DESIGN

CONSTRUCTION

| PRODUCTS

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INTERIORS

selfbuilder homemaker

JUL/AUG 2023

Proudly modernist eco design in ICF

Jess Unwin explores a strikingly modern eco home in Scotland, showing how ICF (insulated concrete forming) can provide a tight fit

Back to base rates

Paul Welch explains the key features of self-build mortgages, and what to expect in the process

Panel game,

Interior designer Robyn Park shows ho panelling could be your inner secret we

Space race

Sally and Tom Marlow have made the most of their new Clapham home with a full renovation and several extensions; Alexandra Pratt speaks to them about their space mission Update your registration here:



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 *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.
 Based on internal testing of the Capacity of the tested under lab conditions based on EN 14511, results may vary depending on the actual usage conditions.
- Based on internal testing on an EHS Mono HT outdoor unit (AE120BXYDGG), compared to a conventional EHS outdoor unit (AE120RXYDGG). Results may vary depending on the actual usage conditions

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Conservative MP Richard Bacon has spent many years banging the drum for self-build in Parliament and at countless events around the country. He's acutely aware of just how far the UK continues to lag behind countries like Germany, where a form of self-build is virtually the norm for most homeowners.

However Bacon seems to have lost his sizzle, and is laying the blame at councils' doors for the sluggish progress since the 2016 Housing Act. He says that "too many local authorities are yet to fully engage with the benefits, and their resources are often too stretched." As a result, 'right to build registers' aren't being promoted, he says, despite councils' obligation to do so.

There might be a cultural issue; Germany seems to historically have been keener to embrace the potential to come together as small collectives ('Baugruppen') to self-build homes in a way that borrows and benefits from each other's skills. The basic benefit being that you don't need to go it alone, which probably

broadens self-build to a much wider section of the population. But is the reason the UK hasn't embraced this sharing approach partly because it's not been made available?

If Richard Bacon really wants change, he's going to have to persuade Rishi Sunak to invest on an unprecedented scale in councils to give them the manpower and money they need, as well as producing specific self-build targets.

JAMES PARKER



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ON THE COVER...

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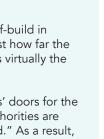
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Integrated building control

Self-builders are at the forefront of some of the most cutting edge building techniques. They now need to lead the way in quality building automation and control solutions, says Paul Foulkes of Theben Automation





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Tom Boddy reports on how an architect completed a retrofit of his modest and boxy London house to Passivhaus standards, creating a much more family-friendly home in the process

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A thoroughly modern eco mix

An Aberdeenshire couple chose an array of innovative building methods – including ICF construction – to create an eco-friendly modernist gem that still manages to blend in with its surroundings



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selfbuilder jouis

Self-building architect Philip Newbold looks back a decade to the battle he successfully fought to build the first 'passive house' in County Durham with an A-rated EPC, and how it has served him and his wife since

The journey of Greendale Cottage began over 10 years ago. When the 2008 crash left me redundant after 35 years in architecture, I became self-employed and trained as a Certified Passivhaus Consultant in 2010.

Having lived in a succession of leaky homes, my wife Joy and I wanted to find a comfortable and sustainable home. However, as we couldn't find anything suitable on the market, we set about finding a plot and building our own place.

In 2011, we stumbled upon a 350 m² plot in Upper Weardale that we believed had detailed planning consent. But we soon discovered that the consent had expired in 2009, which led to various complications.

The vendor had to reapply for planning but was refused due to changes in the council's environmental policies. Even though the foundations for the house were already cast, the vendor had to employ a planning consultant to renew the planning consent with 15 conditions. Despite these issues, we secured ownership of the land in January 2012 for £70k.

PLANNING

The village of Upper Weardale sits within a conservation area and an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) on the River Wear. When I opened discussions with planning on their 15 conditions, I found the planners to be extremely inflexible, and not really interested in my aspirations to build a



low-energy Passivhaus. The Conservation Planning Officer in particular was not interested in the Government's energy conservation agenda at all, only conservation of the local vernacular building style. The planners also insisted on retaining the L-shaped floor plan of the original planning consent with local stone walls, chimney stacks, natural slate roof and sliding sash windows.

Thanks to these draconian planning restrictions, out went any hope of being able to build a certified Passivhaus.

THE BUILD

The house was a two-storey, threebedroomed detached house of 116 m² with an additional attic plant room and store of 46 m². There is a small yard with outbuildings at the rear and a south-facing cottage garden and patio at the front. There was an existing stone double garage on the site with a flat, tin roof which served as our site cabin during the build.

In March 2012, work finally commenced on the construction of Greendale Cottage, where we moved into a tiny rented cottage next door to the plot in April 2012. Acting as the designer, project manager, buyer, site foreman, clerk of works, and even labourer, I found myself perpetually exhausted. Thankfully local subcontractors joined our team, contributing expertise in stonemasonry, joinery, plumbing, electricity, and roofing.

The journey was not without challenges. The weather seemed to conspire against us, with incessant rain

"It was the wettest summer in a century followed by the coldest winter in half a century!" – Philip

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and snow for about 10 months. It was the wettest summer in a century followed by the coldest winter in half a century! Yet, despite the elements, the timber frame, constructed by Swift Timber Homes, took shape within six weeks. I also managed to install the airtightness products, MVHR system and the flue for the woodburning stove.

We had a water-tight shell by Christmas 2012 but the external stonework was less than half finished. When all the air-tightness measures were complete, the blower door air test gave a result of 0.59 air changes per hour.

During the second phase of joinery work, the house was filled with sawdust and nails, while Joy painted the plastered walls and ceilings. Meanwhile, I assisted the joiner in installing the Ikea kitchen units, and the plumber and electrician worked on installing sanitary ware, socket outlets, and light fittings.

We moved in on 1 February 2013. Since the chimney for the stove was not yet finished, we had to buy a 1.5 kW electric radiator. Despite the outside temperature being -5C, the heater maintained a comfortable internal temperature of +18C. This clearly showcased the advantages of having high levels of insulation and airtightness.

Our Woodfire F12 room-sealed woodburning stove has a back boiler that provides up to 8.5 kW to heat water in the winter and also heats towel rails in the bathrooms (and a heat-leak radiator in the linen cupboard). It is our only source of space heating.

Solar thermal panels provide most of the hot water in summer, topped up with the immersion heater, in turn assisted by the output from the solar PV panels. These had been installed and working since December 2012, but we discovered that we could not get the Feed in Tariff until we had an EPC. We could not get that until we had a completion certificate from the Building Control Officer (BCO), and we could not get the BCO completion certificate until the stove flue, stonework, roof slates, electrics and rainwater goods were finished. This was finally achieved in October 2013 and the EPC confirms our primary energy demand as 16 kWh/m²/year.

HOME TRUTHS

We have now occupied our home/office for 10 years and are finally beginning

to appreciate what all our hard work has achieved. We keep the boiler stove burning in winter evenings using scrap wood and have no other space heating or fuel bills apart from electricity which is currently running at £100 a month, excluding the FiT and RHI payments. The (silent) MVHR system in effect recycles most of the heat generated inside the house while constantly providing filtered, fresh air. The recent addition of more solar PV panels on the garage and 10 kW storage batteries in February 2023 has further reduced electricity grid demand.

We have managed to self-build the first EPC Band A passive house in County Durham and have a warm, comfortable home without any oil or gas bills. More importantly, we have proved that it is possible to build a real low-energy home in a Conservation Area and AONB which fits in with the local architecture while addressing fuel poverty issues head-on. In May 2014 the house won Best New Home at the Northern LABC Building Excellence Awards and went on to win at the National Awards in London in November 2014.

"Acting as the designer, project manager, buyer, site foreman, clerk of works, and even labourer, I found myself perpetually exhausted" – Philip

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ASK THE EXPERT

Funding success



Paul Welch of largemortgageloans.com walks you through the key tips for success in playing the self-build mortgage game

You have secured your plot, lined up your construction team, and your planning permission has been granted. But what about funding?

Did you know that lenders in the mortgage market provide specialist self-build mortgages to those building their own homes? From building societies to private banks, there are a variety of avenues to explore when it comes to securing the right funding. In all instances, we recommend seeking the advice of specialist mortgage brokers who have experience in supporting self-build projects.

WHAT IS A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE, AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM A TRADITIONAL MORTGAGE?

A self-build mortgage is a unique loan type, designed to finance the construction of a new home. Unlike traditional mortgages that release the entire loan amount upfront, self-build mortgages release funds in stages through the construction process, ensuring funds are available when needed and agreed upon by the monitoring surveyor.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE IN THE UK?

To be eligible for a self-build mortgage in the UK, you must be a UK resident, have a detailed construction plan, have the appropriate planning consent for the project and be supported, typically, by a professional project manager.

Eligibility also depends on credit history and affordability. Applicants must demonstrate sufficient income to cover mortgage repayments and living expenses during construction. You will also need a solid credit history and to meet lenders' income requirements.



WHICH LENDERS OFFER SELF-BUILD MORTGAGES?

In the UK, several types of lenders offer self-build mortgages, catering to the unique needs of individuals building their own homes. These lenders include:

• Building societies – many building societies provide self-build mortgages, with some even specialising in this type of loan. Building societies are often more flexible and willing to consider individual circumstances.

• Specialist self-build mortgage lenders – some lenders focus exclusively on self-build mortgages, offering tailored products and expertise to help borrowers successfully navigate the self-build process.

• High-street banks – a few high street banks offer self-build mortgages, though their lending criteria may be more stringent compared to building societies and specialist lenders.

• Private banks – high net-worth individuals or those seeking larger loans may find private banks more

accommodating, offering bespoke selfbuild mortgage solutions based on the borrower's financial circumstances.

Researching and comparing various lenders is essential to find a self-build mortgage that suits your requirements and financial situation. Working with an independent mortgage broker experienced in self-build mortgages can help you identify the best lender and secure a favourable deal.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-BUILD MORTGAGES AVAILABLE?

There are two main types of self-build mortgages: arrears-stage and advanced-stage payment mortgages. Arrears-stage payment mortgages release funds after each construction stage are complete, while advance-stage payment mortgages provide funds at the beginning of each stage.

HOW DO MORTGAGE FUNDS GET RELEASED DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS?

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on predefined construction milestones, such as foundation completion, wall construction, roof installation and insallation of internal fittings. An independent surveyor typically assesses progress before each fund release.

CAN I APPLY FOR A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE IF I OWN LAND OR PROPERTY I PLAN TO DEMOLISH AND REBUILD?

You can apply for a self-build mortgage if you already own land or a property you plan to demolish and rebuild. Owning the land can make it easier to secure a self-build mortgage, as it reduces the overall borrowing required and may allow for a higher borrowing limit.

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL INTEREST RATES & FEES ASSOCIATED WITH SELF-BUILD MORTGAGES?

Interest rates for self-build mortgages are generally higher than those for traditional mortgages, usually ranging between 6% to 8%. Additionally, there may be arrangement fees, valuation fees, and other associated costs.

HOW DO I DETERMINE THE AMOUNT I CAN BORROW FOR A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE?

The amount you can borrow for a self-build mortgage depends on your income, credit history, and the estimated construction project cost. Lenders typically offer up to 70% of the total project cost, including land purchase, construction, and finance costs.

WHAT DOCUMENTATION & PLANNING PERMISSIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE APPLICATION?

To apply for a self-build mortgage, you will need detailed plans for your project, planning permission, Building Regulations approval, and a realistic cost breakdown. Lenders may also require proof of income, credit history, and other financial documentation such as bank statements, tax returns and proof of identification.

CAN I SWITCH TO A TRADITIONAL MORTGAGE ONCE MY BUILD IS COMPLETE?

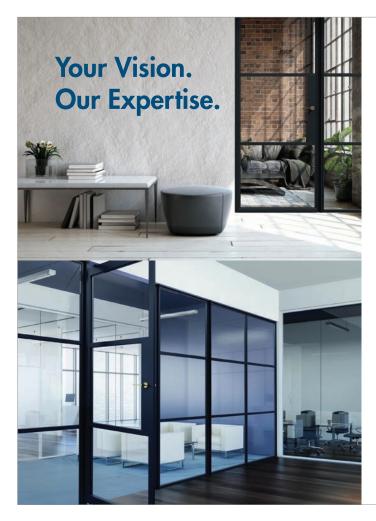
You can switch to a traditional mortgage once your self-build project is complete, and the property is deemed habitable by an independent assessor. This is known as remortgaging, and can help you secure a lower interest rate and better terms than your self-build mortgage.

