named Bailey, but a veritable menagerie of other animals



Our story has been quite an emotional journey, and originally, designing our own place was not on our agenda.

We were living in my parent's house in south east England which we had moved into after their passing. It had been our beautiful family home for 50 years – so leaving was always going to

be a huge wrench for me. But as the property couldn't entertain having ponies 'in-livery,' which our girls desperately wanted, we began searching for a home literally anywhere that could accommodate it.

On one beautiful summer's day in June 2020, Darren had arranged for us to view a bungalow with eight and a half acres in

Gloucestershire. With plenty of bribery, we all travelled together – without any complaints from the back of the car!

Travelling up a quiet lane with sheep grazing, and passing a couple of farms, we finally drove through the entrance gate of the plot. As we parked on the drive, a sense of tranquillity crept over us. The bungalow was a prefabricated

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building with a brick kitchen extension. It nestled in the middle of hedging and shrubs, and was very secluded. It was very run-down, but it was the view that commanded our attention. Being slightly elevated you can see the sprawling Malvern Hills to the left, and to the right Bredon Hill and the Cotswolds. There was a barn of a fair size, where a huge stallion, a mare and her foal were in residence. Several other horses grazed lazily in the paddocks.

We drank it all in, and before we knew it, it was 3 pm we hadn't eaten – the vendor kindly said we could have our picnic in the garden which we did, sitting next to the roses. This was not an ordinary viewing – it was like an afternoon outing and we were all seduced by the place! In fact, we spent over four hours there.

To cut to the chase, we moved to the area staying in holiday accommodation while we waited to complete the sale of

the bungalow. The first week we slept in a tent while the bathroom was ripped out and renewed with a new hot water system. Darren and I showered with a hosepipe (we have no neighbours) but the girls refused and roughed it for a few days. Once in and settled we concentrated on getting our animals – two ponies which quickly became four, two kittens, five orphaned lambs, all to be bottle fed and plenty of chickens. The vendor with whom we have stayed in contact was tickled to see us sorting our animals out before ourselves!

While we considered adding an extension, the architects after visiting the site suggested building a new house instead, as it would be more energy efficient, low maintenance, and eco-friendly. Moreover, we could reside in the bungalow during construction. At this stage, I made the decision to project manage the build.

After researching the local area for a

common architectural theme, I started sketching out a design and layout that suited our living requirements. Paying particular importance to materials – clay roof tiles, cladding from Cape Cod, contrasting larch, plenty of glass and dormer windows, I chose things that would help it nestle comfortably into its setting. Planning seemed pleased with the overall look and feel of the house, but on a site visit, I was told it was too large. With just 10 days to shrink the design, remove the study (Darren works from home) and get the plans back in on the original planning application – it was passed immediately.

The house is to have a large kitchen, diner, snug with plenty of glass to enjoy the views and a veranda where we could sit in all weathers. As speed was the essence with two girls fast growing up I decided a timber frame would be the way to go, which Taylor Lane in Hereford erected in just five days.

To jump forward to provide you with the latest update on the project, the plastering phase, which involved extensive work such as insulation, soundproofing, and thermal vapour installation, is now nearing completion. We're looking forward to wrapping up this lengthy process soon! In terms of our kitchen, we have engaged a company that will be providing bespoke hand built furniture, and are currently deciding on the appliances.

Melanie Pigott



visionfires



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SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE ISSUE

You can transform an existing dark hallway – or dark internal spaces in a new build – by opening up the space using attractive Crittall-style glazed doors. Lucy Bartley of *lucyb home* explains how you can see the light



Crittall-style doors not only have a heritage industrial look, they also have the ability to maximise natural light, and make the most of both interior and exterior views. Adding this unique point of difference to your home gives bespoke versatility, as they can be made to order to meet your individual requirements.

It is only windows from 'Crittall Windows Limited' that can legally be called 'Crittall.' However, the term is widespread and used by many in a general way e.g. 'Crittall-style' to refer to this black steel framed style of windows.

On a recent interior design/ refurbishment project, we utilised this practical and aesthetically pleasing style in the ground floor hallway space. The three key focuses were to allow more natural light, create flow through spaces, and create a division between the entrance hallway and the home office. Reflecting and repeating the style of the doors, as a double door into the living room, gave synergy and balance within the hallway space.


The windows, doors, and panels, literally come in all shapes and sizes, characterised by the slim profile frames (usually in black), and an internal grid-like squared design. The frames are available in a variety of metal colours, with the glass being fluted or plain. Doors are hinged single or double, and pending the supplier, the doors can be designed with visible hinges, sliding or concealed pivot mechanisms. With a variety of handle and lock options, there are endless possibilities to suit all schemes, taste and style!

Crittall doors can create a division between spaces; a partition that divides, but allows natural light in. Partitioning a space still allows the desired 'solo

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purpose' for each individual room. They can also be a striking focal point for the eye and one in which the viewer's view, can extend into the room, through the partition, (opening the space) and beyond.

This style of glass door is extremely versatile and works in both contemporary and more traditional properties. A key benefit to consider is that they allow for doors to be full height by using clear glass, in effect pulling the architrave eyeline upwards.

Fire rated doors are available, which may suit your build needs and both domestic as well as commercial properties.

The glass has another added bonus; it allows you a view of what's going on in another room and a perfect view of the kids! So while busy in the adjacent room, you can see what is going on. Crittall window glass is tough, long lasting, and easy to clean, plus internal glazed doors keep the heat in.

And to help justify the expense, this design aesthetic adds value to your property for resale. Crittall-type doors

can be used as internal walls and work extremely well as a change from the more standard bi-folds, French doors, or patio doors into the garden.

They 'bring the outside in' and frame the outside space perfectly, whether that's a patio, a garden, or a courtyard; they also look superb used in an orangery extension.

Another bonus is that Crittall doors optimise soundproofing, as they use acoustic or double-glazed glass. And the frames tend to be steel, hence are far stronger than aluminium, so good for safety and security.

We love Crittall-style internal doors as they connect spaces using an architectural, striking feature focal point, as well as greatly increasing natural light.

ALTERNATIVES TO CRITTALL

Other options for internal light-bringing doors include half-timbered/half glazed, frosted glass panes, french-style glass doors, and bi-folds – these aren't just for accessing the patio. For a vintage look, consider stained glass, perhaps from a reclamation yard. And lastly double

pocket doors, within stud walls – whether solid or half solid/glazed, always connect and maximise space.

The lovely thing about using authentic Crittall is the history. Used particularly in the 1930s and earlier, the windows and doors are still chosen for builds today. It's possible to renovate old doors and bring them back to life, whether insitu or by an overhaul in a specialised workshop.

Original steel Crittall doors are not cheap, but the impact, visual effect and benefits they can bring to your home do justify the outlay. Like everything, there are alternatives available on the market, for example aluminium. While it's not as strong a material, it tends to have a quicker lead time, which may help your build when working under a time constraint.

Whatever the route you choose for your internal metal glazed doors ensure that you research the supply chain. Read reviews, and look out for a source who is a certified member of the Steel Window Association.

Lucy Bartley is founder of lucyb home



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1

INTERIOR INSPIRATION: ECO OPTIONS

Doing your bit to ensure your self-build minimises impact on the environment is no longer an unusual pursuit, it's virtually a must. One way you can help is by choosing products made from sustainably sourced, reclaimed or recycled materials; as we show here, it's increasingly achievable!



2

1. Build the perfect space to unwind using the **Rotterdam Large Standing Bookshelf Cabinet** by **Desser & Co.** A handmade sustainable solid wood bookcase with two fluted mango wood front panel cupboards and gold handle detailing, perfect for in the hallway or living room. Priced at £699.99.
www.desser.co.uk

2. **Modish Living's Luxe Kensington Chest of Drawers** features wooden drawers crafted using reclaimed sleeper wood, for a wonderfully rustic look. This is contrasted against the sleek, stainless steel framing and matching steel drawer knobs which adds a sophisticated, industrial twist to the design. Price: £1189.
www.modishliving.co.uk



3. The Palawan Bamboo Floor Lamp by Lime Lace is a unique and sustainable lamp with a black frame and a choice of bamboo shade. This eco-friendly lamp is made from sustainably sourced bamboo, making it an excellent choice for those looking to be more environmentally conscious. Priced at £239.
www.limelace.co.uk

4. This stunning Sustainable Velvet Small Sofa from Rockett St George is the perfect piece of furniture for smaller homes, families or couples. This statement sofa is 100% foam free using insulated fibre that is 70% made from recycled plastic bottles as a responsible alternative. The pillows are also formed from nothing but recycled, reused plastic bottles. Price: £1645.
www.rockettstgeorge.co.uk

5. Tap Warehouse's Vado Atmosphere Air Injection Slide Rail Kit with Single Function Handset is finished with a rust-resistant polished chrome. Its air mix technology mixes air to the flow which increases the pressure and reduces water consumption by up to 50%. The tap is priced at £206.99.
www.tapwarehouse.com

6. This contemporary large Urban Chic Dining Table by Oakavia is made using reclaimed wood salvaged from places such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan Southern India. Some of the wood used can range between 50 and 150 years old and is assembled by skilled craftsmen who create this colourful and interesting furniture. Price: £389.
www.oakavia.com

Wetrooms 101

In recent years the wetroom concept has taken a leap into mainstream popularity, and installations in homes are more desirable than ever to meet a range of needs. Shaun Hunt from Impey answers some self-builder Frequently Asked Questions

For many homeowners, a wetroom is the ultimate example of a practical and customisable showering space. Combining a waterproofed, open showering area with a level access floor and built in drainage, wetrooms were originally designed with accessibility in mind. However, integrating a wetroom into your home requires careful consideration.

DO I NEED A WETROOM?

A wetroom, or wet area in a larger bathroom, combines sleek modern styling with the benefits of level access showering. Appealing to all types of homeowners, a wetroom is a long-term showering solution which can fit virtually any size or space of a room. It is versatile enough to adapt to any kind of design scheme and offers the benefit of easy cleaning.

A modern wetroom can easily be installed anywhere within a property, not just on a ground floor, enabling an effective and desirable use of space.

HOW DO I CHOOSE A WETROOM FLOOR FORMER?

Efficient and effective wetroom installation relies on the floor former (or wetroom tray as it is sometimes called) to create the ideal gradient for draining away water. Available in square or linear styles, once installed a floor former becomes part of the fabric of the property's construction and later in the installation process will be hidden from view underneath the tiling.

The location of the wetroom dictates which type of floor former is best for the situation. For use in upper floors or attics, the most popular choice is a prefabricated floor former with in-

built drainage gradient. It needs to be lightweight, but also offer strength and rigidity.

For ease of installation opt for a floor former which can be placed straight onto joists, alleviating any requirement to 'under board.' A floor former with a rotating drain plate makes it easy to avoid underfloor obstructions like pipework or joists; reducing installation time and cost.

