

selfbuilder + homemaker

MAR/APR 2024

Mastering outdoor spaces

'Zoning' now has a new purpose in the garden, as Johanna Elvidge of Marshalls explains

Prefab power

Baufritz explains the efficiency of kit homes, answering some vital FAQs

Ascend in style

British Spirals & Castings shares how staircase design can elevate your home's aesthetic

What are friends for?

Discover how a couple crafted their dream home on Scotland's east coast with the help of their architect friend's creative flair

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DULUX TRADE WEATHERSHIELD OUR ULTIMATE PROTECTION AND COLOUR CHOICE



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FROM THE EDITOR...

The Government's 'watchdog' the National Audit Office has given its masters a nip on the bum this week regarding its sustainability goals. The NAO has told them in no uncertain terms that heat pump installations are way behind what are needed if they are to have even a slim chance of hitting their 600,000 annual installation goal by 2028.

The Government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme has been inflated by £2500 from its original £5000 grant, however clearly this retrofit-oriented incentive hasn't yet produced the numbers needed among existing homeowners. A cost of living crisis might have something to do with that; there's a danger that most of the early adopters might have already adopted heat pumps!

Self-builders are in the vanguard of providing heat pumps to new builds however, partly boosted by the fact the BUS scheme is available for self-builds, as opposed to most new 'commercial' new build homes. There are a couple of slightly woolly caveats. To get the £7500 towards your installation, the home needs to have been "mainly built using the labour or resources of the first owner," and to have "never been owned by a business or organisation."

The second might be clear enough, but I'd suggest the first is in the eye of the beholder!

JAMES PARKER



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

NSBRC GUIDE TO RENOVATION PROJECTS

6 APRIL, SWINDON
WWW.NSBRC.CO.UK/WHATS-ON

HOMEBUILDING & RENOVATING SHOW

11 - 12 MAY, GLASGOW
WWW.HOMEBUILDINGSHOW.CO.UK

GRAND DESIGNS LIVE

4 - 12 MAY, LONDON
WWW.GRANDDESIGNSLIVE.COM

FESTIVAL OF SUSTAINABLE HOMES

17 - 18 MAY, SWINDON
WWW.NSBRC.CO.UK/WHATS-ON

**ON THE COVER...**

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Redefining eco-friendly living

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Building a home tailored for a child with complex medical needs required innovative design and careful planning, resulting in a space that's both functional and inviting

selfbuilder *Diaries*

Navigating their way through planning hurdles and DIY adventures, Fiona & John's eco self-build journey is a testament to their patience and bravery, including getting their hands dirty to stay within budget constraints



Never again! That was what we said after renovating our Victorian home nearly a decade ago. But now it was time to move again, and we were disappointed at the lack of sustainable homes on the market. The more homes we viewed, the more we started to wonder whether we could design and build something ourselves instead. There were plots with outline planning permission in the area, so we met with an architect to discuss what was possible.

PLANNING

From that first meeting, it took seven

months and 30 (hand-drawn!) revisions before we eventually settled on a design to submit to planning in January 2022. This was just in time for all planning applications in our area to be put on hold by new nutrient neutrality guidance issued by Natural England! After weeks of getting nowhere with the planning office, and wondering whether we would be able to build our dream home at all, we took matters into our own hands and contacted Natural England. They quickly ascertained that our site should not be impacted by the guidance and planning gave us (and all the other applications that were on hold) the green light.

During that long stressful wait, we attended the Homebuilding Show in Harrogate where we came across several companies offering SIPs (structured insulated panels) builds. Having spent so long working out the design, we hadn't given much thought as to what we were going to build it out of. But as our goal was to build an airtight sustainable property, SIPs seemed the obvious choice. It also came with the advantage of being a lot faster than other types of construction. We had to swap architects; this wasn't an easy decision, but our original designer did all drawings by hand, which took time, and it was easier


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to have CAD drawings for working with the SIPs company.

THE BUILD

We toyed with the idea of using a contractor for the entire project, but were keen to get the most out of our budget and have a bit more flexibility around making changes. Following our architect's recommendation, we opted for a project manager, coupled with highly recommended builders from a neighbouring site, steering us towards the direct labour approach. After paying various fees (land insurance, soil tests, building control, a structural engineer, etc) and setting up accounts at local builders merchants, we finally broke ground in April 2023. With our project manager at the helm and the builders living up to their good reputation, the foundations were completed on time and with precision and accuracy for the SIPs' arrival in May. Four weeks later the house was built! Well, the structure of the house anyway. With direct labour, you don't have much control over tradespeople's availability – which can lead to delays.