BEFORE APPLYING FOR A SELF-BUILD MORTGAGE, WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER TO ENSURE A SMOOTH CONSTRUCTION PROCESS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT?

Before applying for a self-build mortgage, consider your ability to manage the construction process, your builders' reliability, the project's overall cost, and your financial stability. It is essential to have a well-thoughtout plan, a realistic budget, and a contingency fund to manage unexpected expenses during construction.

Research and compare mortgage options, collaborate with a qualified architect, and ensure you have the necessary planning permissions. Maintaining communication with your lender throughout the process is crucial, and seeking professional advice from a specialist mortgage broker when needed.

Paul Welch is founder and CEO of largemortgageloans.com





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HOME STYLING

PANEL VISIONS

Achieving a cohesive, attractive interior means combining 'interest, contrast and texture,' says Robyn Park of Robyn Park Interiors. She explains how panelling can be a great way to do this, and how it's having a big moment in the interior design world, including for self-builds

There are many styles of panelling available, the most popular being wainscoting and boiserie, using decorative moulding with an 'ogee' or 'beak' profile. Wainscoting refers to panelling that is only used on the lower half, or three quarters, of the wall space, while boiserie refers to full height panelling from floor to ceiling.

For panelling, you firstly need to have a dado rail, usually in a wider moulding, to dictate the top line of a wainscot design, or the mid-section of a boiserie design. Aim for the top line of the panelling to sit at approximately one metre from the floor. Properties with higher ceilings can afford to go a little taller to create the right proportions for the room. Then you can design your panel boxes around the dimensions of each wall. As a rule of thumb aim to have a gap of 100 mm from the edge of one piece of moulding to the next. In terms of the size and number of panel boxes, you will never get the same size or amount on each wall, but keeping the



proportions of a 100 mm gap will keep things feeling cohesive. Remember to always mark out where you intend your panelling to go, as you may have to move sockets or switches to install the mouldings adequately.

Once installed, consider the decoration of your panelling. For boiserie, having one colour over the entire moulding will create a seamless yet textural aspect, but it certainly doesn't have to be that way. You can play with colour to make your panelling stand out from the main wall, or even use each panel box to house a wallpaper that incorporates the colour palette of the room. For a more understated approach wainscoting, often used in hallways and stairwells, can provide a protective function by using a washable paint finish that will safeguard your walls from scuffs and marks over time. You can complete the panelling with a contrasting paint colour or even add wallpaper above the dado rail line for a more dramatic finish. Wainscoting can be used in almost any style of property; it continues a feeling of grandeur in stately homes, adds character to new builds, and provides depth and distinction in open-plan areas.

If decorative detail isn't quite your bag, then perhaps consider tongue and groove, shiplap or board and batten panelling.

Tongue and groove is a classic style that fits well into the farmhouse aesthetic, giving a timeless and practical look within any and all rooms of the house – even the ceiling! Use this style in full wall height to draw the eye upwards and give the illusion of space in smaller homes. It is also great when placed at half height level and can be especially striking in kitchens and bathrooms. Just be aware of using wood planks in areas where moisture is high as this will cause the wood to swell and warp over time.

For the minimalists out there, shiplap



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HOME STYLING



is a sleek alternative. Often using primed MDF planks, they are installed in the same way as tongue and groove to add texture and interest by creating dainty vertical line detailing via the shadow gaps between the planks. Shiplap can run horizontally or vertically, whether that be as a feature wall or surrounding an entire room for a modern 'cabin' vibe. Aim for a plank width of around 100 to 150 mm, keeping the gaps between each plank as minimal as possible. Using tile spacers for this can be great for uniformity. Once decorated, run a thin item (such as a lolly stick or skewer) down the length of the plank edges to remove any paint build-up.

Lastly, board and batten is probably the most cost-effective, and relatively simple, panelling for DIY enthusiasts. Using lengths of thin wood or MDF, these can be nailed or glued to the wall in a vertical pattern, spaced relatively far apart, and topped with a horizontal top and bottom baton. This is a great style for a bedroom main wall and can be fitted from the floor to above the headboard or all the way up to the ceiling. Want to include a little more personality in this style? Try adding a shelf ledge at the top for extra styling items, or even small detail mouldings, like a quarter dowel, to each plank edge for a more classic aesthetic.

GOLDEN RULES

Always use a spirit or laser level: no matter what age your property is, it is safe to assume that not every wall will be straight and/or flat. When fixing your panelling with adhesive be sure to choose one suitable for your material to avoid any staining or failure of adhesion. Once completed, always caulk the edges for a seamless finish before decorating. And no matter what style you choose, always paint the skirting board in the same colour as your panelling. A bright white band at the bottom of a beautifully panelled wall detracts from the detail and beauty of your new addition.

Robyn Park is the founder of Robyn Park Interiors

Wainscoting can be used in almost any style of property; it continues a feeling of grandeur in stately homes, adds character to new builds, and provides depth and distinction in open-plan areas



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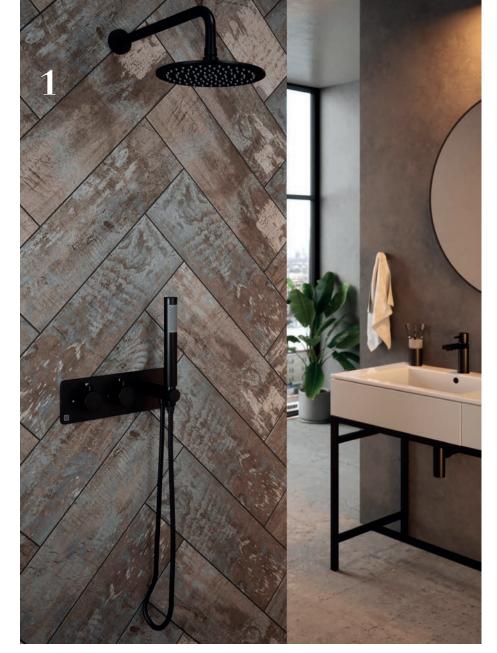
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INTERIOR INSPIRATION: BATHROOMS

The bathroom is of course a sanctuary away from the world, but when choosing products, arguably function and practicality are as important as how well they co-ordinate, or provide a luxury feel. Here we offer a range of ideas which provide a combo of functionality, comfort and beauty



1. The Tap Factory Vibrance Vanto Black Thermostatic Shower Valve from Drench comes with a shower valve, shower hose and handset and fixed overhead shower. The thermostatic control keeps the temperature where you set it and is suitable for all water systems including low-pressure gravity-fed types. Price: £489.99.

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2. The Southbourne Towel Ladder from Garden Trading is perfect for organising and tidying bath sheets belonging to the whole family. Stylishly crafted to last, in natural beech, the Towel Ladder's natural tones blend well with a host of different interior colour schemes – meaning it's a versatile option for use all over the house. Price: £80.

www.gardentrading.co.uk

3. Big Bathroom Shop's Milano Irwell White Round Countertop Basin is a great option for creating a spa-inspired bathroom. This countertop basin features a modern round design and a hardwearing easy to clean white glaze finish. It has been crafted from premium quality ceramic, giving you a basin that will look like new for years to come. Price: £64.99. www.bigbathroomshop.co.uk

4. Create a clean and contemporary feel to your bathroom with the **Ripple Texture Under Basin Sink Cabinet** by **House and Homestyle**. Featuring a textured finish, the large cupboard encloses two handy compartments of inside storage for all your bathroom essentials. Finished with magnetic door closures, this cabinet is priced at £110. www.houseandhomestyle.co.uk





5. With its unique 'double dip' design, the Cabrits Freestanding Bath by Sancturary Bathrooms has been designed to contour to fit the body. It is not only effortlessly comfortable, it is also incredibly water efficient, having a maximum volume of only 176 litres. The bath is priced at £3,756. www.sanctuary-bathrooms.co.uk

6. The Ellipse Freestanding Bath by Waters Baths of Ashbourne features contemporary curves that are designed to support your back and hug your shoulders, offering a truly restful bathing experience. Tactile and warm to the touch, the natural limestone and quartz composite ensures that water is kept warmer for longer. Price: £3290. www.watersbaths.co.uk

7. New to A Place For Everything's bathroom storage furniture range is their Margo Slimline Tallboy. Its small footprint means that it'll fit into even the tightest of tiny bathrooms, yet it offers plenty of storage for all those lotions and potions, towels and flannels, loo rolls and cleaning products – all at the same time. Price: £175.

www.aplaceforeverything.co.uk





Unlocking your door's true colours

Ben Brocklesby of doors and windows supplier Origin offers his advice for selfbuilders on the ins and outs of picking door colours



A luminium doors are a great option if you're looking for an unusual colour. If you want a unique shade, it's best to opt for a manufacturer that makes its products bespoke, to ensure you have plenty of choice. For example, some premium quality aluminium doors are available in over 150 RAL colours, so there's something to suit every style of property. Some manufacturers also offer dual-colour options, which means the frame's exterior colour can complement the building style, while the interior frame can blend in or contrast with your colour scheme inside.

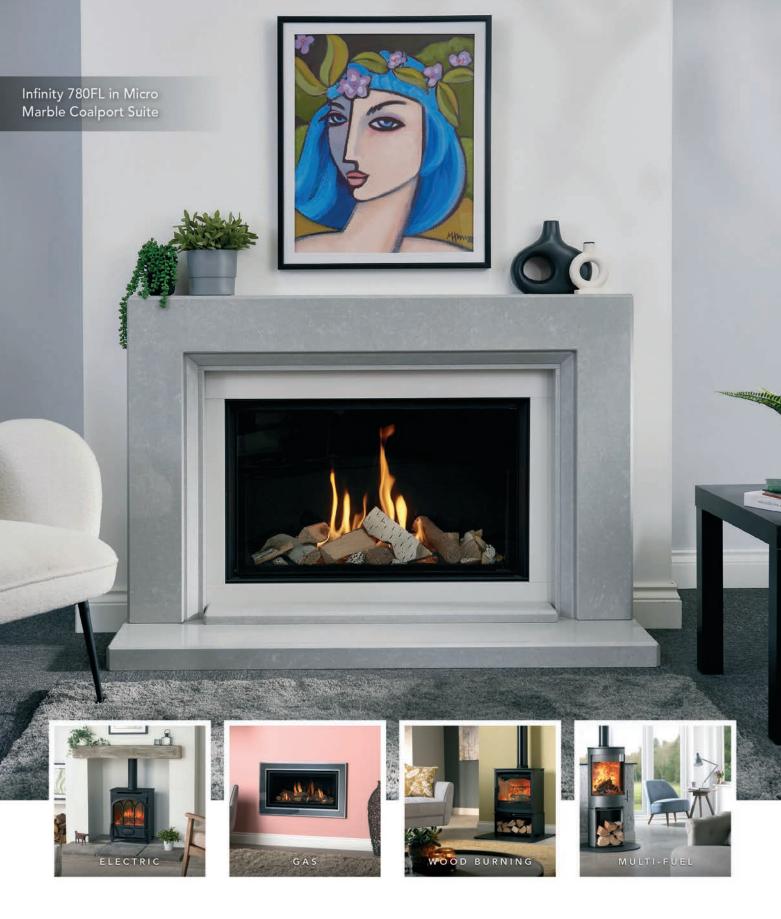
Our data shows that neutral and monochrome colours have an enduring appeal with anthracite grey, 'hipca' white and jet black remaining consistently popular among homeowners who are looking for a timeless look for their homes. However, in recent years, we've seen a growing trend for bolder uses of colour in homes, with inky blues, orange hues and shades of green In recent years we've seen a growing trend for bolder uses of colour in homes, with inky blues, oranges and shades of green

being thrown into the agenda in 2023. Front doors in particular offer a great opportunity to instantly add a pop of colour to a property and boost your kerb appeal.