The linear shower area configuration offers versatility and a sleek contemporary aesthetic. In keeping with the open plan layout of many level access shower areas, a linear design can help to maximise space and enhance accessibility.

With a linear wetroom floor former, it is possible to choose from two, three or four falls, to direct water to the drainage point. This creates three separate layout choices, meaning that linear options can be helpful when designing a shower space for an awkward or unusually shaped room.

CAN I INSTALL A WETROOM ON A CONCRETE FLOOR?

Yes. For installation into a new concrete floor, a screed template is an ideal choice. By clicking together the template into the correct shape for the wetroom, each section has the optimum gradient built in, ideal for drainage. This eliminates issues like water pooling. Look for a screed template that can be installed directly onto the sub-floor and is suited to uneven surfaces. Once the desired formation is achieved, the template is filled with screed.

If you are installing a wetroom onto an existing concrete floor the best option



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is a prefabricated floor former. Once the floor former has been chosen, a section of concrete is removed which allows it to sit flush with the floor and the installation process is then followed in the same way it would be for any other type of wetroom installation.

IS WATERPROOFING IMPORTANT?

Quality waterproofing (or tanking as it is often known), is an essential part of the wetroom installation process. Creating a fully waterproofed barrier for the wetroom guarantees peace of mind – importantly guarding against leaks by creating a highly effective watertight barrier for both floors and walls for the lifetime of the tiles.

Look out for a tanking membrane which is provided on a roll for easier application and handling. A sheet membrane with a butyl rubber coated self-adhesive layer with a polypropylene surface is ideal for tile adhesive. Choosing a product which requires no curing time ensures tiling can commence as soon as the product is laid, reducing installation time significantly.

DO I NEED TO INSTALL UNDERFLOOR HEATING?

Underfloor heating enhances the luxury wetroom feel by creating an ambient warmth.

Proven to be between 15% and 40% more effective than radiators, it allows the heat to rise, slowly distributing it around the rest of the room and creating an even heat flow.

Underfloor heating can be laid on top of the waterproofing membrane for an instant feeling of luxury which not only enhances the experience of showering in the wetroom but also helps the floor to dry out fully between uses.

Depending on the situation it is being chosen for, ensure that your chosen undertile heating option has been compatibility tested with the waterproofing and floor former designs you opt for.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO THINK ABOUT?

Remember that wetroom floor tiles need to be suitable for the wet area and provide a non-slip surface for safe showering. A 'statement' drain top can be chosen to coordinate with brassware and accessories. Alternatively, opting for a 'tiled insert' drain top will ensure that it blends seamlessly.

Shaun Hunt is technical and trade marketing manager at Impey



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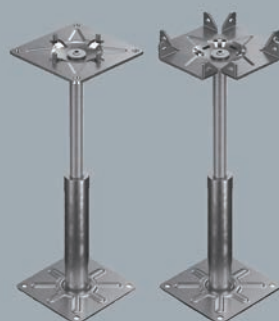
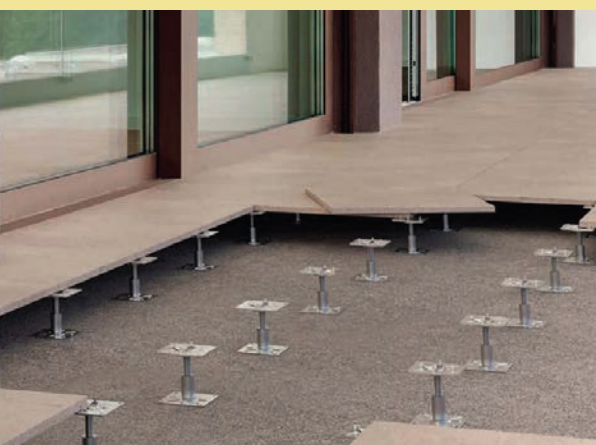
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Key considerations for a watertight wet room design



Wet rooms give the impression of greater space along with a feeling of luxury. They are easier to keep clean and a fantastic way to open up space, making it especially great for those with limited mobility. Furthermore, wet room systems are not limited in sizing, like shower trays often are, so they are also a great solution for awkward or tight spaces such as loft bathrooms or alcoves.

Whether you are considering the jump to wet rooms or just looking for inspiration, wedi - the leading manufacturer of wet room solutions since 1983 – offers valuable insights on perfectly executed wet room installations.

Wet rooms are a big project to take on and it is extremely important to be aware of the British Standard (BS) requirements and of the limitations

of popular materials. According to BS 5385 Part 1 “materials that are subject to movement from changes in moisture content should be avoided”. Therefore, timber sub-floors, plywood and other wood-based sheets or boards are not suitable for tiling in wet, frequently damp, or high humidity areas.

THE PRINCIPLE OF WET ROOM DESIGN IS THAT THE ENTIRE SPACE IS ‘TANKED’ OR WATERPROOFED BEFORE TILING.

Substrates should always be protected with proper tanking such as with waterproof sheet membrane, applying a paint-on liquid wall membrane or with a completely watertight tile backer board.

“Traditional tanking of a wet room is a multi-step process which entails several layers of waterproofing to ensure an excellent seal. Commonly

used tilebacker boards such as cement boards, gypsum boards, magnesium oxide and expanded polystyrene (EPS) boards require additional waterproofing. On the contrary, wedi tile backer boards made of extruded polystyrene (XPS), are 100% waterproof and hence no additional tanking is required. What’s more, they are also coated on both sides with a glass fibre mesh reinforced cement coating to allow for direct tiling and so, priming wouldn’t be required either. Additionally, our boards can also be directly bonded to stud frames, so there is no need for mechanical fixing that would entail laborious sealing steps over the penetrations. Our industry famous versatile wedi 610 adhesive sealant takes care of not only the waterproof adhesion to frames, but also of the bonding and sealing of wedi

building board joints in just a single step. Through reducing installation steps, our product solutions eliminate the risk of failure" – says Ciaran Feeney, Technical Manager at wedi UK.

ALWAYS MAKE SURE THAT YOUR CHOSEN TILES HAVE AN APPROPRIATE NON-SLIP RATING AND LOW HEAT-CONDUCTIVITY.

The chosen tile backer board must also be capable of carrying the load of tiles as well as the tile adhesive. Beware of some commonly used materials such as gypsum plasterboards that have vertical weight-load capability of only 32 kg/m² limiting the choice of tiles significantly. Ceramic tiles are not ideal for wet rooms because their construction and high-shine finish makes them cold to the touch. This can result in much surface condensation making them slippery.

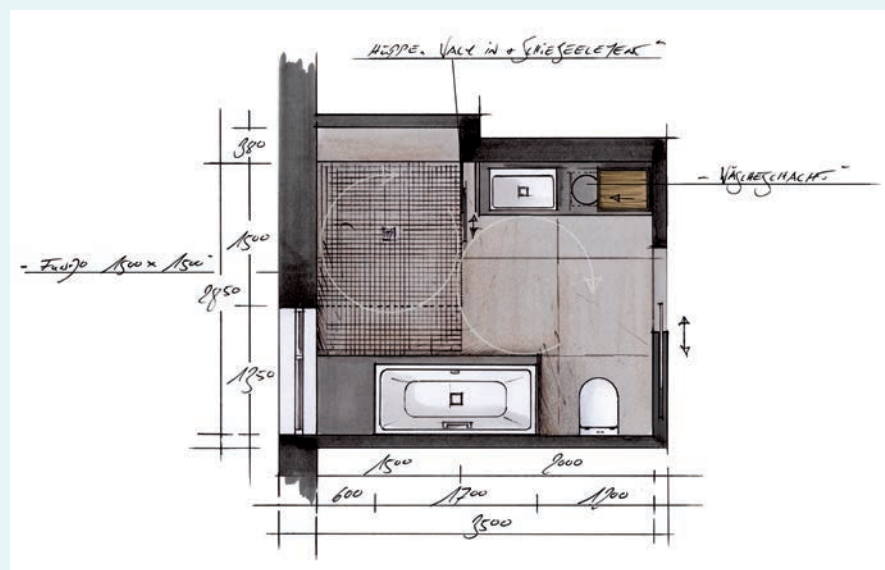
"wedi building boards have 133 kg/m² vertical weight-load capability, allowing for heavier, large-format porcelain or natural stone tiles to be used in the wet room. It is an understatement that grout lines provide perfect breeding ground for mould and bacteria. Thanks to the reduction of grout lines, large format tiles are an excellent choice not only for hygiene but also for ease of maintenance" – explains Mr Feeney.

TILE THE SPACE FROM FLOOR TO CEILING WHILST ENSURING PROPER DRAINAGE AND ADEQUATE SEALING OF THE DRAIN.

The room needs to be tiled throughout with a gentle gradient in the main shower area. If you have a wooden sub-floor, the way your joists run is crucial to where your drain can be positioned.

"Apart from tilebacker boards, we also offer directly tileable 100% waterproof XPS flush-to-floor shower elements in a multitude of formats and sizes. Each Fundo shower element is precision engineered in Germany and features integrated gradients as well as an enhanced cementitious coating to account for the high water exposure in shower areas. They can also be easily trimmed on site to ensure an exact fit. For a universal, flexible seal around the perimeter, we offer a sealing set consisting of a special waterproof slurry, sealing tape and preformed sealing corners" – says Ciaran Feeney, Technical Manager at wedi UK.

A typical electric shower has flow rates in the region of 4-8 litres per minute, whereas a power shower could be up to 20-30 litres per minute. Flow rates of additional hand-held units and



body jets should also be taken into account. The sealing of the drainage is a crucial step of every shower installation, but the stability of the drain body is also paramount.

"wedi Fundo shower elements offer a flow rate of 30-66 litres per minute depending on the design. They are fitted with a partially integrated, 360° rotatable dry-fit drainage technology meaning that no additional sealing or silicone is required for the installation of the drain. What's more, we also offer drain substructure elements for accurate support and alignment of the drainage, especially for installations in timber floors" – continues Mr Feeney.

Whether with point or linear drainage, there is a Fundo shower element for almost every requirement. The surrounding floor should be lined with either wedi building boards or with a wedi Subliner membrane to ensure the proper tanking of splash areas.

CONSIDER UNDER-TILE HEATING TO KEEP THE SPACE WARM AND DRY.

Tiled surfaces can get quite cold and hence it is important to take extra steps. Beneath all UTH systems, whether it be an electric or a hot-water system, there should be an insulated board to enhance the efficiency of heating.

"Thanks to the excellent thermal properties of wedi XPS elements, heat is reflected back into the room. This will not only reduce surface condensation within the wet room, but it is precisely this characteristic that makes wedi building boards and Fundo shower elements perfect to use beneath underfloor heating: they improve the response time of heating systems by up to a staggering 70%" – explains

Mr Feeney.

Adequate mechanical ventilation must also be installed in line with building regulations.