FABRIC FIRST

Sustainability is a big consideration for us, but with a limited budget, it is about working out where to get the



biggest 'bang for your buck.' Windows were a key item so we spent a lot of time researching, even travelling as far as Scotland and Swindon to look at windows with our long-suffering children in tow. The triple-glazed Norrksen windows we selected have a U-value of 0.9 with all the south facing windows having solar control glass to reduce solar gain. We opted for 172 mm SIPs panels with a foil backed breather membrane that provides a U-value of 0.15.

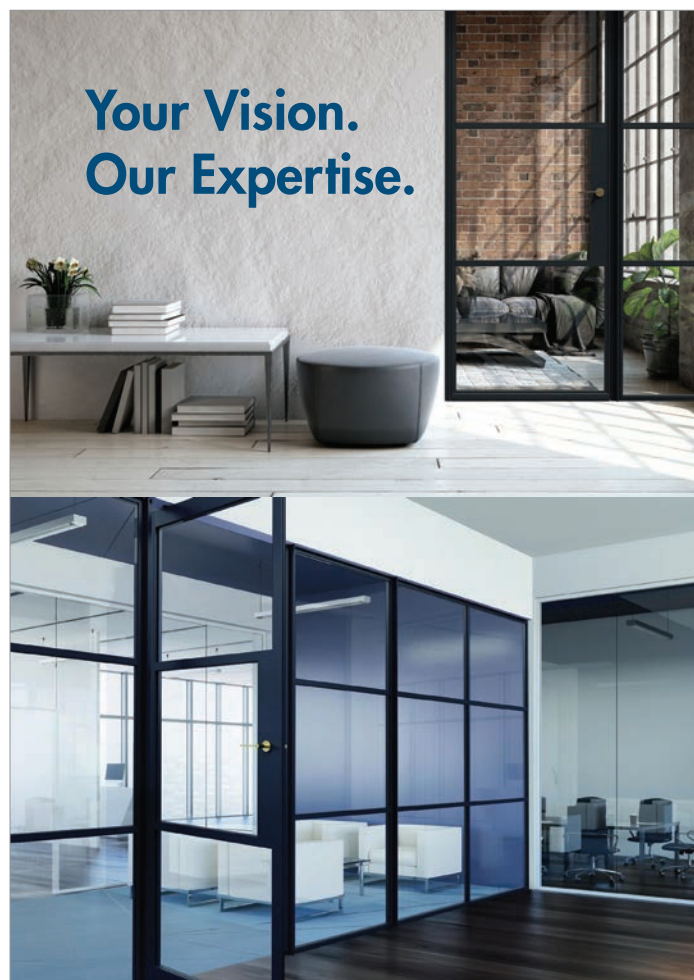
We are trying to make the building as airtight as possible so tape up and joins and use grommets for any penetrations into the SIPs. We also went for an MVHR system (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) to ensure a fresh supply of air, but also reuse the heat energy generated in the house.

DOING SOME DIY

To try and reduce costs, we have tried to do some of the jobs that require less skill. These include installing the MVHR ourselves, laying the underfloor heating, making temporary windows, getting knee-deep in a muddy trench to lay ducts, and cleaning up the site. As we both work full-time and have young children, it has been challenging, but rewarding, and spending so many hours on site getting stuck in has helped us develop good relationships with our trades. We have ended up managing the majority of the project since the roof was complete, as our project manager became occupied with a commercial project. This saved us on his fees but has meant many late nights pricing up materials, sending emails, and generally being quite stressed trying to work out what needs to happen and when.

If we had a pound for every time we've been asked 'when will you be in,' we might have been able to afford a contractor! But you can check in on us on Instagram to find out how we get on.

We set up an Instagram account for the build (at @selfbuildfamilyhome), and we have been quite moved by the support from other self-builders and tradespeople who have reached out to us on there.



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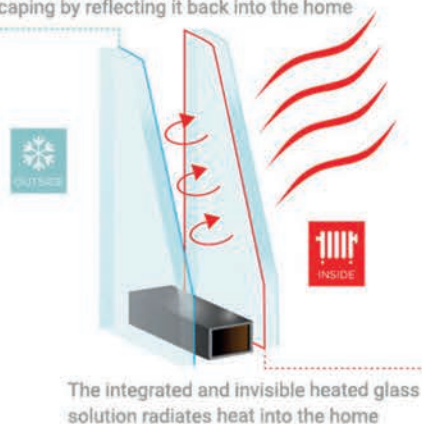
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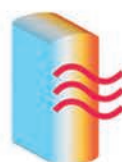
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Discover how kit homes can offer a streamlined approach to your self-build project, while minimising risks along the way. Baufritz's Oliver Rehm sheds light on some important FAQs



WHAT ARE KIT HOMES & MODULAR SOLUTIONS?