When it comes to choosing a colour for your doors, it's worth considering what kind of aesthetic you want to create. Darker tones tend to create a sleek, modern look, while lighter and brighter colours can make more of a statement. Before choosing coloured doors, it's worth double-checking whether your property is covered by any restrictions. For example, if your home is in a conversation area, you may need to seek permission if you plan on opting for a colour which is out-of-keeping with the other properties on your road.

Whatever shade you choose, I would always recommend opting for powder-coated aluminium doors to prevent the colour from fading and protect against scratches. Products that are coated with high grade aluminium and specially cured have a robust coating that is much tougher than conventional paint. This ensures they are resistant to the elements and very low maintenance.

Ben Brocklesby is director at Origin



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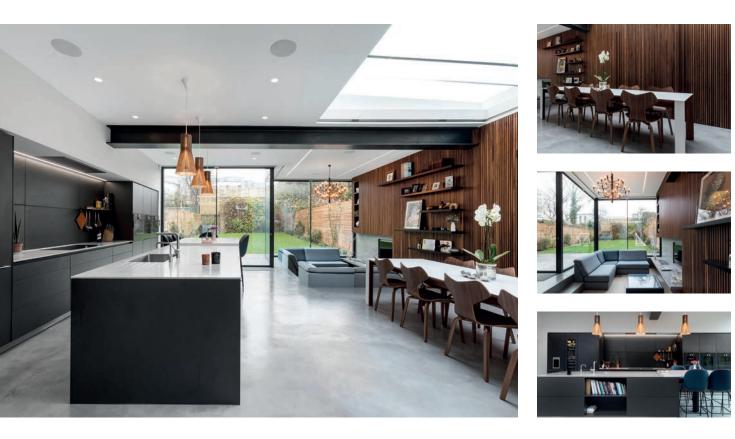


CASE STUDY

ALL CHANGE

Sally and Tom Marlow didn't have to look far from their house in south London in their search for more space. The catch was that their new home needed a full renovation as well as multiple extensions TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT IMAGES DRAW ARCHITECTURE





"U ur previous home was in not far away, also in Clapham, south London," says Sally. "But we needed more space, and we had been looking on this road. The house had been on the market for a while and was well-kept, but we wanted to put our stamp on it."

This handsome, double-fronted Edwardian home already had five bedrooms and an unusually large garden, despite being semidetached. Yet Sally and Tom, who were hoping for a third child, had very clear ideas about what they needed from their new home; room to grow, and more light.

Although Sally and Tom work as lawyers, they are also experienced renovators, with three previous projects under their belts.

"We were pretty confident," says Sally. "We knew we would have to rewire, replumb, replaster and change the shape of the rooms. We also wanted a perfect finish." Friends recommended London practice Draw Architecture, and the couple's brief made it clear a large kitchen, dining and family area were essential features for how they wanted to live in the house. Working from that point, ideas evolved, but it was architect Seamus Shanks at Draw who came up with the concept of creating a sunken sitting area within the open-plan kitchen and dining room. "I just love it!" says Sally.

Almost no part of the original house was left untouched, as they needed "lots of living space," asserts Sally. "There was no basement or cellar, so we used every nook and cranny and built-in maximum storage." As a result, the roofline was raised to allow for three bedrooms on the second floor (making six in total), almost every wall was moved, and two extensions were added; one on the ground floor to create the open plan space, and one on the first floor.

"There wasn't a lot [of the original] house left," admits Sally. "Just the front and sides and the stairs. You could stand inside and see the sky."

Before any of this work could begin, Tom and Sally needed to get planning permission, and this was not straightforward.

"Draw [Architecture] were very good," says Sally. "We got planning permission to add a 'pod'. It's a glass box on the [first floor] at the back of the house, maybe 3 m x 1 m, but it makes a world of difference to the bedroom. It feels so spacious now." This planning application was rejected at first, but the couple was able to get permission on appeal.

The other part of their application was even more complex. Their plans for a large rear extension to house the new kitchen and dining area were rejected. However, Tom and Sally were lucky to find evidence the house was originally built with a type of conservatory attached at the rear. The size and position of this historic structure meant they were able to get their desired extension under permitted development rules. "We got everything we wanted in the end," says Sally.

The property's rear extension is built entirely in masonry, with 100 mm of Styrofoam insulation. Unlike the traditional 'pretty' frontage, the extension has a chic and contemporary black zinc finish. Not only is this hard-wearing and practical, but it creates a clear

HIGH POINT

"The end of the build when it all finally came together. I looked around and just said 'wow'."







LOW POINT

"When the sunken seating area was flooded, just as we were about to move in. We couldn't work it out at first." distinction between old and new. There are no pastiches here.

Glazing was a significant part of the extension design, and it is all framed in powder-coated aluminium to match the black zinc cladding. In addition to the glass outrigger, there are large, glazed sliding doors connecting the kitchen to the garden, as well as a substantial roof light over the dining table. This drops light straight into the heart of the extension. Although Sally wanted to maximise light throughout, she was concerned so much glass may lead to overheating in the summer months. The solution to this was a solar coating on the glazing, which limits the heat from solar gain without reducing light levels. An additional level of shading comes from the integrated blinds Sally specified, and she is very happy with the results.

"Heat is not an issue, and I can get a lot of air in through the sliding doors. It's a very usable space all round," Sally says.

Glass also played a role in the renovation of the original parts of the house. Adding an extension to the rear of a property often means a new and windowless 'middle' room is created, often with little or no light. Rather than lose this space by opening out further, Sally and Tom divided the front and middle rooms with black, Crittall-style glazed doors. This clever approach not only maintains useful separate areas – essential in large families – but it allows for great sightlines and light to flow through the home.

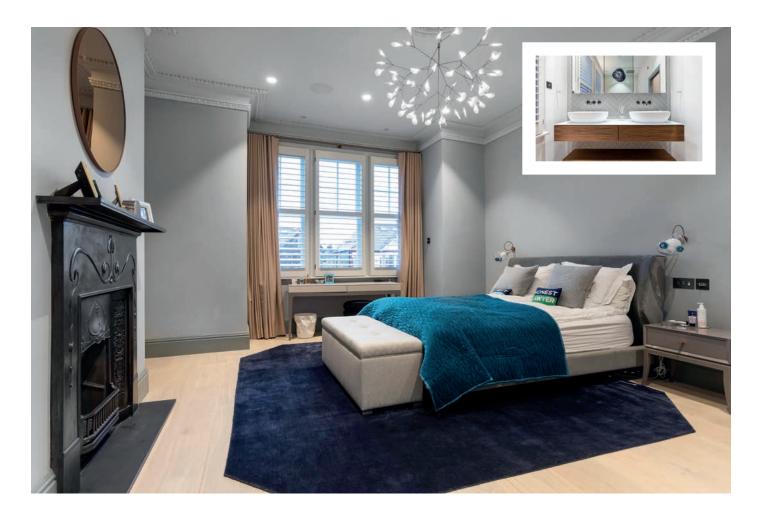
The timeless design of the steel-framed doors also complements the more traditional feel in the front and middle rooms. The apparently effortless merging of period features and The timeless design of the house's steelframed doors also complements the traditional feel

contemporary design in these areas of an Edwardian building shows that not only does true style never date, but that the best of differing periods often work beautifully with each other.

While this is one of the great successes of this project, not all is as it seems.

"Edwardian homes weren't that decorative," says Sally. "None of the details is original, such as the cornicing and so on. We did save the fireplaces, though."

While the flooring in this original part of the house is a modern, grey-washed engineered wood, the extension floor is 'micro topped.' This join-free solution produces a floor that looks like the better-known polished concrete, in fact it is a cement that is modified with a polymer to be ultra-thin. It can be applied to all types of surfaces from concrete to timber, including vertical ones. "It goes up the wall to the side of the television," says Sally. "I love the aesthetics, but if I was to do this again, I would use large concrete tiles, as it has cracked a bit."



Both the micro topped floor and the engineered wood are laid over a new underfloor heating system, so there are no spacehungry radiators in any of the rooms. Sally and Tom chose an efficient gas boiler, with a 'Megaflo' system. This is an unvented system that maintains the supply of hot water with a steady, reliable pressure anywhere in the house, regardless of the number of showers or taps. This is very useful in a house this size with a family of five using four bathrooms!

From a construction point of view, the biggest headache for Sally and Tom was the sudden flooding of the sunken seating area, which happened a short time before they were due to move in.

"This was probably due to the high level of groundwater that exists on the site," explains architect Seamus Shanks. "An external water chamber was placed into the garden to help lower the water table." On a personal level, one of Sally's biggest challenges was getting the lighting 'right' and getting Tom to agree.

INTERIOR DESIGN

"I'm very interested in design, and I scour magazines," says Sally. "But when it came to lighting, I was all at sea, especially on proportions. I would never have thought of some of the larger light fittings we ended up using in the house." The couple brought in Cat Dal Interior Design to help with the lighting and the finishes generally.

"It took Tom and I loads of rounds with our interior designer too, but now the lighting is a triumph."

The quality of the finish throughout Tom and Sally's home is superb, as can be seen everywhere from the magnificent restored original staircase to the new bathrooms. The upper floors have been reorganised to accommodate six bedrooms, four bathrooms and walk-in wardrobes, where previously there were five bedrooms and two bathrooms. The children's rooms on the top floor are full of playful elements, such as bespoke bunk beds and bright colours, creating a fun space away from the rest of the house.

The stand-out space is the kitchen and dining area in the extension. Designed by Kitchen Architecture, the cabinetry was made by Balthup. The island worktop is finished in Caesarstone and the informal bar seating area at one end is Corian, a solid surface made from acrylic polymer designed to withstand the demands of family life. This bar area is linked to the sunken sitting zone and the outdoor entertaining area, making communication between cook and guests easy. The kitchen itself is superbly equipped, with a boiling water tap, discrete hob extraction, multiple ovens, an induction hob, and lots of storage, all tucked

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECTS

Draw Architecture www.draw-architecture.co.uk

INTERIORS

Cat Dal Interiors www.catdalinteriors.com

KITCHEN

Kitchen Architecture www.kitchenarchitecture.com

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.

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	NEWCASTLE NE981ZZ
Mr Alex Clatworthy	
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BR2 8NW	Fax 03000 1582 466
Date 11 February 2022 Our Ref DIY Claim Ref: 123456 Your Ref	www.gov.uk National Advice Service: 0300 200 3700
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CHISTOMER

ATING

ANDREW JONES (THE VATMAN) NEW BUILDS & CONVERSIONS

Hi Andrew, did you get a good response from last months Q&A on this magazine?

Yes I had a very good response, especially towards the questions relating to paying the wrong amount of VAT to contractors.

What outcome do we not want to see when it comes to reclaiming VAT?

As you can see from the example shown, receiving an Awards Notice from HMRC with an amount that is considerably lower than what you claimed for is not what you want to see.

How can we avoid this?

The key is not to pay the VAT to any person visiting your site to do work for you.

How can we make people aware that the work being carried out is VAT Free?

Your contractor may well seek evidence that the development qualifies for VAT Zero Rating and getting this correct is crucial. We can provide a VAT Exemption Certificate to keep on file and present to your Tradesmen which should assist you in not being charged VAT. Please get in touch to discuss obtaining this certificate.



Extra Tip: - When discussing your project with a tradesman, do not introduce your VAT position in the first instance unless the contractor introduces the topic. Allow the tradesman to give you a quote and reveal their VAT position and commit to a price before you then present your VAT exemption certificate.

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The quality of the finish throughout Tom and Sally's home is superb

away behind fuss-free surfaces and clean lines.

"The kitchen is my most joyful space," admits Sally. "We like entertaining and the kitchen just 'works.' It is very functional and well set up." On the opposite wall to the kitchen, behind the large dining table, is a long section of walnut panelling, which hides a bespoke bar. Designed by Sally and Tom, Seamus Shanks, and Cat Dal, it was brought together by Martin, their carpenter. "Martin was an artist," says Sally. "His attention to detail was extraordinary and he brought a lot to this bar in terms of its fine detailing."

The family are fortunate they were able to continue living nearby in their previous home during the 10-month project. For Sally, the build was a race to completion before their youngest child, Jenny, arrived. As it happened, Jenny pipped the house at the post and the Marlow family moved in when she was just a month old.