CONCERNED ABOUT SPLASH AREAS?

The gradient or slope can be extended further out of the shower area with the aid of sloping boards to guide the water back towards the drain.

A true wet room is completely open without any glass partition. However, a simple fixed glass panel creating a walk-in shower area is a practical choice and has become a popular trend.

In cases where a step-up into to the wet area is required, the step should be at least 10cm high, as anything lower can be easily overlooked by those not familiar with the room and become a trip hazard.

"Architects, contractors, as well as end-users know the importance of waterproofing. Everyone knows someone that has had a leakage problem. The key thing is to know how to effectively prevent such issues with the right material. There has been a flood of tilebacker boards in the industry over the past decade, but it is important to know that not all are made from waterproof material or that the quality may be lacking. Do it once, do it right – research. A wet room is an investment, there is no doubt. However, with using the right type of material, thanks to the added waterproofing a wet room will not only add value to the property but also future-proof your home for years to come" – advises Ciaran Feeney, Technical Manager at wedi UK.

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Get in the lead and avoid the delays

Unexpected delays can cause huge disruption to a self-build project, costing you valuable time and money. Here, Ben Brocklesby of Origin explores why it is vital to research likely product lead times when planning a project, particularly for crucial components such as doors and windows

It's crucial that anyone project managing a build takes lead times of key materials, parts, and products into consideration during the planning stages. If an essential element of the build is delayed and progress can't continue without it, it will have a knock-on effect on the entire project timeline, costing time, money, and a huge amount of inconvenience as you rearrange suppliers and tradespeople.

Getting the timing of external products, such as doors and windows, right, is also key. If they are delivered too early, they are vulnerable to becoming damaged while sitting on the building site. If they arrive too late, your property could be left exposed to the elements, risking damage to the progress made, and holding up further work.

AVERAGE LEAD TIMES

The average lead time for doors and windows is around six to eight weeks. However, this varies significantly depending on the supplier you opt for, the tradesperson undertaking the installation, and their availability.

For example, there are doors and windows on the market that are available to be specified when they are required, even if that's in as little as 24 hours when ordered in a popular colour. While most projects don't need quite such a quick turnaround, this offers complete peace-of-mind and is invaluable if you've been let down by another supplier, or plans



have changed at the last minute.

AVOIDING DELAYS

While the supply chain issues affecting the availability of many materials are easing, it's still important to opt for suppliers that you can trust to deliver when you need them to. One way to identify trustworthy suppliers is by checking out their track record on delivery. Some companies do promise to deliver your product in full, on a day that suits you, allowing you to time the arrival of your doors and windows to align perfectly with the rest of the build schedule.

It's also beneficial to look for suppliers which fabricate products in-house, here

in the UK. This will mean the supply chain is much shorter, therefore reducing the likelihood of third-party delays. Plus, by ordering products that are made in the UK, you won't be reliant on overseas shipping, removing another potential hold-up from the process.

CONCLUSION

While researching suppliers' credentials and lead time commitments requires some time investment at the beginning of the project, it is vital for safeguarding the rest of your build's timeline, helping to ensure the project runs as smoothly and cost-effectively as possible.

Ben Brocklesby is director at Origin

While the supply chain issues affecting the availability of many materials are easing, it's still important to opt for suppliers that you can trust to deliver when you need them to



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Know Your VAT Position



Andrew Jones the VAT man is the leading specialist on the VAT 431 scheme for reclaiming VAT on self builds, covering both new builds and conversions. We asked him to explain more about the ins and outs of the scheme, and how his firm can help.

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

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

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

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

What reasons could HMRC have for refusing the claim in it's entirety?

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

And what about reducing the claim after overcoming that hurdle?

HMRC require to view the original invoices. Order confirmations, proformas, quotations and so on, will not be accepted. So you must present HMRC with the correct documents. Another reason is if you have paid the wrong rate of VAT to your supplier, HMRC will not reimburse this VAT to you in your VAT reclaim.

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

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

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

How can you let your builder know you're not on the 20% VAT?

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

Is it that simple? What if the builder refuses?

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

So where does your firm fit into all of this?

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

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

We have only covered some of the big issues, and each person and project have their own potential pitfalls, but briefly - when to submit, making sure it's the correct rate of VAT, names on the invoices, and HMRC's questions after submitting. However, I have a helpful booklet with over 100 Q&As similar to the above. If you would like a copy, or a free no obligation consultation please get in touch today.



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CASE STUDY

PETIT CHABLIS

John and Julia Abbey overcame language barriers and complex regulations to successfully renovate a dilapidated property in the Chablis region of France, creating their dream home with a 'gite on the side'

TEXT HEATHER DIXON IMAGES JOHN & JULIA ABBEY



Have you ever dreamed of selling up and heading for a new life in the sun? It sounds idyllic, but the reality often falls short of the dream. The idea of transforming an old rural building into a gite can often be a logistical nightmare – fraught with complex regulations, language barriers and spiralling costs.

But when John and Julia Abbey moved to France they had some distinct advantages. John had already renovated a property, a dilapidated old village bakery, in the tiny Chablisienne village of Viviers and was familiar with the local red tape and building regulations. Julia, meanwhile, is a professional chef who, with

John, was running a celebrated country pub in Cambridgeshire when they decided to make their life-changing move. Furthermore, John speaks 'reasonable' French, thanks to spending many years dealing with vintners of the Chablis region who supplied their venues with fine wines. Between them, they were the perfect partnership for a new life in the sun.

"We had often talked about moving permanently to France but business and family commitments kept us in the UK," said Julia. "When the time was right we decided to take the plunge and started looking for a property to buy in Chablis. We were familiar with the region,

HIGH POINTS

- "Friends and family finally coming to visit and friends helping with the renovation."
- "Receiving our residency after a year of uncertainty and getting planning approval for the extension and barn conversion, just four weeks after submitting detailed proposals."



knew people in the town and loved the location. The challenge was finding the right house."

At first John and Julia were looking for a property they could run as a small B&B, so it had to be big enough to accommodate themselves and others, as well as have off-street parking and a garden where green-fingered Julia could grow herbs and vegetables to include in recipes.

They eventually found the perfect place which came with an added bonus – a family house with outbuildings on a river frontage, complete with a large garden containing an ancient open barn. Better still, the outbuilding, a former sawmill and machinery store, was a large empty space; ripe for conversion into a gite.

Julia explains further: "John had already renovated the old bakery, so he was familiar with French building regulations and laws, and had got to know the local tradespeople, which was a huge bonus." She continues: "We could avoid the pitfalls and make sure we did everything

correctly from the outset."

Initially John was unsure about the dated property because of its impractical open plan ground floor but, once he could visualise its potential, he realised it was the ideal place for them to live. They agreed that the extensive ground floor would be divided into three separate rooms and the kitchen completely refitted to Julia's professional chef's design, while the outbuildings offered a blank canvas for conversion into extra – and independent – living space. This would earn them an income in the short term and provide futureproof single storey accommodation for them both in the long term, as well as extra accommodation for visiting friends and family.

There were two caveats to the project: the house is the only property in Chablis with a direct link between the road and the river that runs through the centre of the town, and this access had to be kept available in the event of



LOW POINT

When the flat roof failed. "I laid awake night after night worrying about that," says John. "I was also worried we would run out of money, and there were some dark days during Covid – we couldn't get home for my son Charles' graduation."

"John had already renovated the old bakery, so he was familiar with French building regulations and laws, and had got to know the local tradespeople, which was a huge bonus"

emergency vehicles needing access to the river. They were also compelled to keep the huge old barn in the garden as a building of historic interest, even though their initial plan had been to demolish the entire structure.

"We were not allowed to take down any historic building within a certain distance of Chablis church and had to alter our plans accordingly," said Julia. "In hindsight the locals were absolutely right to have preserved it – it's proved to be an excellent sun shelter during the sweltering summer."

Before they tackled the neglected outdoor space, however, John had to renovate the main house within the confines and restrictions of lockdown.

They agreed to live in the Old Bakery while John set to work, then they would move into the property once it was finished and renovate the outbuildings.

"We were delighted to have got the relevant permissions to move to France permanently ahead of Brexit, but we hadn't bargained for

going straight into lockdown," says Julia. "It made everything that much harder because we couldn't draft in extra help very easily and it was difficult to get building materials, but it didn't stop John from working long, hard hours, every single day, for months on end."

It was a mammoth task, but John had renovated properties before and knew how to break everything down into bite-sized sections.

He began by stripping out the fixtures and fittings of the old kitchen which included a cloakroom and a small utility. With the help of his brother-in-law during a three day visit, he knocked down the dividing walls and chipped away the old plaster ready for replumbing and new electrics. All the rubble from the house was shovelled by hand into a trailer and taken to the local tip and new building materials were ferried in using a standard trailer on the back of the car.

It was then back inside the house to start work on the electrics, plumbing and plastering followed by the flooring. During this phase he also reconfigured some of the walls on the first



They finally moved in just before Christmas 2020, hoisting some of the furniture through the first-floor windows

floor to make better use of the space, turning four bedrooms into three with a main bathroom and an ensuite guest room. John and Julia wanted to restore the original ground floor layout of three main rooms – a kitchen to the left of the entrance hall along with a dining room and sitting room to the right. This meant reinstating walls and doors and turning an archway into a feature bookcase on either side of the double doors between the two main living rooms.

They agreed to keep the original fireplace, which sits at an angle across one corner, but then had to wait a year before they could get the chimney swept and certified safe to use for insurance purposes. "However," Julia says, "the first time we lit the fire, it smelt very strange and the next thing we knew, the mirror over the fireplace had cracked and we discovered that the heat was coming straight out of four vents in the chimney breast," said Julia. "Everything around them was melting! After that we blocked up the vents and the fire worked perfectly." With the rooms reinstated, John lay the electric cables

for the underfloor heating before screeding over the top and laying new tiles throughout the ground floor. John and Julia bought their kitchen units in the UK and John fitted them himself, along with the granite worktops.

Drainage could have been a big challenge – there was no toilet in the main bathroom and therefore insufficient drainage at that end of the house, so John used past experience as a drain layer to put in new drains to serve not only the main house but also the gite.

They finally moved in – hoisting some of the furniture through the first-floor windows – just before Christmas 2020. "Fortunately, the previous owners had fitted a new family bathroom and upgraded the windows, which saved us considerable expense," said John.

With the help of friends from back in the UK, John refurbished some of the more dilapidated external shutters, but the long-term plan is to replace them all eventually.

"When you are working to a budget you have to prioritise," he said. "Once we reached





the point where we could move into the house, we turned our attention to the outbuildings and garden."