A kit home looks the same as any other self-build, the key difference is the way the building components are assembled. Rather than materials arriving on site to be assembled by tradespeople, most of the construction takes place in a factory and these finished modules are then shipped to the site and assembled like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

The two main options available are a shell, and a full turnkey solution. A shell, as it implies, includes the walls, roof, windows and floors. In this case the self-builder finds contractors for the internal finishes. A full turnkey solution delivers the finished house. The amount of work done onsite depends on the manufacturer. Some companies deliver the house almost complete, others allow more customisation onsite.

One important factor is that kit house manufacturers may not include

foundations and groundworks. So make sure they have a partner who understands the process, as there is very little margin for error when measuring the floor slab. Some groundworks companies are not used to delivering to these tolerances.

WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN BUILDING A MODULAR HOUSE?

As we have already discussed, how much of the project do you want to manage and how much do you want to hand over to the kit home manufacturer? This will then determine whether you go for a full turnkey or a shell solution. Most self-builders who choose the kit home route do so because they do not want the risk of managing the project and the appeal of a full turnkey solution is what motivates them in the first place.

It is important to involve your architect in the process. As the house is manufactured, the designs must fit

the system. This requires customisation and some options may not be possible. One of the advantages of a kit home is that you know the house will be delivered once the manufacturing plans are complete. Some companies have a limited range of houses so they will not accept designs from external architects. Others are flexible and can adapt most designs to their system. It is worth investigating to find the correct match.

Most manufacturers offer a range of materials and finishes, in which you can go to their sampling centre and have a look in person at what they offer. This can be an enjoyable but intense few days where you select all the internal and external elements of your home.

WHAT DOES A MODULAR SOLUTION COST AND HOW SHOULD I CALCULATE MY BUDGET?

How much should you budget for your home? It depends. Different



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manufacturers target different market segments and costs can vary greatly depending on materials, designs, and flexibility. It is worth checking what is included and that the materials used – as value is not the same as the price. Site clearance and groundworks are not usually included and check if your manufacturer has a partner. They can work together to produce a single price for all the work.

The initial cost of a kit home may seem higher than a traditional self-build approach. A key factor to consider is risk. Once the contract is signed, costs and timescales are fixed. The risk of contingencies and contractor problems is greatly reduced as the house is manufactured to a standard process. Quality control is easier to manage, meaning that elements are built to millimetre tolerances.

HOW WOULD I MANAGE THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS?

The main advantage of the kit approach is that most of the project is managed by the manufacturer as they are

responsible for delivering the house. An initial price is agreed upon for designs and schedules. Once the fixtures and fittings have been selected, a final fixed price contract is usually drawn up. Manufacturers offer a wide variety of fixtures and fittings, allowing clients to choose a range to suit their budget. Once all the elements have been agreed, the client signs the final contract, where the budget is fixed. Although it is possible to make changes once the build has started, it is difficult to do so. It is important to be sure of your decisions in advance. At this point, it is in the hands of the manufacturer and almost everything happens offsite.

ARE THERE ANY DESIGN CONSTRAINTS WHEN CREATING A MODULAR BUILD?

This is an important part of the kit home route. If you choose a timber frame manufacturer you will get a timber frame house. There will be some restrictions on the materials and design itself, but these 'building blocks' of the approach are why the manufacturer can deliver consistent quality and a

fixed price. There is a wide range of options available on the market. Some manufacturers supply a small range of houses to focus on cost and quality, while others offer a wide range of custom options. By definition standard building elements are used for all houses.

HOW IS INNOVATION TRANSFORMING MODULAR HOUSE CONSTRUCTION?

Innovation is a key driver for kit home manufacturers. Because we use modules and systems, we know how they perform and we can invest in R&D. As an industry, construction has lagged behind when it comes to resource usage and sustainability. Manufacturers can focus on materials and supplier networks – we want to create sustainable houses. This is possible because we use common materials in every house and our processes are optimised to minimise waste. Consistent standards and quality control mean that we can produce very well insulated homes that lower energy consumption, and CO₂ emissions.

Oliver Rehm is CEO at Baufritz UK

Scandia-Hus celebrates 50 years

In 2024, Scandia-Hus celebrates building energy-saving timber frame homes in the UK for 50 years.

SWEDISH INFLUENCE

Established in 1974, Scandia-Hus are one of the oldest self-build companies in Britain. Initially a UK distributor of timber frame kits for a Swedish company, with homes being designed and manufactured in Sweden and transported to the UK on lorries, only standard plans with minor modifications were available and the majority of house types were bungalows and Scandinavian-style chalets.

However, since 1996 all their homes have been manufactured in Britain, allowing them complete flexibility over the design and build process. Whilst they have a wide selection of designs to

inspire customers, they are now able to produce totally bespoke homes in any style.