Now, with three children and busy careers, does their new home live up to expectations?

"The house has improved our lives," says Sally.

"It's wonderful to have the space. The children can be doing their homework on the island while I am cooking. We can all be together but doing our own thing. The garden is large enough for the children to play and I'm so excited to finally have off-street parking, a utility room and an ensuite. I've been waiting for these ever since I moved to London twenty years ago!"

Given their experience of such a complex build project has been so positive, is there anything Sally wishes they had done differently?

"I had a real moment when I wondered if we should have dug a basement," Sally confesses. "With hindsight, I would do this, as it would give the children – the older two heading towards the teenage zone – more space within our walls. Also, I would love a gym!"

For now, the family have no plans to make any further renovations and they have settled into their new home enjoying the space, and light, as well as the charms of the more traditional rooms.

"Sometimes," says Sally, "I look around and think wow, we do have a beautiful home."

SALLY & TOM'S ADVICE

"We spent ages on the plans, thinking about space. Get a good architect to push the boundaries. Get out of your comfort zone on interiors; Cat Dal pushed us to think about darker colours and I'm so pleased we did; finishing touches make it a home."

Maintain your rainwater discipline

Maintaining your rainwater system is just as crucial as specifying the right system for your home. Paul Grills of Brett Martin offers insights on best practice for preserving healthy gutters and downpipes

Ithough rainwater drainage systems are far from the largest cost item in a self-build project, neglecting their maintenance postinstallation can prove to be more expensive in the long run due to repairs. The exterior of your house is exposed to all elements, and over time gutter systems will become less effective due to build up of dirt and debris. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain gutters and keep them in excellent condition to ensure your home remains secure during heavy downpours and to prevent secondary issues such as mould and damage to the exterior finish of the home.

SAFETY FIRST

Maintaining gutters invariably means working at height, therefore it is important that you take all the necessary safety precautions, including using the relevant personal protective equipment (PPE).

CLEANING

Regular maintenance of your rainwater system will ensure that it reaches the intended lifespan. The general rule for best practice is to inspect and clean your gutters and downpipes at least once a year, but the best practice is to do so during the autumn and spring to keep them prepared for heavy rainfall and inclement weather. For areas experiencing frequent and heavy rain or areas where there is a lot of wind borne debris such as sand along the coastline or close proximity to deciduous tree leaves in autumn, more regular maintenance to remove the debris may



be necessary to mitigate the increased strain on the system.

Using a plastic gutter cleaning tool, remove larger debris from the gutter and place it in a bucket, then rinse out the remaining dirt and debris with a garden hose for a thorough clean. Direct the hose towards the downpipe to allow the debris to drain away. If water is not draining correctly, check for blockages in the downpipe and use the necessary tool to dislodge them, if required.

After cleaning, check that each component in the system is secure and realign any components that may have shifted during maintenance, flushing the entire system once more with the hose for optimal performance.

It is also important to check and maintain gullies at ground level on open

drains, where downpipes direct rainwater into, to ensure they also remain free of debris and allow rainwater to reach the drainage system.

REPAIRING

After completing the gutter cleaning process, it is important to conduct regular inspections of the entire system, including the joints, to detect any rust or leaks before they can cause lasting damage.

When dealing with leaking gutter joints, there are various solutions available depending on the type of guttering you have. If you have metal guttering, the joint can be scraped of any debris and dried before injecting roof and gutter sealant into it. If your guttering is plastic, check that fittings

Neglecting to upkeep your gutters and downpipes can lead to costly repairs and secondary issues as well as potential damage to the home



such as union pieces and running outlets are secured, as one of the gaskets may be dislodged or damaged. In this case, you can release the joint by squeezing the gutter, and reposition the gasket into the correct location or replace the damaged gasket with a new one. Alternatively, if the guttering is sagging due to a loose or incorrectly positioned brackets, water will accumulate and pool instead of flowing as it should. If the issue is due to a loose screw, insert a wall plug and re-screw the bracket. If the bracket is not positioned correctly, fill the hole and reattach the bracket in the correct position. Plastic guttering should also be checked to ensure that gutters have not moved beyond the thermal expansion guides on the gutter fittings.

To tackle leaks at the end of a guttering length, it is important to check if a stop-end is missing or dislodged. If the stop-end has been dislodged then it should be refixed, in the case of a missing stop-end the gutter profile and size should be checked and then the stop-end should be replaced with one which is compatible with the gutter profile. In the case of a loose plastic downpipe, inspect the clips and screws to see if they're properly connected. Replace the screws with the same size if any are missing. Alternatively, the issue could stem from loose wall plugs, so replace them and secure the screws back in place.

Unfortunately, if rust is spotted, it indicates that the gutters have reached the end of their lifespan, and replacement is necessary for continued efficient rainwater drainage and home protection. At this point, it may be wise to switch to plastic gutters, which do not rust and can still provide the traditional cast iron aesthetic if required.

Maintaining a rainwater drainage system is vital for the protection and longevity of your home. Neglecting to upkeep your gutters and downpipes can lead to costly repairs and secondary issues as well as potential damage to the home. By following these best practices, you can help prolong the life of your rainwater drainage system and keep your home protected.

Paul Grills is technical manager at Brett Martin



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A wasted opportunity?

David Stagg, technical manager for Graf UK, says that 'commissioning' of domestic wastewater treatment plants is as vital as getting gas and electricity services signed off by specialists, and wonders why it's not happening

Www.astewater treatment plants became established in the UK in the late 1990s when specifiers and homeowners finally woke up to the limitations of septic tanks. As a result, you would think it was safe to assume that the need to commission these plants, or to set them up properly, was also recognised.

However, some manufacturers are finding that only 25% to 50% of their systems, at best, are being commissioned. The reason they are not cannot be the cost – it is only between £150 and £300 – nor the time – the 15 to 20-point checklist only takes less than an hour for a trained specialist service provider. So, what is the reason?

It is most likely that a large percentage of specifiers and end users simply are not aware that commissioning is available and/or how important it is to the longterm wellbeing of their wastewater management system.

While registration systems do not guarantee the quality of long-term service and maintenance and the protection of groundwater from potential pollution, such systems exist in Wales and Scotland, but not currently in England.

Historically, there were some agencies which registered and tracked treatment plants, but when the General Binding Rules (a set of rules-based regulations intended to simplify the regulation of small sewage discharges) were introduced by the Environment Agency in 2015, all this, ironically, seemed to cease.

While more and more people are now doing their research and due diligence before purchasing a wastewater treatment plant, some manufacturers





are bridging the gap and putting their money where their mouth is, by offering free commissioning.

These watchdogs for their own systems would rather help specifiers and end users avoid any potential emotional, economic and environmental impact that may be caused without such measures in place.

Issues with non-commissioned wastewater treatment plants are generally due to poor installation and system set-up rather than the systems themselves as they are typically relatively simple to operate.

The first symptom is likely to be a bad smell. Contrary to popular opinion, this is not what end users should expect from a wastewater treatment plant!

It is likely something has stopped working. Perhaps a compressor error. Perhaps the air diffusers that blow oxygen into the water in the tank have got blocked or damaged in some way. Maybe a power cut caused an issue with the timings and workings of the system.

Perhaps the waste content is not suitable for the system to work at its optimal rate. For want of a better way of describing this, is the tank being filled with too much liquid and not enough solids? That can affect how the treatment process works.

The same goes if the system takes in more grey water from sinks, washing machines and showers, than it does black water from toilets. It's called a sewage treatment plant for a reason – it needs sewage! Too much soap and not enough sewage might mean the treatment quality drops.

The number one reason for issues with wastewater treatment plants is poor aeration caused by air hoses and

Issues with non-commissioned wastewater treatment plants are generally due to poor installation and system set-up rather than the systems themselves, as they are typically relatively simple to operate



diffusers (that sit in the bottom of the tank and release small air bubbles into the effluent) which have not been connected properly, or air hoses that kink. This affects the most important part of the treatment process – the quality and quantity of aeration. If the dissolved oxygen levels in the treated effluent are low, this will result in odours. If the diffusers are not located in the tank correctly, such as lying on their side or one on top of the other, some of the air holes may seal up over time as air will always take the path of least resistance which is from the highest point. This again reduces the quality of aeration into the treatment zone and creates more back pressure on the compressor, forcing it to work harder and resulting in a shorter design life.

Tanks can even be installed the wrong way round, with the inflow going into the outlet which will obviously cause issues from the moment go, and if tanks aren't level, gravity flow into or out of the tank will be affected. And if the wrong backfill material is used, even the most robust tank may be damaged by sharp stones or bricks.

Some systems have not even been switched on! If this was discovered say six months after the system should have been commissioned, the plant would only have been acting as a septic tank, a storage vessel with no capacity to treat its contents, for all that time.

Contemporary wastewater treatment plants run on two 12-hour or four sixhour cycles so even if something as basic as checking the date and time are correct is not done, this will affect its ability to function properly.



And let us not even talk about drainage fields! Even though these are invisible once installed, if they have not been sized and designed correctly, any issues will soon become extremely visible...as well as extremely smelly.

David Stagg is technical manager for Graf UK

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What does it take to turn a 200-year-old remote Scottish farmhouse with an evocative name – Easter Shian – into a family home and business? Answer: the resilience and imagination of Dave and Debbie Halls-Evans





"Every time we touched a pipe, there was a flood. Everything that could go wrong on the build, did"

bebie met Dave 17 years ago. Debbie was living in Bolton with her three children and Dave (who has two children) moved from Scotland to be with her. "We ran a consultancy business together," Debbie explains, "but Dave never really enjoyed living in Bolton. When our youngest was 16 we decided to go travelling and we knew we'd never go back to living in England, Scotland would be our future."

After three enjoyable years living in Mallorca, the uncertainty of Brexit gave the family concern, and they decided it was time to make the move to Scotland. Fast forward to December 2019 and the Halls-Evans moved back just in time for the pandemic to hit. "We based ourselves in West Linton and although viewing houses in person was a no go, we had a wish list of properties to look at." As and when restrictions allowed them to, the couple spent their weekends eliminating properties from their list.

Six months later, in July 2020 Easter Shian Farm near Dunkeld was the only property they hadn't viewed. "The agent warned us that it was incredibly remote and very few people wanted to live there." This was music to Debbie and Dave's ears! "When we parked on the drive, we knew this was the house for us." The keys were handed over on Debbie's 50th birthday and within six weeks of viewing the family had moved in.

Before Easter Shian, every home that Debbie has lived in has been rented. "I spoke to the landlord in Mallorca, and he allowed me to gut the house we were staying in and I realised then that my living space is really important to me." With her philosophy being "perfectly imperfectly," Easter Shian was an opportunity for Debbie to properly make a house her own. "My approach is, if what I do is rubbish, I'll get someone to come and fix it!"

Unfortunately, two weeks after moving in, getting someone to come and fix it was very much the case as the honeymoon period was well and truly over, as Debbie recalls: "We'd spent a fortnight stripping the house back to a bare shell and then we found mice, the boiler blew up, the chimneys dropped everything, and we had not one, but seven floods! Every time we touched a pipe, there was a flood. Everything that could go wrong did."

Aware that they now had no option but to start completely from scratch, the couple

HIGH POINT

"Seeing the work so far, and when others appreciate your hard work and effort, and can see and feel what we do for Easter Shian. The recognition by others of what we have done; winning Scotland's Home of the Year Christmas 2022 was the final icing on the cake."



LOW POINT

"There actually hasn't been one! Easter Shian has never given us a moment of doubt or worry. The energy the house emits is that it will work out, it will be okay, and it has taught us so much patience. If I had to pick faults, everything has probably cost three or four times more than we originally budgeted! It just means we work harder to make it happen. With its exposed stone wall and wooden beams, floor to ceiling shelving and dark blue walls, the new library has been a triumph, and is easily one of their favourite rooms in the house

commenced the renovations by painting every room in Farrow & Ball's Lime White while they decided how to reconfigure the layout. This fresh start also allowed Debbie to eliminate the weird and wonderful colour palette that the property had been painted in and gave her a chance to live with a neutral backdrop and see where the natural light came in.