In the early months of 2021, John and Julia gradually emptied the barn and storage space of its contents, taking most of it to the tip while salvaging anything that could be reused and recycled. Then their attention moved to landscaping the garden so Julia could start growing fruit, vegetables and herbs. There was a short delay while they applied for – and were granted – planning permission to build a shed and greenhouse. They hired a digger to shift some of the 100 tonnes of rubble which eventually came out of the garden, ferrying it to the tip in a trailer and returning each time with a load of top soil. "There were times when I looked at everything that had to be done and felt completely over-faced by it all," said John. "When that happens you have to break everything down into manageable sections.

That way you don't feel overwhelmed."

The hard work paid off when the gravel and turf arrived and completely transformed it from a building site into a beautifully designed garden of winding paths, raised beds, gazebos and ornamental planting. It gave them the push they needed for the next phase of their mammoth renovation project – the conversion of the outbuildings into a two-bedroom gite.

They had already acquired planning permission with the help of a local architect – the only stipulation being that the driveway had to be unobstructed, and two metres wide for an emergency vehicle to get from the road to the river.

John started by building a link between the house and the outbuildings which include a ground floor shower room, boiler, laundry room and wine cellar. Doors were installed in September 2022 and the link plastered out and tiled in December.

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"The concrete roof had to be done twice because it leaked after the first attempt," said John. "I was up and down ladders lifting the concrete in buckets. It was hard work but it had to be right."

With the atrium almost complete, John removed the corrugated plastic roof of the outbuildings, took off the old doors and had an old oil tank professionally removed from the site. He then began the transformation of the 900 sq ft space by building the front wall up to roof level, creating a flat concrete roof and then using support beams to hold up the structure while he built the internal breeze block walls. While the front part of the gite was open to the elements, however, heavy storms flooded the building and progress was delayed until it could dry out ahead of doors and windows going in to make the building watertight.

Earlier this year three friends from the UK travelled down to Chablis to lend a hand,

including father-and-son plumbers who spent a month living with John and Julia so they could complete to second fix stage. Between them they laid a concrete floor – using almost 100 mixes of concrete created across three days – fitted a shower room on the ground floor, made the roof terrace on the gite waterproof and installed a staircase to the second floor bedroom.

At the point of writing, John was still working on the second fixes, tiling the floors, plastering walls and generally getting the gite to the point where he could start decorating. "It's been a long, hard project and most of it I've done on my own, but there are stages where you seem to be taking one step forward and three back, and other times when you are making huge progress very quickly. Then suddenly it all pulls together and you stand back and get a huge sense of achievement. You know, at that point, that it's all been worthwhile." ■

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Sealing your future

Windows are one of the most important elements of any property, so effectively sealing them for optimum long term energy efficiency must be a top priority, says Andy Swift of ISO-Chemie

The success of a renovation or self-build project can be defined by the choice of windows and doors. Get it right and the property can look superb; adding real value for years to come. However, pursue the wrong route and the disappointment can linger for years. The same can be said of how the units are sealed. Indeed, while there have been advances in glass and frame technology in recent years, way too many projects are being let down by poor or ill-equipped window and door installations.

BUILDING REGULATIONS

Changes to Part L of the Building Regulations, which came into effect earlier this year, place the emphasis on stricter standards and compliance procedures around energy and ventilation performance, contributing towards a roadmap to a net zero carbon future and properties designed and built in-line with stricter carbon emissions targets. Specifically, to ensure continuity of the air barrier, window and door units will have to connect to the primary air barrier and the frames will need to be taped to surrounding structural openings using air sealing tape.

This comes against a landscape where evidence points to doors and windows as the main source of continuing energy inefficient properties. Indeed, in the light of product innovation over the years, it's almost criminal that the hundreds of thousands of self-build or retrofit installations completed each year go unchecked or unregulated. This is a pity because with advancements in cost effective, easy-to-use technologies, there isn't a justifiable reason for delaying or avoiding the specification and installation of better sealing solutions.

The new Part L is to be welcomed, and sees requirements for improvements in air tightness, forcing it from 10 air changes per hour down to 8 air changes per hour and also U-value on windows shifting from 1.6 to 1.2 W/m²K. This



Innovative sealing technologies are undoubtedly a beneficial way to help self-builders and renovators have the energy efficient homes we all want

places an onus on using more energy efficient sealant solutions and the requirement that the window frame should be linked back to the wall with an air-tight tape.

Heat will always find the fastest exit as it meets the 'A' or 'A+' rated window, and invariably this emanates from the 10 mm or so expansion gap left around the window following fitting. This is normally left empty, but an amount of spray foam can be injected to fill the void before a silicone trim is applied for a smart looking finish. Unfortunately, as expedient as this might seem, none of these solutions create a measurable, long term, high performance thermal, acoustic or airtight barrier – the U-value of the installed window is simply reduced, which leads to heat escape and,

ultimately, financial losses.

That's why the property and building sectors deserve better insulating solutions to improve energy efficiencies, especially if as predicted, the UK market stays buoyant over the next 12 months as the economy continues to recover from the pandemic and building and construction activity remains busy, particular in the face of a chronic national housing shortage and the need to build more affordable housing.

Modular construction, which is gaining increasing traction, is seeing continued integration with the more traditional methods of building, enabling self-builders to bring forward projects more expediently. Designers and specifiers are looking at ever more expeditious ways to deliver low



carbon structures that use sustainable technologies to deliver measurable airtight, acoustic and thermal sealing benefits.

Building Regulation changes will have an unequivocal impact as energy ratings for property become stricter, and these include energy and ventilation standards for new homes that are far better for the environment and fit for the future. It's hard to argue that higher air and thermal standards for house construction has to be a continuing priority.

Innovative sealing technologies are undoubtedly a beneficial way to help self-builders and renovators have the energy efficient homes we all want. Indeed, as sustainability continues to be of paramount concern in the development of low carbon and eco-friendly building projects, we will see technologies such as 'energy foam tapes,' which can add real value during the initial and post construction phases, grow in importance as effective ways to seal window and door frame expansion joints and gaps.

PRIORITY SEALING

The need for more effective insulation and sealing solutions of windows and doors will become a priority for the self-build and renovation sectors. Indeed, it could be argued that retrofitting sealing solutions can be an effective way to achieve greater energy efficient homes rather than building new properties. In the self-build market, designers will continue to invest in new ways to deliver low carbon structures, which use sustainable technologies such as foam sealant tapes to secure measurable airtight, acoustic and thermal sealing benefits.

With 25% of the heat leaking from around windows it will become ever more critical to improve the seal around the window to wall gap if the amount of heat loss around frames is to be significantly reduced, helping to save energy costs in the process. Retrofitting properties with effective sealing solutions must also become a direct focus for self-builders and those involved in refurbishment and home renovation projects. As they say the greenest home is one already built – it just needs proper retrofit insulation.

Andy Swift is sales and operations manager for ISO-Chemie

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HUNGATE LODGE, HUNSTANTON - A BEAUTIFUL SEASIDE HOME THE PROJECT

It's hard to believe that Hungate Lodge was once a dowdy bungalow with windows which took little advantage of a beautiful coastal location. Now fully renovated, the Lodge is clad in white render, timber and seamed zinc, with triple glazed VELFAC composite windows adding contemporary style, impressive thermal performance and expansive views over the sea.

'We extended the sides, added a new full height porch, and converted existing roof lights in the loft into dormer windows, some with full height glazed doors and Juliette balconies,' says owner Dave Gambell. 'We also raised the height of the single storey rear extension, installing a patio door with side panels at ground level, and a triangular window above which rises into a new gable roof.'

WHY THEY CHOSE VELFAC

External VELFAC aluminium frames, finished in anthracite grey, feature an



enhanced anti-corrosion coating to prevent damage from salt-laden winds, an important benefit which influenced Dave's choice of ground floor patio door: 'We had planned on installing a bi-fold door but couldn't find a supplier able to add an anti-corrosive finish,' he says, 'so we chose a VELFAC casement door, flanked by fixed glazed panels, which looks great and is probably more practical.'

Internal timber VELFAC frames are finished in a clear lacquer to match wood-look floors: 'We felt natural wood was the right finish for a 'rustic' beach house,' says Dave, 'and clear lacquer is very durable and rarely needs recoating.'

As an experienced consulting engineer specialised in sustainable builds, Dave was already familiar with VELFAC when choosing windows and doors. 'I've seen the VELFAC composite system installed in literally hundreds of projects,' he says, 'and though my professional focus is on energy targets and U-values, I also really like the look of the system, especially the slim sash design.'

WINDOWS AND DOORS PERFORMANCE

To help meet a project U-value target of below $1\text{W/m}^2\text{K}$ Dave specified VELFAC triple glazing, with U-values of 0.8W/

m^2K : 'Given the added performance of triple glazing, the extra cost was not that great in the context of the whole project,' he adds. The house faces north west, and is shaded by trees, so glass coatings weren't required to modify solar gain, and in fact the long thin windows in the extended porch are designed to actively generate heat: 'They help turn the porch into a solar reservoir for the rest of the house,' explains Dave, 'and work as part of our new MVHR system.'

Before specifying, Dave talked through his project, and saw product samples, at one of the VELFAC showrooms: 'Retrofitting windows always raises issues as every opening is slightly different, so it was useful to have some expert help when confirming exactly what was needed,' he says.

Dave and family are now enjoying their newly renovated home, their new windows, and some great views: 'The large windows in the rear extension are particularly successful,' he says, 'and we enjoy watching the sun setting over the Wash.'

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CASE STUDY

WHEEL OF GOOD FORTUNE

A young couple seeking their first home together in Cumbria brought in family help to maximise the benefits of a site that once housed a water mill, and on which now sits their four-bed property

TEXT LAURA SHADWELL IMAGES LUCY RAE



At the start of 2021, Tom Horner and Lucy Rae were keen to buy their first home together. Having previously bought a small terrace property as a 'fixer-upper' to sell on rather than to live in, they were able to fund their next move with the proceeds.

The couple had been to a number of house viewings to no avail. "We were getting a bit deflated, we couldn't find any houses that we thought could be 'the one,'" explains Lucy. It was shortly after that they stumbled upon "an affordable" plot of land in Egremont, in the west of Cumbria, near the coast.

It was tucked away down a lane, but a convenient five minute walk to the shops, and "the perfect place for this time in our lives," says Lucy. "It's a small market town just a short drive from the Lake District, close to work, friends and family." Having grown up in the area, they didn't hesitate, and – despite fierce competition – their

offer was accepted in April 2021.

Lucy's parents were a big help, having had first hand experience with self-building, in fact completing a number of properties previously themselves, her father being a builder. "I was brought up around the idea of self-builds being an option," comments Lucy. It meant that her dad, her uncle and Tom were able to handle the lion's share of the actual building work.

ALL IN THE PLANNING

Originally setting out to find a three bedroom property, changing their option to build from scratch allowed the couple to consider a four-bedroom design. However, says Lucy, it wouldn't be an overly large property: "As it's just the two of us at the moment, we weren't too fussed about a big house – we just wanted something that would be affordable to build, and affordable to run."