ENERGY-SAVING DESIGN

Scandia-Hus have been championing energy-efficient design since its inception, employing advanced Swedish technology to create low-impact homes with minimal energy consumption. Managing Director Derek Dawson explains, "Combining our airtight timber frames with thermally efficient triple-glazed windows and high levels of insulation, all of which are standard in our builds, was a pioneering approach in the 1970s which has proven to keep our customers warm and significantly reduce their energy bills as well as their carbon footprint."

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

As they enter their 50th year of business,



Scandia-Hus are enthusiastically looking to the future and their continued growth. Their newest show home, "The Lodge", will be under construction this year with an outbuilding dedicated to sustainability and renewable energy technology, showcasing different components of a timber frame structure and incorporating information on renewables such as heat pumps and solar panels.

This will be located at their Show Centre in Sussex where there are currently three show homes open to visit. Appointments can be booked by contacting the office.

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FEELS LIKE HOME

More homeowners are exploring the possibilities of texture in the kitchen, in search of a more inviting and cosy ambience for the 'heart' of your build. Molly Chandler from Willis & Stone offers guidance on how to achieve a homely feel

The 'warm textural' kitchen trend is rapidly gaining popularity, as homeowners look to inject a personal, welcoming feel into their homes. Warm textures radiate a sense of comfort and cosiness, transforming what can sometimes be a stark, clinical space into a welcoming hub of the home. The use of natural materials such as wood, stone, and warm-toned metals creates an inviting atmosphere, encouraging people to gather and spend quality time together in this central space.

IN TOUCH WITH NATURE

Wooden cabinets, stone countertops, and tactile finishes all help to connect the kitchen with the organic world, creating a sense of harmony and balance. This connection to nature not only enhances the appearance of the kitchen, but has also been proven to promote general well-being, reduce stress, and improve mental health.



TIMELESS APPEAL

The timelessness of this kitchen trend lies in its ability to seamlessly blend with various design styles. Whether it's a rustic farmhouse, a contemporary urban space, or a traditional country home, the warmth of natural elements enhances a wide range of interior aesthetics. This versatility ensures that the kitchen remains stylish and relevant, adapting to changing design preferences over the years.

Additionally, the neutral and earthy colour palette contributes to the overall elegance of the kitchen. As found in nature, these classic colours can be easily paired with other design elements, allowing homeowners to personalise their space while maintaining a sophisticated look.

HOW TO APPLY THE LOOK

Embarking on a self-build or renovation journey offers a unique opportunity to infuse your kitchen with the enduring charm of this design style. As well as choosing natural materials, layer them carefully to add depth and visual interest to your space. Such materials also contribute to the durability and longevity of your kitchen and the combination possibilities for cabinetry, worktops, and flooring are endless, offering huge scope for interior design.


For example, use hand-painted wooden cabinets combined with a smooth natural Quartzite worktop, splashback, and limestone floor for an elegant organic feel. Wood flooring and chunky wooden worktops can also be used to great effect in 'textural' kitchens and there are many other options available for splashbacks too; simple



metro tiles, textured ceramic tiles or even tiles made from recycled materials can all be used to create an inviting space. Infuse personality into your chosen design by selecting unique handles, taps, and other hardware as these small details can contribute significantly to the overall warmth and character of your kitchen. Elements such as brass door handles and drawer pulls complement the warm tones of a hand-painted kitchen beautifully.

LIGHTING

When planning your space, think about the natural light and how you can maximise this. Where possible, strategically position your kitchen units to make the most of available sunlight. For your main light sources consider

A photograph of a modern kitchen with a warm, textured aesthetic. In the foreground, a round wooden dining table is set with a small potted fern and two coasters. Behind it, a kitchen island with a marble countertop is visible, featuring two large brass pendant lights hanging above it. The island has a built-in sink and a small potted plant. In the background, there's a kitchen counter with a marble backsplash, a range hood, and various kitchen items like a cutting board, a vase of tulips, and a small shelf with jars. A wooden door is on the right side of the frame.

*Infuse personality
by selecting unique
hardware, as small
details contribute
significantly to
the overall warmth
and character*

incorporating fixtures with warm-toned bulbs as this will enhance the inviting ambience. Statement pendants hung over an impressive island can be used to great effect along with warm under unit lighting and strip lights to illuminate features such as decorative shelves or alcoves for example. For the fixtures themselves, warm metals, glass, or even ceramic pendant lights work well in warm textural kitchens and there are many different sizes and shapes available to choose from.

THE COLOUR PALETTE

Warm muted tones can be applied to walls, cabinetry, and even furniture pieces to create a harmonious and sophisticated space. Subtle accent

colours can also be incorporated using artwork, decorative accessories, and soft furnishings. Consider combining the old with the new; a few vintage pieces combined with modern-day kitchen accessories made from natural or recycled materials can create a harmonious, unique space.