"Asides from the crazy colour scheme, the house was lacking in character, and it didn't feel remotely like a 200-year-old farmhouse. It really needed some personality," Debbie remembers.

The bright yellow and blue kitchen was one of the first rooms to be neutralised and although the couple had inherited the AGA with the sale, it wasn't in working order. "We phoned the local AGA installer, and it turned out he had put the AGA in in 1964 but he hadn't been back since! Let's just say it was overdue a service!"

The layout of the property had also been somewhat neglected and was a bit of a mish mash; it certainly didn't work in its current format for the family. On the ground floor, there was a shower room and utility/boot room by the front door. Off the large kitchen was the first of the "white boxes" that the house was famous for in the area – namely two conservatories that had been added to the rear of the property. Adjacent to the kitchen was a huge living room with fireplaces at either end, and access to the second "white box." On the first floor were four bedrooms and on the attic level a further two bedrooms with one utilised as a bar.

As Debbie had always wanted a library this was her jumping off point. "The main living space was one really massive room with a fireplace and a sofa at each end which I found quite a peculiar way to live." In the kitchen, the dining table had been placed under the stairs which made it impossible to seat everyone at the table but while the kitchen was generously proportioned, the island made it difficult to relocate said dining table. Dave and Debbie's solution was to redesign the main living space by erecting a partition wall at one end of the room to create a separate library and then use the remainder of the room as a dining room and games room. This configuration created a better



flow through the house with the kitchen leading through to the dining room/games room and the library at the end. The conservatories were still accessed through the kitchen and dining room respectively but the whole ground floor now came together as a more usable space.

With its exposed stone wall and wooden beams, floor to ceiling shelving and dark blue walls the new library is a major triumph, and easily one of their favourite rooms in the house. Indeed, the family even congregated here last year to have an atmospheric Christmas dinner. "Dave was worried if we split the room to incorporate the library, that it would seem too small but it's still a huge space. It took a while to get our heads around what would be our main living space because of the two conservatories. However, this change has transformed how we navigate around the house."

With the dining table out of the kitchen as well, Debbie was able to build a larder under the stairs. Then she set about making the white box conservatories more user friendly and aesthetically pleasing. Internally, the boxes are now dual-purpose spaces. Stylish and comfortable, one is used as Dave's home office and meeting space and the other as a TV/ garden room. However externally, they needed slightly more imagination. "We decided to paint the garage black to see what it would look like in the agricultural landscape; we couldn't believe how well it worked and so we applied the same principle to the white boxes." The conservatories were reroofed, fitted with blinds to create the illusion of Crittall glass - the frames sprayed black. "It's transformed the way the entire property looks." The garden access from

both conservatories has also been moved as Debbie explains: "The doors were originally at the front which did make sense but for me it felt like I'd lost a wall." Now with the doors at the side, they are in the process of creating a courtyard between the two boxes which they'll "eventually plant around."

One of the conditions of the sale of Easter Shian was that as the previous owners were moving to live on a barge, they were allowed to leave some of their bigger pieces of furniture. As a result, there's been a lot of repurposing around the home and the introduction of several funky wall coverings.

When Debbie turned her attention to renovating the entrance hall and downstairs shower room both the repurposing and wallpaper really came into play. "The hall was extremely important to me; I wanted to evoke the vibe of the house as soon as you came in the door." Debbie's vibe is quirky, eclectic and welcoming, and with a range of objects and curios on display, it showcases a taste of what's to come in the rest of the home.

Just off the hall, the shower room (after one of the many floods) has been changed into a cloakroom style WC with pheasant wallpaper and a repurposed wardrobe for storage. Again, it has an atmosphere more akin to a country house shooting lodge rather than your average downstairs loo.

In the attic bathroom, a former dressing table is now the sink unit albeit with the addition of some unusual 'hare head' handles. And while Debbie readily admits she's a huge fan of Woodchip & Magnolia designer wallpapers she's equally happy to rummage through a skip

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where she found the wood for the corner bath soap holder. "I thought it looked like something interior designer Athena Calderone would have in her home – my version is a bit less expensive!"

Debbie's fondness for wallpaper isn't restricted to the walls either. In the attic twin bedroom, she used B&Q Fresco paper on the walls and floor. "It's inexpensive and once varnished over, practical too.

"The attic level was quite a bizarre space," she continues. "The previous owners had removed several walls and put in a bar and as a result, it didn't really feel like a farm cottage up there." Debbie and Dave took away the bar making it into a bedroom once more and reinstated the original walls. This allowed them to create a suite with two bedrooms and a Jack and Jill bathroom for the couple's four grandchildren and their parents when they come to stay.

Today, the interior is nearly to Debbie's liking although she's constantly tweaking and moving things around. However now, she has other challenges to occupy her time.

"Three years in and the gardens are our next project," says Debbie. However, Debbie's plans are more ambitious than introducing a few planters and a bit of landscaping. As a fan of Jack Wallington, garden designer, and author of The Times Garden Book of the Year 2022, A Greener Life. Debbie decided to approach Jack to help her. "I wanted to build a habitat, not simply a garden, so I contacted Jack and asked if he would be interested in doing a project with us and he said he'd love to." The project should take five years and Debbie has to instigate it. "I'm a complete novice but Jack will do a site visit once a year to make sure I'm on the right track. I'm really excited about it as his ideas are amazing."

As part of the redevelopment of the land, the couple also have ambitious plans for the outbuildings. Work will soon commence on the barn closest to the house to turn it into a commercial building for their consultancy business. The second, larger barn will be demolished and within its footprint two one-bed, holiday cottages will be erected. "We're also going through the process of putting in a borehole beside the cottages and then we'll have our own water supply which will be very pure.

She adds: "This is such an incredible place, I would like other people to experience it. We would like to be able to bring our clients here and eventually invite guests to come and stay so they are able to take a bit of Easter Shian home with them." Such is Debbie's passion for Easter Shian that she has started her own ezine about the goings on at the farm. "It's a wonderful way of documenting what we do with the house and if anyone can pick up some ideas, they can have them for free. Is it a history of the house? I don't know!" Also on the cards is an Easter Shian candle range, and Debbie is in discussions about developing an Easter Shian gin as well as a special tartan.

"I'm not a naturally patient person, but Easter Shian has taught me patience. It'll probably take us a lifetime to do everything we want to and to restore all the character; it's an ongoing process but an enjoyable one."

You can keep up to date with the goings on at Easter Shian at www.eastershian.com

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Basement specialist specifies Triton Systems

One of **Triton Systems** approved installers has made use of the manufacturer's waterproofing and sealant products in constructing a large wine cellar as the semi-buried basement structure beneath a new five-bedroom property in North London. Harkmac Construction Limited undertook the new build in the Stanmore area on behalf of Inspired Designs, a Residential Design and Build company and recommended the use of Triton's TT admixture to the project structural engineer along with Swell Seal mastic to address the day joints. Harkmac's Contract Manager on the Stanmore job, Anthony Anderson, comments: "We work right across the country from Cardiff, down to Portsmouth and up to Coventry and have utilised the Triton range on a variety of domestic and commercial projects, including several of the David Lloyd gymnasium extensions. The products are very easy to use and we get good technical back up from Triton, including site visits and the supply of drawings or special details when needed." As a long-established manufacturer with a very successful track record, Triton Systems offers a wide range of well proven products to cover damp-proofing problems, timber protection, structural repairs, condensation control and the penetration of gases such as radon and methane. Its technical advisory service is also able to offer advice on specific project requirements as well as guidance on relevant product compliances.



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Wrap up warmer

Having a solid roof fitted on your conservatory can help to save energy and bills, but it's important to choose your system carefully to get the best results, Tim Douglas from Guardian Building Systems explains

A roof replacement is a great opportunity to revive and maximise the use of any conservatory, and a well-designed and properly installed roof provides a whole host of practical and aesthetic benefits. Warm roof systems can help keep the space cooler in summer and warmer in summer, save on heating costs and make the space look much more modern and welcoming.

However, not all conservatory roof replacements are equal, and for anyone committed to investing time and money in a new roof, it is important to understand the different options. Over the past few years, a growing number of contractors have started to offer so called 'wrap over' systems. Unlike warm roof systems, which are specially designed and engineered for each conservatory, wrap over systems are typically fitted directly over your existing roof and are built by the contractor. As a result, while having a wrap over system installed can be cheaper at first, they can lead to some worrying, costly and stressful consequences.

UNDERSTANDING THE OPTIONS

As mentioned above, there are two commonly specified options for solid conservatory roofs:

• Wrap over systems – made up of timber battens, a breather membrane and tiles, are fixed over the existing conservatory roof, followed by a final waterproofing system.

• Warm roofs – these are new roofing systems which completely replace your existing conservatory roof. They are often



formed from lightweight aluminium and pre-insulated to ensure good thermal performance. Warm roofs are designed specifically for conservatories, and are usually preassembled in dedicated facilities bespoke to a conservatory's specifications.

Once fitted, both of these systems can initially appear very similar, however, wrap-over systems often conceal a number of potential problems.

WRAP OVER RISKS

Wrap over systems typically feature very little insulation and the quality of the installation will be down to the individual contractor. This can lead to sizeable gaps between the insulation. The result is a space which isn't much warmer, or cheaper to heat, in winter and can badly overheat in summer.

The potential gaps in the insulation layer, or around the edge of the roof where it joins to the conservatory, can also create cold spots on the surface. When the warm air in your conservatory reaches these, it will cool and form condensation either on the surface of the layer, or within the construction. This can lead to mould growth which is not only unsightly, but can be unhealthy to inhale. It can also cause the timber structure to rot over time.

Perhaps most significantly, many of the wrap over systems we come across are fitted without proper Building Control approval and certification. This may not only present issues if you choose to sell the house, but it can also pose serious safety risks as it often means no structural calculations are carried out.

For these reasons, it's important to think carefully before having a wrap-over system fitted. In most cases, warm roof systems provide a safer, healthier and better long-term investment.

WARM ROOF BENEFITS

As mentioned, warm roof systems are designed specifically for your

Warm roof systems typically come with lots of design flexibility, allowing you to choose the style of roof tiles and incorporate features such as rooflights or internal downlighters



conservatory's dimensions and design. The manufacturer will typically work with dedicated installation partners who will discuss the design options with you and arrange for proper structural calculations to be carried out.

The structure of the warm roof will commonly be formed from aluminium which is strong, lightweight and will not shrink over time, meaning it is often possible to avoid the need for extra structural supports.

Warm roof systems typically come with lots of design flexibility, allowing you to choose the style of roof tiles and incorporate features such as rooflights or internal downlighters. Once your design is agreed, the components will be manufactured at dedicated facilities with precision engineering. This ensures that once it arrives onsite, all the components should fit together quickly and accurately with no gaps, ensuring it looks the part and performs as you expect.

The actual installation is extremely fast, typically only taking around three days and typically doesn't involve any wet trades – so there's less risk of delays due to the weather.

Once the warm roof is installed, homeowners tend to reap the benefits for years to come. A warm roof regulates temperature because of the effective insulated structure, reducing energy usage while still retaining the natural light that many find appealing about conservatories.

This kind of roof replacement makes any conservatory a fully functional living space that can be used all year round, without the frequent maintenance that glazed roofs require. And in terms of resale, the sleek design can pay for itself.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ROOF FOR YOUR CONSERVATORY

Replacing your conservatory roof can be a great way to add some extra space to your home, whether it be for a playroom, home gym, office or something completely different. It can also ensure that the space is much more comfortable to be in whatever the weather outside, without adding lots of cost to your heating bills. To get the best results, however, you need to think carefully about what option provides the best long-term value. Warm roofs offer a proven replacement which can deliver a whole host of benefits without the potential downsides of a wrap over.