HIGH POINT

"Working together with Tom and family members, and the location."

– Lucy





Luck was on their side again when it came to finding an architect. The land was sold with a consented design for a four-bedroom house with an integrated garage. Coincidentally, the architect – Geoffrey Wallace – who had designed it had also previously worked with her parents – “it’s a small town!” she laughs.

Lucy and Tom met the architect and explained their ideas for a revamp of the design to provide an open plan layout with aluminium bi-fold doors, plus an added boot room and utility room. “As we’re both quite outdoorsy, we wanted a separate boot room just to hide the muddy walking boots, and an area large enough to entertain friends,” says Lucy. The architect wasted no time in making the changes, and eight weeks later, planning was granted.

As the garden has a small stream along one side, flood surveys and a mining survey were carried out as part of the sale, fortunately all came back with no issues. To provide a ‘belt

and braces’ solution however, the architect insisted on raising the damp course higher than stipulated in the Building Regulations, and once completed, the drive will be made from a permeable material for better drainage.

There was only one objection raised during the whole planning process, and that was from neighbours worried about the damage construction vehicles would do in the narrow shared lane. This was easily resolved, with Tom and Lucy promising to fill in any potholes at the end of the build, a promise they duly kept.

Roughly 0.4 of an acre, the plot was originally part of the neighbours’ garden. When they purchased the land, the only thing standing on it was an old workshop. However, they quickly discovered once digging commenced that there were signs of there having been a water mill on the site; “the amount of sandstone we pulled out of the ground was enough for anyone!” Lucy exclaims. This included several original mill

LOW POINT

Lead times and availability of materials during the pandemic: “There were quite a few periods when we were waiting around for materials.”



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wheels; "We intend to clean them up and make a nice feature out of them," she adds.

PANDEMIC PREDICAMENTS

The construction of the property took place during the pandemic, but Covid restrictions did mean that with a lot more time at home, they could take an even more active role in the build. Lucy adds that "As the builders were mainly my dad and uncle, we had no choice but to be hands on!" The couple also learnt a lot – there were no services on the plot, so that was another thing they had to organise.

In common with much of the construction industry during the pandemic, lead times for parts and materials were a big issue on this project. "We had to wait nearly two months for the steel beam for our bi-folds, which was a big holdup," says Lucy. Also during that time, cement was in short supply, the price "rocketed," and the couple were limited to five

bags per day from their local supplier. "It was probably the most frustrating part of the project – there were quite a few periods of time when we had no choice but to play the waiting game for materials," she adds.

While sustainability was not at the very top of the couple's agenda, they nevertheless saw it as important to include where their budget would allow. They decided to incorporate an air source heat pump (paired with underfloor heating downstairs and radiators upstairs), as well as a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery system (MVHR), to give a continuous supply of filtered fresh air throughout the home.

INTERIOR INSPIRATION

In addition to the open plan layout of the kitchen/entertaining area and utility/boot room, the downstairs also has an inviting hallway, downstairs WC, and separate snug; "It was



important for us to have a separate living space – especially for the winter months where we could cosy up in front of the log burner!”

Upstairs, the layout provides them with four good sized double bedrooms, including a master bedroom with an ensuite and walk-through wardrobe, and an attractively-designed family bathroom.

Inspired by images of past projects on Instagram and Pinterest, the couple’s vision for the interior was a traditional country feel: “We wanted a timeless theme with a fairly neutral palette, but accentuated with bursts of colour from soft furnishings and pictures.” They opted for limestone tiles throughout the downstairs (apart from the carpeted snug), complementing the Farrow & Ball painted walls.

The two tone kitchen units, and the ‘khaki’ green in the boot room, reflect the property’s rural setting, and create a calm and natural

living environment. A brick slip surround to the fireplace in the snug offers a feature focal point, along with an oak mantel that ties into the other oak elements throughout the house. Lucy is particularly pleased with the feature TV unit in the open plan kitchen: “My dad built it out of MDF sheets – this saved us thousands!”

The exterior of the property has been mainly rendered, although the lower half of the chimney stack and around the front door has been finished with a random-coursed, natural stone walling.

KEEPING A GRIP ON FINANCES

Although the couple didn’t have a strict budget, they were equally realistic about not letting the cost run away. They kept an inventory on an Excel spreadsheet so they could see exactly where their money was being spent.

Despite already facing financial challenges

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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TOM AND LUCY'S TOP TIPS

- "Keeping your neighbours on side is always a good idea!"
- "Try and stick to your budget as much as possible, because you do want to be able to live your life once the build is finished."
- "At times a build can test your stress levels! Keep your spirits high, and keep working together."

such as price hikes of materials and needing to dig deeper foundations than initially planned, Lucy was adamant about not cutting any corners when it came to the finishes.

"It's hard because you want to stick to a budget, but then at the end of the day it's the house you're going to live in so you want it to be perfect." To offset some of the additional costs, Tom brought his DIY skills to the fore, upcycling a dining table from Ebay, as well as making a couple of matching benches from pine sourced from their local wood merchants.

FEELING POSITIVE

Tom and Lucy say that their first experience at a self-build has been a positive one, in part because of the fact their family offered so much support, including hard graft. Their new home took just under a year and a half to complete and was signed off in September 2022.

The young couple couldn't be happier with the end results. Since moving in, they have been making the most of their new, open plan kitchen, which is "definitely our favourite room in the house," enthuses Lucy with a smile. "We have

"We just wanted something that would be affordable to build, and affordable to run"
- Lucy

been busy repaying everyone involved in the build with Sunday dinners!"

Are they planning any future builds? The couple say they think they will be living here for a while, and are "still recovering from this one!" laughs Lucy. "We would possibly be tempted in the future if a plot came up that offered views of the Fells," she admits, "but they tend to come at a higher price." For the time being anyway, they are going to enjoy their new home, and the results of all their hard work. ■

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Open up to light relief around the home

TuffX's Paul Higgins explains how rooflights can provide innovative solutions to maximise natural light, create dedicated work zones, and balance energy efficiency with comfort in your self-build or renovation



Times have changed, and our homes are changing with them. Energy prices have rocketed to heights we never would have imagined, and the cost of living continues to rise. We're unlikely to see the historically low mortgage rates we've become used to again for a long time.

Financially speaking this all affects

customers' decisions, whether they are self-builders or renovators.

But we're also still working from home since the pandemic, if not full-time, then in a hybrid fashion which has been so popular among employees and looks set to stay to some degree or other. This impacts how we want to use and feel about our homes, which are working

harder than ever. So it's about making quality product choices with benefits that justify the cost, and longer term also improves the efficiency of the home and consequently mitigates the cost of those rising energy bills.

New home spaces, with room for desks and ideally dedicated work areas that can be stepped away from at the

Rooflights can provide a creative solution for 'zoning' particular areas in your home – whether it's a home office or new living space

end of the day, have become popular as we work more from home, but are no longer happy to do so hunched over a laptop on the sofa or at the dining table. Rooflights can provide a creative solution to 'zoning' new areas in the home – be it a home office or new living space.

Using rooflights creates the impression of separate 'zones' in an otherwise open space. They're a great way to update an open plan home to include a new designated zone for work or living.

Rooflights and lanterns are also ideal for extensions as they flood the home with natural light, particularly in terraced or narrow properties, where the centre of the house can become quite dark. Natural light isn't just a 'nice-to-have' either, it can reduce eye strain, headaches and fatigue, as well as increase productivity; all important in a home working environment.

For year-round comfort, solar glass rooflights are popular, but most come with a compromise. These usually include a glass tint applied to the outer pane to help manage heat transmission, although this tint also reduces light transmission which can have a substantial impact on ambient light levels in the home.

However, if you do your research, you will find new products are slowly coming to market that do away with this trade-



off between heat management and the proportional loss of light associated with tinted solar products.

The result of these innovative products is maximum light transmission with minimal solar heat gain, helping to maintain comfortable indoor summer temperatures. New, pioneering glass coatings can now absorb and reflect up to twice as much heat as standard glass, meaning homeowners are no longer forced to choose between light and comfort. If homeowners opt for a unit with a low U-value too, heat should be retained equally well during the winter months.

Times may be tough, but that's why it is more important than ever to make sure the products you choose in your home build or renovation are working hard

to give you what you need – energy efficiency, great value and a home that performs as brilliantly as it looks.'

CASE STUDY: FITTING FIRST TIME

Adrian at United Cloud Construction turned to TuffX when he needed a rooflight solution for a new extension to a property in Brighton where the homeowners wanted to maximise the natural light in their new space. The rooflights were to be installed on the low pitch roof of a single storey garden room extension to the rear of the customer's property.

With the limited-size roof unable to accommodate a traditional roof lantern, two Infinity rooflights were chosen.

Adrian fitted two different sized rooflights – one 1 m x 1 m, and one 1 m x 1.5 m, which were both standard sizes although bespoke sizes can also be arranged on request. Rooflights are also available in various glass finishes, including clear, solar and privacy glass.

Rooflights can offer a solution for customers who want a simple, effective and high-quality rooflight that they can fit themselves quickly with no additional assembly on site.

Paul Higgins is commercial director at TuffX



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Open the door to versatility

The world of garage doors is changing. Here Jon Watson of Garador looks at the new trend of multi-use doors and what they can bring to your build

Multi-use garages are an accepted part of modern life. While storing and protecting vehicles is still a key function, today garages are also used for general storage, gardening equipment, DIY tools, home gym apparatus and even as a home office. This means features such as security, technology, insulation and even natural light all need to be factored into the garage door selection process.

The most important of course is to select a garage door from a recognised brand you can trust. After that, there are many other factors that need to be looked at.

SECURITY

Many homeowners assume that their garage doors are secure, but the truth is that they can be vulnerable to break-ins if proper precautions are not taken. With expensive equipment now proving an additional attraction for burglars, security has become a major factor which needs to be considered when choosing a garage door.

It makes sense to look for garage doors which have the valuable Secured by Design accreditation. This is a special UK police initiative that recognises extra security, and garage doors which carry this mark have been engineered specifically to offer an extra level of security. In popular up and over garage doors, for instance, you may find additional back braces have been fitted on the inside for great rigidity; improved and reinforced locking systems may have been installed and even 'anti-snap



cylinders' with a 'sacrificial' front may have been added to help prevent entry even after an attack.

None of these additions will detract from the functionality of the design of the door but will help to improve security and give confidence that your valuable possessions are protected, especially when you are not at home.

TECHNOLOGY

Automated garage doors are another area that needs proper attention. With modern technology progressing quickly, some electrically operated garage doors have older hand transmitters that can be compromised by thieves copying signals. To counteract this, some manufacturers use 868 MHz high frequency radio signals with 'rolling code' technology that

makes the radio frequency code almost impossible to copy, as it uses a different code each time the hand transmitter is used to operate the garage door. Even better is the bi-directional radio technology now available which provides even more security by using the same 128-bit encryption that is used by many banks for their online banking security. This has been designed to prevent signal copying that even the most tech savvy burglar might employ.