Further enhance the allure of this kitchen style with feature walls, elevating your space to new dimensions. Explore exposed brick, textured wallpaper, or even innovative paint techniques to infuse depth into your design. Consider installing open shelving to showcase glassware or decorative items, imparting not only visual intrigue but also creating a lived-in, layered atmosphere.

COMPLETE THE LOOK

The warm textural kitchen trend is about creating a comfortable, elegant space that will stand the test of time. Select furniture and soft furnishings with care, opting for pieces with warm finishes and inviting fabrics. For island seating, barstools are a popular choice and are available in a wide variety of designs and materials. To finish your space, consider window treatments such as blinds crafted from natural fibres like cotton or linen, along with proportional area rugs to soften the space while providing homely comfort and texture.

Molly Chandler is a designer at Willis & Stone

1



2



INTERIOR INSPIRATION: LIGHTING

Going well beyond just getting the right practical illumination levels, lighting sets the mood, and impacts wellbeing. Explore our hand-picked collection of options and light up your life

1. Artisan crafted by skilled craftspeople, the **Morocco Ceiling Light** by **Where Saints Go** is a striking pendant lampshade made using entirely natural materials. Sporting a unique structural shape, each lampshade is made using a combination of natural rattan, lasio peel and manila rope, which is made of natural fibres sourced from the abaca plant native to the Philippines. Price: £99. www.wheresaintsgo.co.uk



2. Laura Ashley's **Isaac 3 light Bar Pendant** by **dar lighting** fits effortlessly into kitchens and 'dens.' Bold lines and angular shapes lend a contemporary touch that looks fantastic against bare brickwork. This contemporary hanging ceiling light boasts industrial appeal with a warm antique brass finish. Priced at £190.
www.darlighting.co.uk

3. Designed by Charlotte Cochrane, this lamp by **Twisted Loom** is handmade in Manchester from sustainably sourced and salvaged beech. Each lamp is carefully constructed by expertly splicing and hand-turning different pieces of wood to make one beautiful whole. Each lamp has a uniquely different wood grain, "a story in its own right." Priced at £225.
www.twistedloom.co.uk

4. **GANTlights' S1 Hanging Lamp** from **Lime Lace** combines elegant design with subtle functionality. Perfect for lightening up any room in your home, the S1 Hanging Lamp has a fluted surface an interesting texture and

lighting effect, and is suitable for use individually over your dining table or in a group of lamps above a counter. Priced at £219.
www.limelace.co.uk

5. Hanging stylishly above the table, the **Serene Brass Pendant Light** by **Atkin and Thyme** brings a contemporary feel to any decor. Crafted from one sheet of iron, the pendant shade has a sculptural umbrella leaf shape that can provide directional light over a dining table, kitchen island or breakfast bar. Priced at £149.
www.atkinandthyme.co.uk

6. The **Pleat Reading Floor Lamp** by **houseof** has been designed by interior designer Emma Gurner, who's well-known in the interiors sector for her playful use of colour. It is made from painted steel in moss green with a pale blue interior, which gives a warming glow. With an adjustable tilting shade, this floor lamp is the perfect reading companion. Price: £399.
www.houseof.com



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A grand slam for eco-living

This year, Grand Designs Live promises an immersive experience with exhibitors across four key sectors: build, kitchens and bathrooms, gardens, and interiors.

The show will take place over nine days, including engaging talks led by renowned TV broadcaster and design expert, Kevin McCloud. Visitors will have the chance to connect with specialists, architects, building suppliers, and designers, to explore unique furnishings, designs, and bespoke artwork that will inspire home projects and bring visions to life.

Eco-friendly living and sustainability are big themes for this year's show, with cutting-edge, innovative ways to make your home more sustainable. From carbon reducing heat pumps from Fischer to zero-carbon solar panels from TCA Solar, there are a range of brands that can help you achieve your sustainable goals at Grand Designs Live.

The event will be a hub of green living inspiration, promoting small steps towards a self-sufficient and carbon-neutral home. Grand Designs Live is the one-stop destination to transform any living space into an eco-haven.

This year, the event will debut The Grand House, a groundbreaking build featuring cutting-edge low-carbon and renewable energy technology. It has been designed from the ground up to show how we can all take small yet impactful steps towards making homes self-sufficient and carbon neutral.



Additional features at this year's show include:

- Kevin's Green Heroes – This platform aims to acknowledge groundbreaking concepts and new-generation construction ideas that prioritise environmental sustainability, from small-scale start-ups to big businesses. Each year, Kevin McCloud handpicks the Green Heroes shortlist to shine the spotlight on ingenious and transformative eco-friendly innovators. This year, visitors can



expect the return of some familiar Green Heroes including Woodio, Sugarcree, Phyto, Denimite and many more.