Tim Douglas is technical manager at Guardian Roofing Systems



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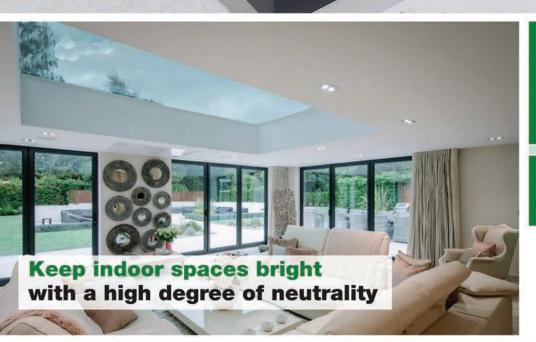


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Architect Paul Testa, of HEM architects, turned a 1960s bungalow into a beautiful, stylish low energy home, with VELFAC windows making the most of beautiful valley views while meeting stringent performance targets. 'Our philosophy is to build sustainable, good value homes which are enjoyable to live in,' explains Paul. 'The owners of Sycamore Hall welcomed this approach; they wanted a comfortable, modern, low energy home which embraced the surrounding countryside and so we embarked on an ambitious retro-fit which included installing VELFAC windows.' A good view often means a more exposed location,

and another reason for specifying VELFAC. 'Almost all units are triple glazed,' says Paul, 'which allowed us to install large windows designed to 'blur' the boundary between inside and out, without compromising thermal insulation or air tightness, and significantly reducing energy consumption. The resulting home is cheaper to run while allowing the owners to fully enjoy the surrounding hills and changing weather.'

R-AFFORDABLE HOME, LOCHALINE



The R-Affordable House brings together contemporary design, socially-responsible construction and high performance building products including VELFAC windows - to deliver 'a quality affordable house, filled with light, economical to run and using sustainable materials in an innovative way'. Overlooking the Sound of Mull, the timber-framed home features whiterendered tapering walls, a grey slate roof, an open plan living area flanked by bedrooms, and gallery space in the eaves. A run of five VELFAC patio doors frame a stunning view of the Sound of Mull, with triple-glazed units meeting demanding thermal efficiency targets given the windswept location. VELFAC windows also underline the architectural quality of the build while maximising natural light; internal timber frames are finished in a clear lacquer, complementing timber door frames and white-painted wooden walls and floors, while external aluminium frames are finished in pale grey to add

contemporary style to the traditionally inspired exterior.

GAMEKEEPER'S LODGE, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON



At this contemporary two-storey lodge, created by interior designer Sarah Farrington, VELFAC composite windows were specified for their low U-values, slim frames and contemporary style. 'I wanted a really well-insulated home which also made the most of views over a lake at the front and woodland at the back." explains Sarah. 'I also wanted windows on both east and west elevations of the large open plan living space, but as we are on top of a hill air tightness was also important.' Triple glazed VELFAC units were the ideal solution: 'The timber internal frame acts as a thermal break, and the triple glazing keeps the inner glass at a comfortable temperature,' she says. 'Internally, I opted for white painted timber frames to allow uninterrupted views of the lake and countryside beyond,' she adds, 'and the large windows mean the house is always filled with light, despite being built into the hillside.'

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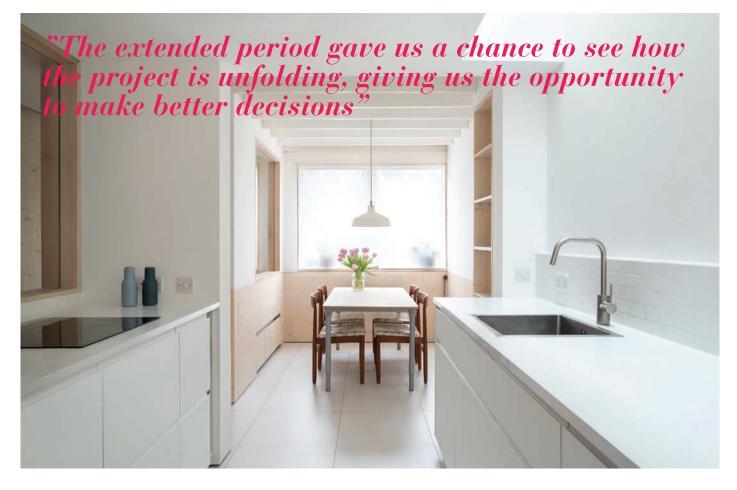
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CASE STUDY

ENERPHIT FOR PURPOSE

Bob and his wife have completed a phased retrofit of tight building into an highly efficient and carefully designed home which meets the needs of the future, both theirs and environmentally speaking

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES AGNESE SANVITO



t took all of Bob Prewett's passion and drive as an eco-build enthusiast to successfully complete his retrofit of a compact 1960s 'shoebox' home for his wife and two children in south London, after years of intermittent progress.

The project, in the quiet suburb of Sydenham, London, illustrates how a low energy refurbishment can be effectively executed in stages, even if you may not possess sufficient cash flow upfront at the project's outset, and while living the property.

Bob and his wife, also an architect, have extended and reconfigured the home to tailor it closely to their family's requirements, while also upgrading the building to achieve the Passivhaus EnerPHit Standard.

If you're unfamiliar with EnerPHit, it is very similar to Passivhaus, however while the latter applies to new builds, EnerPHit is designed to





provide similarly high levels of energy efficiency when retrofitting an existing property. By applying this standard, Bob's has dramatically reduced the home's energy usage.

Bob's passion for sustainable design stems from studying architecture at the University of Bath, which included learning skills such as heat loss calculations for buildings. In 2005, after completing his studies, Bob set up his own practice to put what he had learned to the test, with, he says, the main goal being "making buildings more energy efficient."

However, as Bob admits, at this time the majority of people "weren't interested in building eco-friendly homes." However, in 2008 a client approached the practice to undertake an "extreme retrofit" on a Victorian terrace house, which he says "shifted our whole focus."

This transformative project ignited a desire within Bob to experience the same thermal comfort that he witnessed his clients enjoying. He found himself envious of the cosy atmosphere they had achieved. Bob recalls visiting the home after the main retrofit had been completed during a particularly harsh London winter. There was no heating due to the boiler not yet being commissioned, but a decorator was comfortably working in short sleeves, using a lamp for warmth. The encounter left a strong impression on Bob, fueling his determination to create his own energy-efficient haven. A few years later, with a growing family, he finally decided to take the leap. Originally, the plan was to find a site in London and build from the ground up, but Bob admits: "unless we won the lottery, buying even the tiniest parcel of land in central London was a hopeless dream." Their work commitments meant the idea of commuting was off the table.

So they shifted their focus to finding a "fixerupper," a property which they could "radically" alter and make it their own. Bob says this would be the closest thing they could do to building a brand new house.

After an arduous search in a chaotic housing market, they eventually found an ex-council house in Sydenham. Neglected for nearly 60 years, with the exception of some shoddy installations of cheap PVCu double glazing in 2000, the home was in poor condition; the doors and windows were "literally falling out."

Bob describes it as a "shoebox" with a "mean" layout over two floors with a flat roof. The ground floor contained a kitchen/dining area at the front and rear living space. The lack of natural light left the middle part of this floor dark and gloomy. Four small bedrooms were squeezed onto the upper floor; two being tiny and barely accommodating a single bed, says Bob.

The silver lining of the home's condition meant that it was on the market for a more affordable price. Despite its cramped interior, Bob and his

BOB'S ADVICE

• "Take the time to plan! If you are going to do a phased retrofit, you need to ensure that each phase satisfies building control every step of the way, which is quite a challenge. But if you think about it early on, it's very much doable."

• "Deal with any existing building defects before you start. If there are any damp patches, or the roofs leaking, resolve those issues before any of the insulation goes in the walls. Putting insulation over damp walls is a recipe for some obvious major problems, but so many people do it!"



wife could see themselves living there, albeit with some major alterations, and in 2014 they purchased the property.

PLANNING

Many of Bob's clients have Victorian houses in conservation areas or even listed buildings, and planning could take years to get, and is "always traumatic," he says. He was expecting the worst with this project, he says.

A big part of the pessimism stemmed from their intention to add an extra bedroom on the flat roof. "There's a standard clause that states 'we don't support applications that raise the ridge height of a home,' and we were definitely going to do that!"

Fortunately, as an existing water tank sat on the top of the structure, this provided enough precedent to get planning through without any objections. "For once, it was easy!" Bob exclaims.

Spreading the costs of the project into phases was always going to be a likely scenario: similar to many of Bob's clients, he had a set budget from the outset, but as is often the case, it fell short of their ambitions. Realising that they didn't have enough funds, they used a builder's expertise and together devised a plan to split up the work into three phases. When construction started onsite, the family opted to rent a nearby flat, eventually moving into their unfinished home after the main works were complete.

PHASE ONE: 'PUTTING A SWEATER ON'

Phase one took place in 2015, and was compared by Bob to "putting a sweater on the building," and consisted of most of the energy saving measures. Each wall was injected with cavity wall insulation while further internal insulation was added to some walls.

Bob made the loft extension one of the first tasks. With this happening, it meant the original uninsulated roof covering which was probably "about to start leaking," could be renewed. The timber extension required "unusual carpentry work and a careful approach by the contractor." The detailed design work could only happen after they had opened up the existing roof to see how it was previously made. Consequently, the engineer had to visit the site and quickly sketch detailed plans.

This phase also saw a high level of 'strip out' to change the internal spaces. The reconfiguration of the interior layout was chiefly done to enhance space and functionality for the family. The loft extension added an extra room, while on the ground floor, the separating wall was removed, creating a spacious open-plan area.

To improve the dark central portion, two large rooflights were installed on either side of the loft conversion. Joists on the first floor were cut out in places to allow natural light to permeate down to the ground floor. This significantly brightened the ground floor and transformed it from how it



was used previously, says Bob.

Upstairs at the front, the wall separating the small and medium-sized bedrooms upstairs was demolished to create a larger, master bedroom with ample space for clothing storage and a luxurious super king bed. A crucial aspect of this phase involved planning the ductwork for a ventilation system to be installed at a later stage. As Bob was targeting the demanding EnerPHit standard, an MVHR (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) system was always part of the plan. Bob says a good ventilation system is vital to ensure air quality in energy-efficient homes.

The challenging part of this stage, he admits, was "probably us, as clients." Notably, they altered floorplans the day after the builders commenced work, relocating the kitchen to the centre of the house. This decision saw the contractors having to dig up a portion of the concrete slab to accommodate a new drainage run. Fortunately they were working with "great builders" says Bob, with some relief!

PHASE TWO: ENVELOPE

By 2018, they had entered phase two of the renovation, with the family already having impressively coped with living in a home being retrofitted for a couple of years. During this stage, they made significant changes to both the front and rear facades by demolishing and reconstructing them using a more insulated wall construction.

Bob explains that their home, like many built during the 1960s, was built using 'cross wall' construction. This meant that the party walls bore most of the structural load, and the joists ran from side to side, leaving the front and rear elevations as simple infill.

During the Easter break in 2018, Bob's wife took the children to France for a couple of

weeks. While they were away, the builders managed to knock down the front and rear elevations, rebuild with extra insulation and then fit the triple glazed windows by the second week. By the time the family returned, the house was back together, and fully watertight.

At this stage, the MVHR system had not yet been installed, prompting the family to rely on opening and closing windows. However, as winter set in and the windows remained closed more often, Bob observed an "unsurprising" decline in air quality. He adds: "If you're building envelope is done to a high standard and you've not commissioned the ventilation system yet, it can be a big problem."

PHASE THREE: A WAITING GAME

The final phase of the project has dragged on for a couple of years, admits Bob, with "quite a bit of work still yet to be finished." This phase has seen the final major fabric upgrade however, where the outdated PVCu doors at the rear were replaced with a larger set of sliding triple glazed doors, providing a view of the newly decked back garden.

While the upstairs finishes are still awaiting completion, considerable progress has been made downstairs. The area has been adorned with customised built in timber furniture that utilises the small apertures within the home, effectively maximising the available space.

The finishes are now mostly being undertaken by Bob, who has turned it into a weekend activity. Consequently, the project has been somewhat prolonged, but his commitment and efforts are driving it forward steadily.

LAYOUT & STYLE

The home as it stands today displays various timber details as well as white finishes as part

ENERPHIT AIM

I think that was probably always an aim. You know, if it was possible, we try and do that. Partly because so I was an early founding member of the Passivhaus Trust in the UK. I did my passive house qualification in about 2013 or 2014, something like that. Okay. Must have been before then. It must have been 2012. So, am I what my wife has a similar interest in Passivhaus she's built and then a passive house retrofit before?



of its clean and simple contemporary design. Bob asserts how timber was used to "reflect the values of building an eco home."