It seems an obvious aspect to mention, but it can be easy to leave your garage door open for a spell when you are going in and out. Thieves can operate in a surprisingly short timeslot, and a system worth considering is smart operation. Look for a leading brand which offers its own app for remote control; this means

With modern technology progressing quickly, some electrically operated garage doors have older hand transmitters that can be compromised by thieves who are copying signals

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INSULATION

In multi-use garages, insulation is important. An ill-fitting or poorly insulated garage door offers poor protection against the elements, potentially resulting in draughts or rainwater ingress. Today there is a good choice of garage doors offering varying levels of thermal efficiency depending on the type of equipment stored in the garage.

When contents need to be kept both warm and dry, an insulated sectional garage door is a good choice. Ideally you need to find a door with foam-filled sections and with rubber seals around the edges to prevent drafts and rainwater from getting in. This type of garage door is particularly useful for homes with integrated garages. A garage door fitted into a strong box chassis will not only save time and the effort of having to construct a timber sub-frame, but will also ensure a perfect fit.

NATURAL LIGHT

In so many instances, having a design of a garage door with windows that allow natural light inside the garage is vital, especially if the space is being used for something like a home office. There are numerous styles on the market which incorporate glazed windows to let in natural light. These can add additional character to a door as well, and if you choose a trusted brand, you can be certain that the windows have been carefully designed so that security has not been compromised.

As the trend for multi-use garages continues, additional innovations are coming in, including more advanced side-hinged garage doors designed with helpful features such as built-in door stays and dampeners for a smoother door action. These new style single side hinged doors offer full width opening for cars, of course, but also offer single door access into the garage which can be opened and closed quickly and easily to obstruct opportunist burglars.

The industry is adapting to new trends. While in some cases the choice of models and styles can seem overwhelming, with the right information and advice anyone can quickly find the best garage door for their property.

Jon Watson is managing director of Garador

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CASE STUDY

THREE VIEWS YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON

Securing one priceless Devon view was an major coup for an architect and her husband, but they didn't realise their build would give them three

TEXT EWEN MACDONALD IMAGES GEORGE FIELDING & NICK YARSLEY



When it comes to creating the perfect self-build, you would expect an architect to have everything in their favour.

But while architect Julie-Ann Clements wasted no time creating the perfect design for her and her husband Richard's new home, finding the right plot proved more of a challenge.

The couple wanted to stay in the Devon village of Lymestone, which sits on the South West coastal path, and were looking for a forever home with a great view. But their budget was a big issue.

"We were in the process of selling a house that we lived in on the other side of Lymestone," explains Julie-Ann. "We didn't really want to leave the village but we couldn't find anything that was within the price range we wanted."

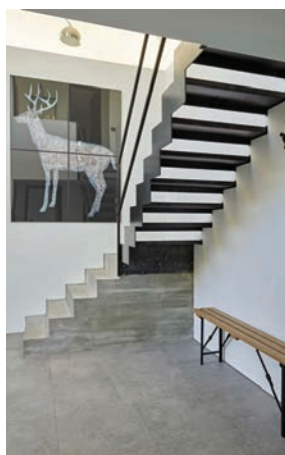
"We had come to the conclusion that we were going to need to move out of Lymestone in order to make enough money to be able to move back so we could make our forever home."

Their first potential project was a huge property that included a tennis court. But at the last minute, they got gazumped. The next

LOW POINT

Spending four months of winter in a caravan. "We spent four months wrapped in fleeces, wearing hats and gloves with a camping stove."





potential house was in the next village. "At the eleventh hour, when everything was all done and dusted, the solicitor discovered an issue about the access," explains Julie-Ann. It was discovered that the sellers didn't own the first part of their driveway and the couple knew this would be an issue when reselling it, so had to back out of the sale.

Soon after, a small uninspiring bungalow came onto the market in Lympstone, and Julie-Ann and Richard were among the first to see it. "It was dilapidated," she exclaims. "It had been someone's treasured home, but the roof sagged and it wasn't in great shape."

However, the couple discovered it had a secret attraction: a rooftop view of the estuary of the River Exe, which flows from the city of Exeter to the English Channel. "We were both really excited and we thought 'this could be the house!'"

The couple returned to the bungalow and sneakily climbed up on the roof (which Julie-Ann admits was a bit scary), to see the view of the River Exe estuary. "This is a really difficult and expensive thing to get in Lympstone," she adds, admitting, "we were quite cheeky, and put in an offer below the asking price."

Despite the easier option probably being to clear the site and start fresh, Julie-Ann and Richard decided to retain certain elements of the original building. Although not visible to the

naked eye, the new house incorporates some of the bungalow's existing external walls.

The main work they did included removing the roof, partially knocking down some of the walls, extending the ground floor to create three new bedrooms, but more importantly introducing a new first floor. It houses an open-plan living space and a kitchen enclosed in floor-to-ceiling windows. Outside a partial wraparound deck sits beneath an overhanging roof to maximise the indoor/outdoor feel of the house.

"Basically, the main part of the house is still there," explains Julie-Ann. "We took down two exterior walls and we knocked out some of the internal walls. The old house now forms part of the internal layout. Our bedroom takes up two-thirds of the original house."

She says she knew from the start how their home was going to look. "Being an architect obviously you've got a bit more vision," she says. "I could visualise how it was going to look like right from the get-go." And, according to Julie-Ann, the final design remains true to the first sketch she did.

The project has been a five-year journey. The couple bought and moved into the bungalow in 2017 and Julie-Ann couldn't wait to get started with the demolition. Before they had finished moving in, she began to strip the interior, starting with the carpets. "The thought of living in somebody else's dust really grossed me out,



HIGH POINT

Climbing onto the roof of the bungalow and realising the possibilities of the view. "We were both really excited and we thought: 'My God, this could be the house!'"



Merely in labour costs alone, the couple estimate they saved over £600,000 on the project



so the carpets were going out of the windows as the guys were bringing in our boxes.

"The next day, when Rich took the carpets to the tip I was ripping out the doors and architraves to expand the space."

The design meant adding a floor to make the most of those rooftop views. But getting planning permission for the design was complicated. Julie-Ann created a 3D model which was shared with neighbours and while making the most of the views was the priority, the design ensured that none of the windows overlooked their neighbour's homes.

The couple also spent thousands on landscaping including trees and bushes to ensure maximum privacy and appease neighbours' concerns. "We probably spent most money as a proportion of the build on landscaping," says Richard.

It took around nine months from the original design to get the planning permission for the new house – longer than they had expected. But the couple had marched on with their demolition. Windows were ripped out and boarded up as they moved in room by room. Once they had gutted the inside, the couple made money by selling off the dilapidated roof via Facebook; they made about £500. But because the buyers removed it, the real saving for Julie-Ann and Richard was in the time it would have taken to remove it themselves.

"Some people came from Dorset and they basically took the roof off and took it away." As well as saving them the trouble, Julie-Ann and Richard repeated this trick with their old windows, which netted them another £500.

While the house was without a roof (or windows) the couple moved out. Opting for an old caravan in the garden, they spent four months wearing fleeces, hats and gloves, and eating food from a camping stove throughout the winter.

The budget meant doing as much work as possible themselves. Contractors were used for skilled elements, including a carpenter for stud work after the timber frame arrived, as well as an electrician and plasterer. But if the couple could do it DIY, they did.

"We did all the insulation and plasterboard, but we had electricians that did all the wiring because that's not something you should ever do – under any circumstances!"

Having moved out into a caravan for the winter, the couple were keen to get back inside as quickly as possible, even though it meant living on a building site. "As soon as the windows went in and it was theoretically weathertight, we were back in. It was basically like camping inside," says Julie-Ann. By 2019, they had installed a kitchen and the bathrooms. But it took a further three years before it was finished. "The flooring, bathrooms, garage and



“I really love the big living area because it’s so light, and every single angle that you look out is like a completely different scene,” says Julie-Ann

annexe were completed in January 2022,” says Julie-Ann. “And we still have bits to finish yet!”

The couple have many favourite bits in their new house. “I really love the big living area because it’s so light, and every single angle that you look out is like a completely different scene,” says Julie-Ann. “In one direction is the river, then you turn about 45 degrees and see the hills and then if you go another 45 degrees you are looking out towards Woodbury Commons. It’s quite extraordinary and actually, I say this to people all the time, we only knew that we had the view of the river but the fact that we’ve got these other great views as well is a real bonus.

“Rich wanted to be able to sit inside but feel like he was outside which is why we’ve got the roof overhang; it also offers shade because the house faces south.”

The couple has made provisions for old age, which few self-builders would consider. This includes building in a lift shaft so that a lift can be added to access the top floor when the owners are less mobile. The doorways

are wide and a self-contained guest annexe in the garden has been earmarked as a potential home for a professional caregiver for them one day. “It is designed around being able to stay here forever, so long as we’ve got the means to be able to pay for somebody to look after us,” says Julie. This element of her design was inspired by an elderly couple in a nearby house, who have live-in care.

Julie doesn’t think of it as a showcase for her architectural skills, just her home. “I think because it’s very modern, people sometimes look at it and think that that’s all that we do at In Ex Design. But all of our projects are completely different.”

Her advice to potential self-builders is the same rules she gave herself. “I would really advise against having the subcontractor do any design: don’t let the electrician design where your lights are going to go because they’re coming at it from a practical perspective. However, if you want to have the perfect house for you, you need to think about where you want it based on how you use the room.” She adds:

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"It's the little things that people don't necessarily think about. That's why you employ a professional."

The exterior of the house is created from render board – a breathable cement board. It allows the movement of the timber frame behind it. Part of the exterior of the house is covered in porcelain tiles. "They are the sort of thing you might expect to see in the bathroom," adds Julie.

The joy of self-build projects and bespoke designs is the wish list you can fulfil. Alongside the tiled exterior, the house has a bespoke staircase that combines steel and poured concrete. It also has an aperture in the roof, which is there for aesthetic reasons, and sits over the entrance. Julie-Ann says: "People ask us: 'What's that there for?' and I can say, 'Because it's cool'. The hole creates an amazing shadow line that changes throughout the day." The house also has a wall that conceals the practical

part of the house, including the washing line and potting shed.

The biggest constraint for the couple was the financial aspects of the project, when Julie regularly works on projects with budgets in the millions. "Clients generally have much more money than we have," she says. A lot of time was spent getting the most for their money. This meant shopping around for bargains and doing around 80% of the work themselves."

In labour costs alone, the couple estimate they saved over £600,000. "It was relentless. We worked every single day in all weather conditions, regardless of whether we felt like it. We just worked all the time – every weekend and work holiday and after work.