- Ask an Expert - Sponsored by Schüco. Visitors can discuss builds and renovation plans on a one-to-one basis with specialists in architecture, construction, finance, interior design and for the first time, window and door experts.
- Outdoor Living Showcase – This dedicated area features top exterior furnishing brands presenting their products in situ at the show, including Protek, who will host several expert talks from their colourful outdoor inspiration stand. The stunning Protek Woodcare 'Show Garden', designed by Matt Leigh from ITV's Love Your Garden, will be unveiled live at the show.
- Green Living Live – An area dedicated solely to eco-friendly products and services from companies that hold sustainability at the heart of their business. Visitors can expect to find free expert advice, along with a wealth of ideas and solutions for making your home more sustainable.
- Daily Live Talks – An area featuring industry experts sharing invaluable insights with showgoers on homes for the future.

Article submitted by Grand Designs Live

WHEN & WHERE

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DIRECTING A CORNISH FAIRY TALE

Anglophile and ex-Disney executive Kathleen Gearhart-Filmer moved to Cornwall to turn a concrete house into a magical coastal retreat

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT IMAGES LEIGHTON JAMES



Several years ago, while on holiday with her baby daughter in Carbis Bay, west Cornwall, Kathleen Gearhart-Filmer fell head over heels in love with the county. Fast-forward to 2020, and she was looking for somewhere to buy. However, "The north coast [around Carbis Bay and St Ives] is quite commercialised, and you don't go to Cornwall to be surrounded by people," says Kathleen, who was formerly an executive at the Walt Disney Company in the US. Running her own events management company now allows Kathleen to split her time between London and the west country, living the Cornish dream with her two children. She summarises the appeal: "My kids are different people

around the water; Cornwall is a brilliant place to gather, and one of the most peaceful."

Widening her house search to the south coast led Kathleen to a mid-century property in a tiny village with views across Mount's Bay and its famous island castle. Located just three minutes from a beach, the home was well-located on a large plot, but didn't make the most of the setting, with windows facing away from the sea. Yet Kathleen was charmed, and could see the potential. "On one side is the sea, on the other open fields. It's a beautiful oasis."

The home was a probate sale and went to closed bids, but although Kathleen was delighted to win, there was





For those in the know, the term ‘mundic’ signals an opportunity to self-build

no question of a simple renovation, as the house had been constructed using ‘mundic’ concrete. Used in housebuilding until the 1950s, it contains waste aggregates from tin mines, and contaminants in the aggregate cause the concrete to deteriorate over time, making the property unstable. While any building containing mundic is classed as substandard and unmortgageable, for those in the know, the term ‘mundic’ signals an opportunity to self-build.

“I 100% expected to demolish it,” says Kathleen. “But I assured the vendors we would respect the land. It had been a family home for generations.”

Kathleen initially sketched out her own designs for the home, which she then took to local expert Simon Boulton at the architecture practice Lilly Lewarne. Prioritising connectedness to the surrounding environment, Kathleen’s home has five bedrooms and five bathrooms in a 580 sqm property, spread across two levels. There’s a garage and an outdoor shower too, all set in enchanting ‘wrap-around’ gardens, which were created by local landscaper Glenn Humphries.

“They really brought the garden to life,” says Kathleen. “There are lots of wildflowers and in spring and summer they are stunning.”

Another priority for Kathleen was building with local, natural materials, including reclaimed Delabole slate and hardwoods. Yet despite both this approach and her willingness to

communicate fully with the local community, including using leaflets explaining her plans, Kathleen experienced some push-back against her plans. After working further with Simon to tweak her application to remove some windows and keep the roofline low, the plans were granted permission. “Now, the village is very happy with what has been built,” says Kathleen.

Within the permission, however, the planning department placed several conditions on the project, some of them fairly onerous. The most expensive of these was the requirement that Kathleen remove the top 600 mm of soil across the entire plot and replace it with soil from outside the area. This is a precaution against contamination from old tin and copper mines and is not an uncommon planning condition in Cornwall.

“The impact of removing all that soil, well it was a massive undertaking,” recalls Kathleen, confession struggles to understand the reasoning behind this requirement, given the agricultural nature of the surrounding landscape. “It’s one of the most unbelievable things I’ve ever seen.”

Rather than put the building contract out to tender, Kathleen turned to a firm she had worked with before, Ridgwells Construction, which is based in Truro, Cornwall.

“They’re an extraordinary team,” says Kathleen. “They’re detail-orientated, reliable and responsible.” She was as involved as possible, and says she thoroughly enjoyed it.

KATHLEEN'S ADVICE

- ★ “Get on top of utilities immediately.”
- ★ “Don’t underestimate wayleave issues.”
- ★ “Communication with the local community is very important. I used leaflets put through doors to explain what I was doing.”
- ★ “Keep the design ‘clean’; let the light in.”
- ★ “Don’t be scared to look for other treatments to create texture and colour on walls.”
- ★ “Respect the land and bring the outside in.”