As you come in through the front door, where there used to be a small WC is now a compact shower room. To the left is a functional space featuring a bench where the family can take their shoes on and off, as well as a decent amount of storage. "It's very small, but it just about copes with the clutter that a small family can create," says Bob.

Continuing past this area, the dining area is on the left, flowing seamlessly into the central kitchen. A corridor then brings you to the modestly sized living room at the rear of the home. "It's a very simple, open plan layout, with dining at the front, kitchen in the middle, and then relaxing at the back," asserts Bob.

Moving up to the first floor, there remain similarly-sized bedrooms at the rear of the house, maintaining the original proportions. But in the middle of this floor is now the family bathroom, while a generously sized bedroom sits at the front. Ascending stairs to the second floor, there is a compact fourth bedroom nestled within the attic space.

Part of the home's charm lies in its raw elements, with exposed joists replacing ceilings on the ground floor. Not only does this "give you a feeling of a bit more space above your head," says Bob, but "it also allowed us to do some of the airtightness measures!"

However, one of "the most important" parts of the home for Bob is how natural light flows

through the ground floor space. Bob makes the most of this working on a bespoke timber desk here when working from home. This desk cleverly doubles as a cupboard, opening up during the day and neatly folding away its doors at night. "It's such a nice place to work," claims Bob.

Undertaking a phased retrofit project has presented both advantages and disadvantages for Bob and his family. One of the main benefits, as Bob points out, is the flexibility of not requiring all the funds upfront. However, he also acknowledges that completing the project all at once under a single contract would likely be more cost-effective.

Another benefit has been how splitting the project into phases has allowed them ample time to carefully consider each decision, avoiding rushed choices that can lead to mistakes, which he has seen with his clients. "The extended period gave us a chance to see how the project is unfolding, giving us the opportunity to make better decisions."

However, living in an unfinished home for an extended period has been stressful, as Bob admits. The constant reminder of incompleteness has kept them on edge during the journey.

Despite the challenges, Bob and his family have found great satisfaction in the results achieved. Bob confidently admits that his home now surpasses the comfort level he once admired in his client's home all those years ago! Is it now EnerPHit certified officially? - yes it is.

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Schlüter-Systems offers both conventional underfloor heating (UFH) and an electrical undertile heating alternative suitable for diverse applications: the manufacturer's two CAD-enabled options for the 21st century - BEKOTEC-THERM and DITRA-HEAT E.

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For specifiers and architects, as well as installers of flooring finishes wishing to increase their knowledge of underfloor heating technology, Schlüter-Systems also offers a CPD seminar entitled Specifying Integrated Underfloor Heating Systems which can be delivered online or in person.

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Low-carbon Home Systems	

CASE STUDY

A THOROUGHLY NODERN ECO MIX

An Aberdeenshire couple chose an array of innovative building methods – including ICF construction – to create an eco-friendly modernist gem that still manages to blend in with its surroundings

TEXT JESS UNWIN IMAGES RAW FORMAT PHOTOGRAPHY, MALL GIBBON & RYAN UROUHART.





hatting with Ryan Urquhart about the home he has designed and built for his young family, you have to admire both his determination to 'do something different,' and to complete so much of the work himself.

In Aberdeenshire, where of course granite is the traditional construction material, Ryan chose to get to grips with 21st-century alternatives to create a very modern-looking house.

Even he admits he was "pretty nervous" when he applied for planning permission to build on what was part of a farmyard near the village of Mintlaw: "The design I put forward was quite bold," he says.

He needn't have worried – not only did he get the thumbs-up from the local planning authority, but, according to Ryan: "They loved the design, the uniqueness of it and planning went through without a hitch."

The home he now shares with wife Jemma and three-year-old daughter Miley is laid out in a roughly T-shaped way at ground level with three bedrooms on the east side, a carport and utility room to the west.

Running north to south along the open-plan spine are the kitchen, dining area and the family living space, which benefits from countryside views. An external west-facing canopy allows the family to enjoy the afternoon and evening sun.

The smaller first-floor section of the house is where you find the master bedroom with ensuite dressing room and bathroom, plus more southfacing views through big windows. Of course, it's the view of this modernist house itself from its surroundings that has attracted the most attention locally. The design is a collection of interlocking square and rectangular boxes, topped by flat roofs that at first-floor level feature an overhang to protect rooms from getting too hot in the summer sun.

As a qualified architectural technician, Ryan already had some of the relevant know-how to embark on this self-build project, but it was probably the example of his father that first planted the seed of the idea. "My dad, a carpenter by trade, built the house where I grew up, so I'd say that watching him do that was absolutely an inspiration."

He continues: "I always knew in my head that I wanted to do a self-build at some point and I knew I wanted something modernist – I like straight edges and flat roofs. I wanted to do something different and special but something that still suited the location."

However, deciding the final layout and look of the self-build was no easy task. Ryan reveals: "A lot of it was considered with views and sunlight in mind. I must have gone through a dozen sketch pads, sketching and resketching, working my way through so many different ideas.

"Eventually, Jemma and I were on a train journey somewhere – I started sketching again, did the layout, a bit of a perspective elevation and we just went, yeah, that's it! We've got it."

Finding a site for the project was also a challenging endeavour. After looking at close to

HIGH POINT

"I loved getting hands on with every part of the building, but the high point was working with the ICF. I did so much of it myself and although I was a bit daunted by it before I started it turned out to be easy to work with. Throughout I was always expecting a hitch, but it was a real buzz – I really enjoyed it and I couldn't be happier with the result." – Ryan Urguhart



LOW POINT

There was a lot of time when Miley and I didn't see much of Ryan. He'd work all day doing his job then spend most of his free time doing everything he could to build our home. This was tough at times but worth it for what we have now.

– Jemma Urquhart

30 plots of land, the plot Ryan and Jemma finally bought in 2018 for £60,000 is just 300 yards from the house where Ryan grew up and where his parents still live.

The proximity of family, and their help, has been a huge bonus in their self-build. "As well as my dad being nearby, my younger brother is an electrician, while Jemma's dad and brothers are all carpenters," says Ryan. "We also lived with Jemma's parents nearby while the new place was being built. We knew we would need family support and we're very grateful to have got it."

With Ryan both the architect and project manager on the self-build, work on foundations began in the autumn of 2019, just weeks after Miley's birth in August. However, Ryan's commitment to the build became even more hands-on once the construction of walls got underway.

He explains: "To keep heating bills and carbon emissions low, I decided we'd build using insulated concrete formwork (ICF). I also thought this was probably something I could do myself."

Walls are created using this technique with a polystyrene sandwich plus a poured concrete filling, providing a 'pre-insulated' structure. The concrete core should also hold some heat through the day and slowly release it back throughout the house at night, again reducing heating bills. The ICF work was carried out in three stages and finished in February 2020 with the completion of the first-floor walls. Ryan comments: "This was mostly done by me with help from friends and family, and two or three guys from the building contractor between their other jobs.

"Don't get me wrong, it was a learning experience for us all, and the ICF supplier did have one of their experts check on us from time to time, but it was actually so straightforward that we couldn't quite believe it and we were always expecting there would be a catch."

The first Covid-19 lockdown caused some disruption, but work carried on – both outside and indoors – through 2020, 2021 and 2022 with Ryan continuing to do as much as he could himself, but always with help and guidance from family and friends.

Looking back, he accepts the biggest challenge of the self-build was the "time management side of things." He adds: "I'm a director at the company I work for and we're very busy so some weeks I didn't get to the build at all. I also had a new daughter and, of course, at points I stayed home to spend time with her."

During 2022, the white ICF structure of the Urquharts' new home was transformed with the application of its final exterior cladding, putting an end, says Ryan, to local comments







about the 'big igloo' that was being built in the neighbourhood. "Before the cladding was on, you could see this bright white ICF box for miles around!"

Again, he opted for a modern, sustainable cladding product, called Rockpanel, which is manufactured using highly compressed stone wool fibres made from basalt (volcanic rock). Stone wool is created by spinning molten rock and minerals with slag (a byproduct of steel manufacture), to create a cotton-candy-like wool product that is bound together using thermosetting resin. This is then pressed into panels that are finished with a decorative coating.

"It's highly fire-resistant and has good durability," says Ryan "and it comes in a variety of stone and wood effects ranges." He explains how the "muted tones of the cladding have blended in so well with the surroundings, such as the trees, the neighbouring granite steading and even the nearby electricity substation."

The one area where Rockpanel isn't used is a feature stone wall around the front door that is a nod to the granite stonework that's so familiar in

the region. However, even here there's a twist as Ryan's builder helped source an unusual darker granite from the bottom of a local quarry that isn't often used in construction.

Doing it differently may have been one aim for this self-build but low carbon was the other central ambition. It certainly has excellent 'green' credentials with an air source heat pump, underfloor heating on the groundfloor and a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system. The couple also have plans to install solar panels on the roof at some point in the future.

A home control system automatically takes care of this impressive array of eco-friendly tech, but the couple can intervene should they want to using an app on their mobile phones.

When it comes to the interior of the Urquharts' new home, most would agree that the premiumquality Rotpunkt kitchen is the star of the show. It's part of an overall design theme of industrial chic that includes eye-catching heat and scratchresistant Dekton Trilium worktop surfaces.

Various shades of stone-inspired greys are counterbalanced by metallic bronze colours and a unique rust-spotted steel latticework down the

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT DESIGN/PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Baxter Design Architectural and Building Consultants baxterdesigncompany.co.uk

INSULATED CONCRETE FORMWORK (ICF)

Econekt econekt.co.uk

FOUNDATIONS/CONCRETE FLOOR, ASSISTANCE WITH ICF WALLS/GRANITE STONEWORK WALL

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RYAN'S TOP TIPS

• An important factor in choosing a plot for your self-build is whether it is connected to services like the electricity grid and mains water.

• Having friends and family with the skills to pitch in can really help to keep costs down and we'll aways be so grateful for that. I wanted to be very much hands-on with the build, so another benefit was being able to 'pick their brains' and be shown how to do things, but I'd say generally not to be scared to have a go yourself on some part of the build.

• Try to get as much as possible about the layout and design of your house decided before construction starts. Changes midway through the process can mean delays and extra costs.





side of the stairs that's been cut to resemble a New York skyline. Says Ryan: "A lot of people would opt for oak or glass balustrades, which is contemporary, but we wanted something that would let in light but also be a feature in itself," says Ryan.

The family have lived in their new home for some months now and their self-build is pretty much complete – apart from landscaping works that will include some tree-planting to soften the impact of the prevailing south-west winds.

"We are being as sustainable as possible in terms of upcycling, the site was formerly part of a farmyard and there is a lot of old 'junk' lying around that we intend to use for dividing up garden spaces and as features like planters."

The cost of the land plus a total of £360,000 spent on the build has been funded by savings, proceeds from the sale of the Urquharts' previous home and a mortgage but, more importantly, the couple are delighted with the results of all that investment.

Jemma says: "I couldn't be happier with the result. The dream was a unique home for what started off as the two of us, but soon became the three of us." They wanted a space where they could relax and enjoy spending time with family and friends. Somewhere with no wasted space, high ceilings and a kitchen at the heart of everything – which is what they've achieved.

"I played a minimal part with my paintbrush," says Jemma, "but I look around and see the work Ryan and our family and friends did to help us. I'm so proud of Ryan for designing and building a beautiful home that we get to enjoy every single day."

Ryan agrees: "I'm happy with how everything's turned out. I just wanted something that we would like – I wasn't too worried about what other people think. But quite a lot of people stop to have a look and, if I'm outside working, they tell me they love the house. There's bound to be some that don't love it, but you can't please everyone!"

The icing on the cake is probably that the man who first inspired Ryan's self-build dream, his dad, is also a fan: "He was very unsure to start with, his approach is more traditional and he was sceptical to say the least about the shape, style and the ICF. Like myself he was constantly looking for the 'catch' with ICF, he couldn't believe how easy it is to build. But now it's finished I think he admires what we've built and appreciates how well it sits in the landscape compared to a house with a standard pitched roof."