"People will visit and say, 'It's really modern, but it's really calming and relaxing at the same time. 'Ultimately,' she concludes, she it's not about what a house looks like, it is what it feels like and how we experience it." ■



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[...] the calculation procedure within BS EN 13384-1:2005 can be used as the basis for deciding whether a chimney design will provide sufficient draught."

Source:
Document J Building Control
Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems
page 30 - §2.8 - "Height of flues"

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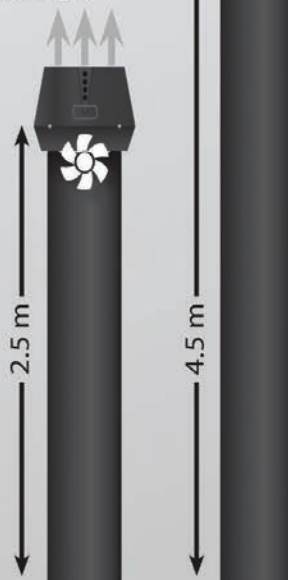
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New wellness priorities

Thain Gummer of LG Electronics looks at best practice for optimising indoor air quality and reducing risks – including using proper HVAC maintenance, monitoring, and certain types of air purification technology

With increasing awareness that poor indoor air quality (IAQ) is affecting a majority of people in the UK – both at home and at work – it is important to take a closer look at the issues we face and the solutions that exist.

This is especially the case for self-builders who have the opportunity to access as much support as they need for improving IAQ in their new homes. A robust approach to ensuring the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) equipment in home is vital, especially for those with family members susceptible to allergies and poor air quality.

Outdoor air pollution can make its way indoors as well of course, including pollution from traffic, industry, fossil fuel burning and pesticides – all of which can emit fine particles, CO₂, NO_x and VOCs. Environmental allergens, bacteria and viruses affect 15% of the EU and UK population in a normal year – which becomes a figure many times that when Covid-19 is circulating. The ‘high season’ for environmental problems is February through to August, while hay fever seems to occur all year round.

Indoor air pollution sources include pollutants from fuel-burning combustion appliances, odours such as those from tobacco products, VOCs produced by building materials and furnishings, products for household cleaning, personal care and hobbies, and mould resulting from excess moisture.

On top of this, you have extreme weather conditions adding to the issues – with heat waves causing poor indoor air quality due to ozone and particulate pollution.

With the rising concern for quality indoor air, using best practice for operation and maintenance of HVAC systems to optimise indoor air quality while reducing risks is more important than ever before. Studies have shown that air pollution can negatively impact our health, and the global pandemic focused us on the adverse health

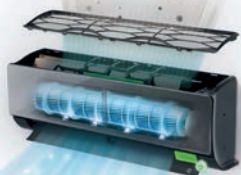


effects caused by inefficient ventilation. In areas with a higher concentration of pollution, research has found that this lower air quality can exacerbate a number of health conditions, including respiratory diseases and cardiovascular damage, and is linked to premature mortality worldwide.

Filtration and purification are vital in

solving the problems surrounding IAQ. As well as being able to monitor it we need to be able to differentiate between levels of pollutants to work out how clean is clean.

We need to be able to monitor the air – which involves the use of particulate matter sensing. The majority of HVAC equipment these days now has a sensor



In areas with a higher concentration of pollution, research has found that this lower air quality can exacerbate a number of health conditions

measuring PM 1.0 particles (particulate matter with a diameter of less than 1.0 µm). Equipment even has IAQ displays as a matter of course measuring a number of parameters and in a number of different ways – IAQ can vary from good to moderate, unhealthy to poor. It can be monitored and displayed on the unit itself or monitored via an app.

It should be remembered that pollutant removal technology varies according to the equipment measured.

It starts with prefiltration of big particles – a multi-layered structure can remove particles up to 2.5 microns and trap big dust particles at the air inlet – this is the basic approach. The addition of an allergy filter will remove allergy-causing substances, such as house dust mites, floating in the air – helping people who react badly to foreign substances.

Dust electrification can be used to increase the electrostatic charge of particles and improve the efficiency of the fine filters in removing dust particles. The filtering of ultra-fine particles is the next step, removing 99.9% of PM 0.1 size ultra-fine dust. The PM 1.0 allergy filter removes allergy-causing substances. It's possible to purchase equipment that generates over three million ions to remove up to 99% of airborne bacteria, like staphylococcus aureus, Escherichia

coli and Pseudomonas aeruginosa. It also eliminates bad odours that circulate in the air.

Finally solutions are available to introduce UV-C radiation – an effective disinfection process in this situation. The high-energy radiation destroys the DNA and RNA of the microbes so that they can no longer proliferate, removing bacteria and viruses.

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Clearly this is an area of activity that will continue to grow in importance and see increasing levels of activity from all companies operating in the sector.

Thain Gummer is national sales manager at LG Electronic's Air Conditioning & Energy Solutions

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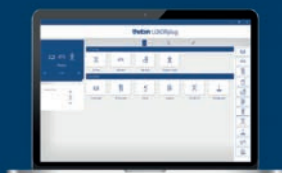
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CASE STUDY

UNSPOILT VIEWS

Despite being in an unspoilt location in the Cairngorms, a couple worked carefully with their architect to create an eco-friendly holiday home that blends into the landscape and maximises the stunning views

TEXT NIK HUNTER IMAGES DAPPLE PHOTOGRAPHY



Building a holiday home within the boundaries of the Cairngorms National Park proved to be more challenging than Siobhan Turner and Rory Webster anticipated. Fortunately, they had architects who were willing to think outside the box.

The area they would seek to build in was already a given, as the couple were looking to establish a base where they could stay when visiting Rory's family in Ballater and Aberdeen.

However they had another, more altruistic goal: "Knowing it was going to be our holiday home, we were very conscious that we didn't want to take housing stock out of the

area," Siobhan recalls. "That was the reason for choosing to build rather than take on a renovation." The couple also wanted to avoid the more rural, farming areas of Aberdeenshire, and settled on a plot with far reaching views across two valleys and the River Don.

The purchase of the site was completed in August 2017, and Siobhan set about finding an architect to take on the project. As Rory and Siobhan live in London, the internet was the obvious starting point. "I did a search for Aberdeenshire architects and found several, but nothing stood out until I saw Strathdon House on Brown & Brown's website and I

HIGH POINT

"The first time I sat in the living space after it was furnished and watched the sunrise – that was magical."





“Once the concrete lorry had been on site to do the foundations, the driver refused to return to do the wall as the access was too difficult” – Andrew

thought – this is what I want.”

The brief to architect Andrew Brown was relatively straightforward, as Siobhan recalls: “We wanted three bedrooms, one with an ensuite, we wanted to make the most of the views, a window in the ensuite shower room, a fire, and to be as eco-friendly as possible.”

Andrew was already aware of the plot as he and his wife live in the locality about four miles away and knew a bit about the site’s history. “It’s called Spyon Cop, and while there’s no firm evidence as to why, locally the anecdotal suggestion is that the cottage that was originally on the site was built by someone who had returned from the Boer War. (There is a hill called Spion Cop in South Africa where a battle took place – Spyon Cop means Spy Hill in Afrikaans.”

The cottage that had been there previously was a pile of rubble when Siobhan and Rory purchased the site, but it was obvious that in its footprint was the best place on the plot to build. “It’s a great location with far reaching views but it’s not for everyone,” says Andrew. “There’s not a proper road to access it; it’s just a farm track.”

Access was to provide an issue later in the

build, but the architects Brown & Brown’s first priority was to find out a bit more about their clients, and their expectations for their new property. Says Siobhan, “At the very start of the process, Andrew set up a Pinterest board for us and he put some things into it – yes we like that, no we hate that, what on earth were you thinking? And we added things we liked. I think he then used that as a template to see what our tastes were, and I think he got a pretty good idea of what we liked very quickly.”

Brown & Brown also explained to their clients that they would present two or three concepts but they were not expecting them to go with any of them in their entirety. “It was more a case of ‘we like this from A, that from B and we really don’t like that in C!’ Andrew was also adamant that if we saw a problem, we weren’t to try and solve it.” Siobhan adds: “He said ‘tell me what the problem is, and I will fix it because that’s my job.’ We took that on board, and it really opened up the dialogue and made for a very honest relationship.”

While Brown & Brown’s brief was straightforward, access to the plot was not as

LOW POINT

“The site was challenging, as was lockdown. Thankfully the roof was on, and the windows were in just before it hit – but it really was an awful time.”



“With Brown & Brown’s help, we’ve achieved exactly what we wanted, inside and out” – Siobhan

Andrew explains: “We came up with a couple of options focusing on how we could make the most of the location.” The River Don is below and there’s a valley to the south and a valley to the east. “The valley to the south gets really good light but it gets a lot of weather. Indeed, we had four months of snow and at one point during the build we were dealing with 1.6 m of it! Our contractors, Crombie, were brilliant, but they really had their work cut out for them.”

Where the original cottage had once stood was the most sheltered point from the weather and respected the views from the glen below, and it was also the most accessible even if it was not easily accessible. Asides from access there was also the issue of how the house would fit into and complement the surrounding countryside. “We didn’t put it on a pitch because a straight line on the landscape was slightly more incongruous. We came from the idea of creating a new little hillock and when you see it from the glen, it appears layered.” She adds: “It’s not bashful, it’s not a building that

hides, but it doesn’t stand out either.”

Clad in black painted larch, the property visually ‘loses itself’ in the hill, and more so in the winter when the hillside is naturally darker. Adding a turf roof which was sown from the grass on the adjacent hill also assisted in bedding the property into the landscape and helped its insulation properties too. “We completely over-insulated the roof, but then it also has turf and soil and that doesn’t feature in the thermal calculations. The roof was already performing highly but once you laid the soil and turf, that improved it even further.”

Brown & Brown were also keen to over-insulate the roof because the site access restrictions now meant that the timber frame would have to be smaller than what they would normally specify. The location made getting materials to site difficult and many were taken up on a trailer behind a pick up. The windows were delivered by the local farmer on his tractor and trailer. “We had to use a slightly smaller timber frame which we could transport more easily although



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it still had great thermal properties and supersedes what Building Regulations ask for," asserts Andrew.

To heat the property an air source heat pump was fitted at the rear of the house where it's nestled between the house and the hillside to offer it protection from the elements. This powers the underfloor heating system and is very efficient although most of the heat in the building comes from natural solar gain through the glazing. To ensure the building holds the heat well and uses less energy, trickle vents have been fitted in the walls rather than the windows to encourage airflow and windows have been positioned to open at specific points to naturally cross ventilate the house.

The difficulties in getting supplies to the site led Brown & Brown to choose materials that largely could be dealt with by manual handling and in the main it took a lot more planning, but it all came together albeit more slowly. The only aspect that didn't go as planned was a feature wall of board-marked concrete in the main living space. "Once the concrete lorry had been on site to do the foundations, the driver refused to return to do the wall as the access was too difficult."