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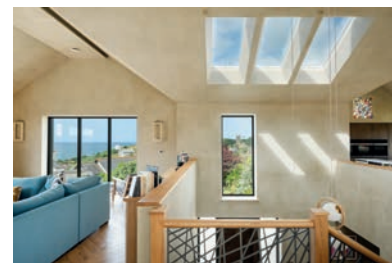


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"Designing the interiors and being part of that build process was a real high point of the build for me," says Kathleen. "I couldn't be there as much as I wanted to be, but I trusted Ben Ridgwell and his team."

The house is constructed from masonry to assure structural integrity, given the exposed location and the sloping plot. This required a substantial retaining wall; "a massive piece of construction," says Kathleen. This is now accessible via steps "planted with mint, which releases scent as you walk." The Delabole slate isn't just on the roof, but also side-hung on part of the building, in the traditional Cornish manner. Another section has hardwood rain screening. There's also a significant amount of stone, which was hand-cut on site by "two of the most remarkable men," says Kathleen. "The artistry of it! They used amazing techniques we take for granted; it was a marvellous thing to behold."

If the build was a high point for Kathleen, the low point was organising the utilities. Tackling drainage was a key obstacle, there being "a maze of pipes and access" for sewage and drains. Kathleen also had to get three-phase electricity to her new home, and this took almost a year to achieve.

"I tried to future-proof by putting it underground to protect it from gales," says Kathleen, who found dealing with the regional supplier easy. The problem lay in the negotiations with a local landowner, across whose land Kathleen laid her power supply in trenching. While these discussions continued, she had temporary power, "but it delayed us getting into the house for a long time." Kathleen adds: "It was more costly than I could

have imagined."

Despite having little power and no heating for a year, the house, and its contents – including furniture – did not suffer. Kathleen puts this down to the very high levels of insulation specified by Lilly Lewarne. The home is now heated by two air-source heat pumps (and this was the reason the three-phase supply was required).

Despite having the space for a ground source heat pump, Kathleen rejected this option, seeing it as a "massive intrusion" in the project. She adds further: "On a previous project we went through five drills [boring the hole required] and I didn't want to put my neighbours through it."

The air source heat pumps warm the domestic water for the property, and heat it via the underfloor heating system. This, combined with superb insulation and air tightness, led Kathleen to install a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system (MVHR). An ideal way to ventilate energy-efficient, air-tight buildings, the MVHR expels stale air while retaining the energy used to heat the building. This is transferred to the fresh, filtered air which the system circulates continuously.

The glazing throughout is aluminium-framed and provides excellent weather-tightness. This is vital in such an exposed location and aluminium is a popular choice. The inevitable Covid-related supply issues meant the frames were somewhat delayed (although Kathleen describes the supplier, Green Circle, as "fantastic.") Another hiccup was a mysterious concrete trough found by Kathleen's builders during excavations in what had been the rear patio of the building.

"It was 4 m x 6 m and no one had any idea what this thing was," says Kathleen. "It

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The most expensive condition was the requirement that Kathleen remove the top 600 mm of soil across the entire plot

was so huge we had to re-use it on site and integrate it."

In a build this size, the electrics inevitably become complex, and the variety of lighting fixtures was a major focus of the interior design, managed and installed by the "superb" NSN Electrical. Kathleen specified low-energy LED lights throughout, including a unique lighting system up in the roofline of the vaulted spaces upstairs, which is used to illuminate the walls finished in clay plaster. Kathleen decided against painting or otherwise finishing these walls, preferring the natural colour and texture of the plaster.

"It's not a flat colour," says Kathleen. "Light at different times of the day or night looks very different on the walls, it creates a very natural feeling, making it an extension of the outside landscape and that was important to me. This is a modern build, but I insisted we build with traditional materials."

Like the building design, when it came to the interiors, Kathleen had her own ideas and planned out every aspect of the interior design on a spreadsheet. The kitchen on the upper floor in this 'upside-down' home is a stand-out feature. With the vaulted ceilings creating a sense of airiness, the kitchen fittings are all about convenience, ease of use, and beauty. Working with a company recommended by her builders, Kathleen chose cabinetry that looks like sawn wood, contrasted with a countertop made from Dekton composite stone which

is attractive and highly functional. The high performance is matched by its carbon-neutral credentials, all of which appealed to Kathleen. The lust-worthy American-style fridge opens with a touch, and the Miele hob on the island has its own ventilation, doing away with the need for an extractor, which can block sightlines.

When planning the interiors, Kathleen turned to artwork for inspiration. With most windows giving outstanding coastal and rural views, Kathleen kept much of the decor simple and natural. Downstairs, the bedrooms and ensembles are cosy with different colours and personalities. All of this makes the perfect backdrop for Kathleen's art collection. A painting by one of Kathleen's friends, (which is large at 5 ft by 5ft), takes pride of place.