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New Majestic Mansion design from Keller



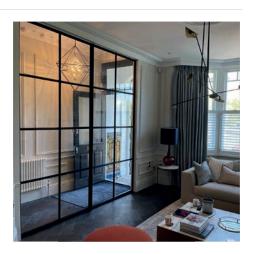
Illustrating the style of the Dutch masters, with the play between dark and light, and the floral pattern in the wallpaper, the Majestic Mansion design from **Keller** features warm, dark veneered units with narrow frames. The dark smoked glass doors are designed to create a 'majestic' atmosphere. The on-trend Elba recessed open units in pecan brown, with LED strip lighting, provide a chic finishing touch while the Lexington narrow framed cabinet fronts in matt black oak stain deliver luxurious

elegance with a timeless appeal. Keller is well known for offering the widest range of colours (2,050 NCS) and finishes in the kitchen furniture market – along with a vast range of cabinet options.

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Snug fit

Individual style is in and creating a snug room is a great way to show it – says **Crittall Windows**. Planning a new look for your home? It seems anything goes these days – the trend is for individual style. With many of us spending more time at home, householders are increasingly design savvy in creating a personal style to reflect their lifestyles. "An impactful way is to be inspired, be adventurous – be you," says Russell Ager, managing director of Crittall Windows, a pioneer of bespoke steel frame window manufacture for almost 180 years. Creating a cosy snug room is a great way to show individuality and very in vogue. As is sharing natural light throughout your home. While the nature of a snug is to make it comfy, clever use of glazing via internal steel screens, doors and windows – made to order to your personal needs – ensure light is let in throughout the home and they look stylish, without compromising warmth and cosiness. For example, matching combinations of Crittall's minimal profile windows and Innervision internal glazed steel screens with sliding or hinged doors are bespoke and designed for modern living, providing a light and airy sense of space. Their elegance and clean lines, subtle detailing and excellent technical properties can transform your home's look. They make a snug room – although small by its nature – seem bigger, with the added benefit of keeping down your heating bills by using a smaller area.



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top. Supplying efficient heating, the unit generates domestic hot water and stores it inside a 185L stainless steel tank with U-Vacua™ insulation to reduce energy losses.

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IronmongeryDirect's new catalogue



IronmongeryDirect has launched its latest catalogue showcasing key highlights from its huge range of over 18,000 products. Also featuring hundreds of new products – it is perfect for professional builders and contractors to browse and find a product that is right for the project at hand. Katrina Adamczyk, Head of Category Management & Merchandising at IronmongeryDirect commented: "We are pleased to introduce our latest catalogue as a useful tool for busy tradespeople to browse while on the go. With

a huge range in stock, the catalogue showcases our key ranges, as well as some of the latest exciting products that we have introduced to ensure we continue to help our customers meet the different demands of each job."

03003 038 821 www.IronmongeryDirect.co.uk/free-catalogue

DRU expands the Dik Geurts Vidar Triple range of wood stoves with six new models



Dik Geurts is a name that has been synonymous with wood fires and stoves for over 40 years. Founded in the Netherlands in 1981, the Dik Geurts range is now produced by DRU, established in 1754 and one of Europe's leading fireplace companies.

The Vidar Triple, with a panoramic, 3-sided fire view, is one of the most popular stoves in the Dik Geurts range. It is Ecodesign compliant with an A rated energy label and easy manual air slide control.

The Vidar Triple series now includes small, medium and large models, each with a freestanding or wall-mounted option. The freestanding models have ample wood storage capacity and all models have optional external air connection for clean burning and high efficiency. All versions also have infrared side windows, which enable high flames and comfortable heating.

In addition, the small Vidar Triple models have an average 4.9 kW heat output, which means, under UK regulations, there is no need to install extra ventilation points in the room.

Dik Geurt's wood fires and stoves are available from a national UK network of fireplace dealers.

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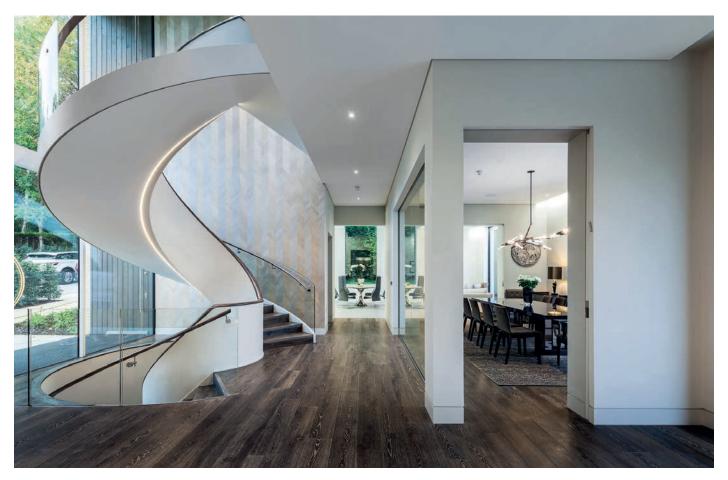
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Structure versus style?

Many people feel that staircases are just a means of getting from floor to floor in a property, but for others it is a focal point which is treated in the same way as a major piece of furniture or a kitchen. Eric Nicholls of Spiral UK provides some insights into the choices to make



There are many decisions to make in designing a house, and there is often the chance to change things over time, such as colours, floor finishes, appliances or even windows and doors. With stairs it is not so simple, they are structural and often interface with other parts of the building structure. Putting it simply, you get 'one bite of the cherry,' and then have to live with it, often for decades! Stairs need some careful thought, as if you get it wrong, it can ruin the whole feel and flow of the house. So some decisions to be made.

DESIGN

Do you want simple standard straight, or something more adventurous like spiral, curved or floating? As you can guess, the more complicated or bespoke, the more the cost generally increases. Bear in mind that generally the more complicated the stair, the more it will require associated supporting structure. You may need to consider if a concrete foundation or thickening of the floor slab is required, or if steel beams rather than timber trimmers are needed for the edges of the stairwell. Where does it start and finish? People can often get carried away with design but forget the fundamental basics, you must think about how you use the stair and the space flow; don't finish facing a wall or having to turn around to walk where you most often are heading. This is particularly important with curved and spiral stairs, which have different Building Regulations and need careful consideration regarding headroom, far and away the most common design fault with all stairs. You need to think three dimensionally, not just on plan and sort

People can often get carried away with design but forget the fundamental basics – you must think about how you use the stair and the space flow



this even before you look at design and materials or finishes.

REGULATIONS & COMPLIANCE

Stair regulations are many and varied, sometimes conflicting and confusing. Talk to a specialist stair company, this may save you a lot of trouble further down the line. They will work closely with you to understand your specific needs, assess the available space, and create a well-thought-out stair plan that meets both regulatory requirements and your aesthetic preferences.

MATERIALS

For most staircases what material you select is driven by budget, particularly with more standard and conventional designs. For simple stairs, wood is the material of choice, as it is flexible for design, economical (as it grows on trees) and relatively simple to manufacture particularly with the availability of CNC machining. If it is to be decorated or covered with floor finishes, MDF is great as it's very stable, economical and a good material to paint. You can combine MDF with natural timber, using the 'real' wood for the visible areas where you want to see the beauty of the grain and colour, with the hidden or decorated areas in cheaper MDF. For more complicated stairs such as spiral or curved, you will most likely require some metal components.

BALUSTRADE

The simplest and also most economical is vertical balusters or spindles, either in wood or metal. Horizontal style balustrade is popular, but not always acceptable to Building Control, so it's advisable to check first. Glass can look great, and is not as expensive as you might think, even when curved. Remember that if you don't want a handrail, then the glass must be laminated.

HANDRAIL

The main options are either timber or metal, which can be either painted mild steel or polished stainless steel. Think about the feel and look, timber is warmer and softer, and metal will look sharp and fresh for longer. For high end projects, leather clad handrails are fantastic, but at a cost!

LIGHTING

Make sure the stairs are always well lit, both from above and below. Any sort of stair that is dark will not work well. Consider LED lighting, but in moderation, more can be less! There is a lot to consider, but by following the above points in order you should get the best results and value for money. Speak to specialist companies once you have decided on the basic principles, don't confuse yourself by looking at too much online too early!

Eric Nicholls is managing director of Spiral UK



Integrated building control benefits

Self-builders are at the forefront of some of the most cutting edge building techniques. They now need to lead the way in quality building automation and control solutions, says Paul Foulkes of Theben Automation



Remaining in control is important. Not having to worry about if something is being done engenders a sense of security: knowing your car will start, knowing the fridge is working, knowing your boiler is supplying heat and hot water.

If these things are interrupted, or fail to happen, then the consequences can be challenging, possibly dangerous, maybe even fatal.

In aircraft, for example, there are multiple redundant control systems with failsafes. For commercial buildings that isn't cost effective, and it's definitely not in the residential self-build market sector. For buildings, the solution must be able to withstand challenging installation conditions and be capable of supporting constant high levels of usage.

This is an age when no building owner can risk having their building control systems compromised, so security is vital to maintain, reducing risks ranging from local infiltration up to sophisticated DNS type IP attacks.

This all means that systems that are installed in buildings should be dependable, robust and secure. It is an accepted strategy, and makes sound commercial sense, to upgrade systems, to keep them functional and fit for purpose. Commercial installations are high cost and are organised to assess and mitigate these risks.

At residential level, the way that building automation is carried out needs to be very different, however. For some time in the residential market, there has been a reliance on internet and wifi-based products. This has been driven by the well known manufacturers seeing the value in this market. Their business plans are based around the consumer replacing their hardware every three years. The evolving nature of this market can become further complicated by ever changing wifi standards, the promise of ever faster mobile networks that will displace the home wifi network, and a lack of standardisation.

Updates and upgrades are commonplace, but this can have its downside too. Eventually the hardware is no longer capable of running the new software; it becomes obsolete. That cost

Self-builders ideally need a solution that is easily installed at the construction phase and fully functioning from the outset, not dependent upon waiting for the phone connection of obsolescence is directly passed on to the consumer.

Security has been cited by some manufacturers as the reason to remove some systems from the market. Sadly, as some systems are cloud based, all functionality can be lost. The paying consumer is left with non-functioning hardware and needing to pay again for a solution. This can leave a bitter taste in the mouth of the consumer.

There is also the question over the reliability of the internet, specifically the wifi router. Often it is unsecure and can be very low quality. In the case of cloudbased solutions, that pass through the wifi router, there is the constant question of information security. Even if the network is secure what is the owner of the cloud service doing with your details?

These are all questions that need to be answered before the wise self-builder starts planning, and paying for a building automation solution.

The choice of system must be secure, cost effective and have an acceptable lifetime. Being backwards compatible, fully future proofed and non-proprietary reduces both install and long term costs. It must be capable to deal with the complex energy management requirements that come with renewables and localised storage and it needs to



be able to support the changes that will come with micro-grids, vehicle to grid connectivity and multiple tariff energy supplies.

The solution should be upgradeable, but that upgrade must be the choice of the self-builder and not forced by the vendor. If you want additions such as voice control it should be the system that you choose and it should be as an additional "layer" of functionality. That additional layer could be, for instance, a simple door lock or voice control

That voice control could be for your convenience, such as calling up a lighting 'scene' when you are entertaining, or it could be part of a support system to enable someone with disabilities to interact with their house. This is the basis for AT; assistive technology.

Self-builders need a solution that is easily installed at the construction phase and fully functioning from the outset, not dependent upon the phone connection. The system should be something that offers the homeowner/self-builder choice and one that they can easily find support for. Not all self-builders use the same construction techniques, and a wiring and control solution for the project must be adaptable no matter what route is chosen: SIPS, single skin brick, traditional, timber frame etc.

All of this means that as well as the previously mentioned requirements of robust, dependable and secure, the installed solution also needs to offer choice, be flexible and be openly compatible with multiple vendors, and be able to fully integrate other systems that are defined by the self-builder, such as home cinema or security.

KNX, sitting at the core of a building, satisfies all of these requirements. A KNX solution gives full control to the user, and flexibility to the self-builder. There is no cloud dependency, no monthly fees and the user information is secure as it is not dependent on wifi. There is no risk of obsolescence. It is robust and simple to install making it the ideal choice for all self-builds, no matter what construction method is used.

Paul Foulkes is UK country manager at Theben Automation



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