After some head scratching, Brown & Brown decided to have the wall built in lightweight masonry and asked their microcement specialist, Concreto Living Coatings who also made the

flooring to do a microcement effect with board marks for the wall. "It still looks like a heavy-duty concrete wall but it's not!"

Somewhat unusually, Brown & Brown were also involved in the interior design of the project, not only the layout. Andrew explains the approach: "It was important that it was a calm materials palette. We knew that Siobhan and Rory had a lot of mid-century furniture and we wanted the space not to feel too minimal or sparse. However, there's a big difference between a house and a holiday house in terms of how you use it, and that's reflected in the layout that we suggested." He continues: "It is not where you live all the time and while you do need somewhere to store the vacuum cleaner you don't need space for school report cards."

Taking their inspiration from Scandinavian summer houses which are generally centred around one larger social space, Brown & Brown suggested locating the entrance to the house at the rear of the property. "As you come in at the back of the property we wanted to take the view away from you and we deliberately positioned a solid bit of wall where you enter. Once you come around this into the social space then you're rewarded with the views."

A compact hall (4 x 4 m) leads to the principal bedroom and ensuite. On the other side of the social areas are two guest bedrooms, along with a family bathroom at the front and a utility



room at the back of the property.

"We considered that most of the time it will just be Siobhan and Rory in the house. Pocket doors allow a house to feel more than the sum of its parts, and when they're alone, most of the time these doors will be open."

The custom birch plywood kitchen and dining cabinetry were designed by Brown & Brown and built by the contractors. "They're off the shelf carcasses but with custom doors and work surfaces and the contractors made all the fronts. We wanted it to be consistent with the other bits of cabinetry and ply that we'd used elsewhere."

The kitchen is compact and functional although Siobhan insisted on an island, as she recalls: "Andrew's not a cook, that was the only thing he hadn't thought through. You need an island so that you don't have your back to your guests when you're cooking, and it allows you to take in the stunning views."

Careful to ensure that the fire didn't detract from the views either, Brown & Brown suggested a hanging stove. "We needed a stove that was in the view but didn't get in the way of it and that led us to choose this hanging version. It's efficient, it rotates and it's made by Scottish company, Firemaker, so it ticked all the boxes for the clients."

Another thing on the wish list was the ensuite

window which Brown & Brown took great pains to get exactly right. Although the main bathroom has a view of the glen the ensuite has a view that no other room has. Andrew Brown: "We fitted the slot-style window in the shower looking down the glen so one can see the sun coming up. It's also precisely positioned for Siobhan and Rory's height."

Although the build started in December 2019 between Covid, the weather and the access issues Spyon Cop was finally completed in July 2022 and Siobhan and Rory are now catching their breath and starting to enjoy their new property. "With Brown & Brown's help, we've achieved exactly what we wanted inside and out. Our aim was to use local or Scottish suppliers for the build and the furnishings. It wasn't possible for everything, but we have art from local galleries, Adirondack chairs from Shetland, rugs from Skye, and the stove from the Borders – it's been quite a journey," says the couple.

Siobhan sums up her feelings, now the build is finished. "We really had no idea how difficult it would be to build here, it was such a challenge. But, we have been able to realise our dream and build a house that makes the best use of the land and the views and it does so gently. I'm not sure if I would do another self-build – I think we need a little longer to recover!" ■

Functional, bespoke utility kitchen collection

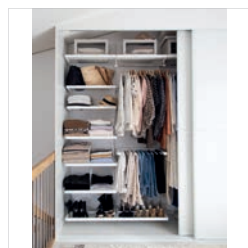


Keller Kitchens has launched an extensive all new range of utility room furniture in numerous finishes and configurations. Designed for clever but stylish solutions, this range can also be used within storage and laundry rooms too. With the range of tall, base and wall units, along with complementary interior fittings and handles, the homeowner can create a truly personalised utility room, where ease of use and great design go hand in hand. The units can be combined with Keller's existing

kitchen ranges for an overall, streamlined scheme. Keller is well known for offering the widest range of colours (2,050 NCS) and finishes in the kitchen furniture market. Pictured is Keller's Bolton range in Sage Green

www.kellerkitchens.com

Get clever with storage solutions



IronmongeryDirect has extended its diverse range of products to offer a wider choice of storage solutions, with new products added to the Elfa range offering further flexibility on home storage ideas. A recent survey by IronmongeryDirect found 2023's most popular New Year's Resolution was to reduce clutter and get more organised around the home (39.4%), with bedrooms and kitchens top of the list of areas earmarked for improved storage solutions. IronmongeryDirect's wide range of storage

solutions spans a number of trusted and exclusive brands including Elfa, Rothley and Altro, with a breadth of components that provides fitters greater flexibility to provide a truly customised service.

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Selfbuilder & Homemaker website



The Selfbuilder & Homemaker website is an online provider of past and present products and news items for all those involved in and working on a self-build project. www.sbhonline.co.uk is a one-stop source for all the latest press releases, providing visitors with access to information about products and services that they may require. From the website, you can find links to digital issues that have live links to advertisers' sites, as well as daily email alerts to keep you as informed as possible. You

can also subscribe to receive regular copies of the printed and digital versions of the magazine, or sign up to the monthly Selfbuilder & Homemaker newsletter.

www.sbhonline.co.uk

Time to give your decking some TLC



Timber decking really benefits from some TLC at this time of the year in order to protect it from the elements and make sure it's looking its best ready for the summer ahead. A great start would be to get rid of any build-up of mould, mildew and black spotting that have made an appearance over the Autumn and Winter months. **V33** are specialists in innovative surface coatings, and have been coming up with leading high-quality products for DIYers for over sixty years. The V33 range includes two high

quality decking oils, formulated to feed, protect and enhance the natural beauty of old or new exterior decking. While both decking oils in the new range are UV- and water-resistant, one also offers anti-slip properties.

01797 367 555 www.v33.co.uk

Versatile, lightweight and waterproof



As one of the most versatile and widely specified products from **Schlüter-Systems**, Schlüter-KERDI-BOARD finds applications for both retrofit and new-build installations, with different thicknesses of the extruded polystyrene (XPS) panel providing a stable and waterproof substrate for natural stone and ceramic tiling. The panels are available in thicknesses of 5, 9, 12.5, 19, 28, 38 and 50 mm and are easily installed across existing masonry, concrete, timber stud frames or lightweight metal framing, with

panels featuring parallel grooves also available for creating rounded surfaces, such as for seating or curved walls. KERDI-BOARD is frequently used to create work-surfaces, breakfast bars, islands and vanities.

www.schluter.co.uk

Aqualisa adds elegant matt black options



Aqualisa has extended its popular AQ™ mixer shower collection with the addition of three new models in a sleek matt black finish. Designed to make a striking statement in any contemporary bathroom setting, the AQ Matt Black showers are available in a choice of round or square dual outlet shower column, or a round bar valve option with adjustable handset. Recognised for its quality and reliability, the Aqualisa AQ series combines attractive styling with excellent performance, durability and safety features,

including a maximum water temperature setting, with override button if a hotter shower is desired. Each bar valve is engineered from brass, and is equipped with safe touch thermostatic technology.

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Decking as a design tool

Guy Douglass of Millboard takes a look at the versatility of decking and the many different ways it can be used to enhance your home's exterior

Decking is incredibly useful when designing landscaping because one material can be used for a number of purposes



There have been many different gardening trends over the years – the '70s rockery, Japanese gardens, Mediterranean gardens – but decking has always had an enduring appeal within these trends. It is practical, popular and often the most frequented part of a garden. Decking allows us to extend the months of the year that we can spend outdoors, it enables us to create 'another room' – either to welcome and entertain friends and family, or to just spend quiet time relaxing in a tranquil outdoor space. Decking is also an incredibly flexible design tool.

CREATE DISTINCTIVE VISUAL EFFECTS

The lines of decking can be used to create different visual effects in a garden. Boards oriented vertically will lead the eye down the garden and towards an intended focal point. Horizontal boards give the impression of width and space – ideal for a seating area. Boards placed diagonally add interest and a new dynamic within an overall design.

Different width decking boards can also be combined in an alternating or random pattern to create a distinctive design. A slim board can also be used as edging to define a specific area of

the deck in a 'picture-framing' effect, in the same colour as the main deck or in a contrasting colour.

ONE MATERIAL, MANY USES

Decking is incredibly useful when designing landscaping because one material can be used for a number of purposes, helping the designer to achieve a unified look without having to switch materials. Built-in seating using the same material can create a pared back aesthetic giving the illusion of more space – very useful for smaller urban gardens. Decking can be used to



create built-in seating, planters and even dining tables and pergolas. Bullnose edging and fascias add a beautiful finishing touch to any decking project and allow easy incorporation of under-lip lighting for a professional finish to entertaining spaces.

PROVIDING SOLUTIONS IN TRICKY SPACES

Not everyone has a flat rectangle as an outdoor space. It can be challenging to create spaces to relax in when you have a sloping garden. While one option is to do lots of earth moving and hard construction, decking often offers an

easier – and more economical – solution. It can be especially useful in waterlogged gardens, creating an all-weather surface which extends the months when we can venture outside. As decking can be constructed to embrace SuDS principles, it allows for the natural drainage of rainwater, rather than it pooling on the surface or being directed to overloaded drainage systems.

Naturally, the self-builder will always be concerned about the durability and maintenance needs of timber decking in any garden, waterlogged or not. Nowadays there are plenty of alternatives to timber decking that don't decay or become slippery in wet weather.

A SEAMLESS TRANSITION FROM INSIDE TO OUTSIDE

Using the same flooring across several rooms in a house can make a space seem larger and encourage flow from room to room. Increasingly, the same rules are being applied to outside spaces as our gardens become extensions of our inside living and entertaining space. Choosing a decking material that matches the flooring in the room leading to the garden creates a sense of flow between spaces. This was done to great effect by Val, the Instagram designer and renovator (@no5_thehouse) where

he chose decking that matched the timber flooring in his kitchen. The result is an amazing inside/outside extendable entertaining space – the courtyard feels more like a tranquil living room.

THE DURABLE APPEAL OF DECKING

Decking has graced our outdoor dining areas for many decades, and for good reason. It has many applications and is well loved by designers and homeowners alike for its beauty and its versatility. Over recent years, we have seen a huge increase in homeowners using their outdoor space not just as a garden, but also as an additional room in the house for entertaining and relaxing and generally enjoying life outside. This often means incorporating heating, lighting, soft furnishings and cooking and dining facilities – all of which are much easier to pull together as a cohesive design with decking underpinning it all.

Modern composite materials, with their authentic wood-look appeal and multiple colour options and finishing accessories, have opened up a whole new range of possibilities that will help keep decking as an integral element within all the best gardens.

Guy Douglass is global sales director at Millboard



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