"Until now, I've not had walls strong enough to hold it," says Kathleen. Even in the garden, a sculptural elephant roams, freed from his original territory in Hyde Park, central London.

"I've loved searching out talent and showcasing it," says Kathleen. "When I travel, I buy artwork, and this house has become a depository."

The garden landscaping also makes the most of the sea views, with terracing, patios and lawns offering a variety of places to relax and take in the sound and sight of the sea. Kathleen is justifiably proud of what she has achieved with this project.

"This home is beautiful and sympathetic. I used local materials and suppliers, as I believe

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT

Simon Boulton at Lilly Lewarne Architects
www.lillylewarne.co.uk

BUILDING

Ben Ridgwell at Ridgwells Construction
www.ridgwells.co.uk

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you must ensure you are giving local people work. That is how economies thrive."

Kathleen now spends as much time in the property as she can. "This is a really special place," she says, "I come here with extended family and the beach is safe for kids and dogs. We're also close to St Michael's Mount and there

are so many gardens nearby, too."

Kathleen plans to retire here, as she loves it so much. "I can sit anywhere, whether it is sunny or raining, and feel like I am part of the coast, part of nature." And last but certainly not least, she adds: "There's so little light pollution, I can see the stars!" ■

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CASE STUDY

KEEPING YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE

By letting their good friend, renowned architect Richard Murphy take the lead, a couple in the east coast of Scotland are now living in a bold and beautifully designed home that fully embraces modern architecture

TEXT NIK HUNTER IMAGES CRISPIN RODWELL



Despite being friends with esteemed Edinburgh architect, Richard Murphy, Kim and Graeme Ritchie never dreamed that one day they'd be doing "a Murphy." However, life has a way of serving curve balls and today they are the proud owners of a Murphy-designed home, which they absolutely love.

Kim who runs her own website company (redstone-websites.com) and Graeme, a microlight instructor at East of Scotland Microlights, had been toying with the idea of moving for a while. They were living in an old mansion house in Longniddry that had been converted into flats, however, they certainly weren't looking to build their own home, as Graeme recalls: "We weren't searching for a

building plot and although we are friends with Richard, we never thought we'd have the chance to build 'a Murphy'." However, while browsing the property pages, not the building plot section, Graeme stumbled across a plot for sale in Gullane on Scotland's East Coast. "Gullane was where we wanted to be if we were ever going to move," Graeme continues.

The plot in question was part of the garden next door and the owners had planted a beech hedge so they could split their large garden and develop the other side of the site. The plot had been on the market for a while although the owners had already applied and been granted planning permission which had taken them approximately three



years to obtain. The issue was several protected trees on the site which had deterred interested buyers.

"We decided to ask Richard to have a look and he didn't see a problem," Graeme remembers. After Richard had drawn up a sketch, he and Kim went for a pre-planning meeting with the council to confirm whether or not it was a viable application. "We took a risk buying the plot when we wanted to completely alter the original plans, but our design was roughly the same footprint and was located in the corner of the plot away from the trees."

With the previous owners still living next door, the couple were also worried that their new design may cause offence. However, as Kim remembers: "They really appreciate modern architecture, and were very supportive of the new plan."

After selling their flat to fund the build, the couple moved into a rental for the duration. However, with the advent of Covid, the process took longer than normal. "We viewed it in March 2019 and purchased it in November," says Graeme. "It obviously took a long time to get things moving during the pandemic because people weren't at work." The couple were also keen to get a handle on the costs as they didn't have an infinite budget and didn't want to start if they couldn't finish. "The builders finally arrived on site in the summer of 2021, and we moved in September 2022. It was watertight and warm; we had a functioning kitchen and bedroom, but there was still a lot of work to do."

Although it took a while to get started, the

actual design was more or less agreed upon from the day that Richard first saw the plot as Kim recalls: "We once asked Richard that if you ask for a 'Richard Murphy house' do you have any say whatsoever – and he said no!"

Graeme continues: "The only thing he asked was how many bedrooms did we need? Our answer was three – one for us, one for guests and one which we use as an office." After drawing up the plans, Graeme and Kim realised the plans didn't include a garage. "We have several bikes which we needed storage for, so Richard extended the building marginally to add a bike store at the rear." Like a narrow garage attached to the house, the bike store has gravel at the entrance, an external hose and a charging point inside. "Essentially, our brief was really three bedrooms and a space for the bikes. However, pretty much from when we showed Richard the plot, he already knew how it was going to come together."

Located on one single storey, one enters a small hallway leading into the open plan kitchen/diner. Adjacent to this and accessed by pocket doors is the sitting room. On the other side a corridor leads through to the three bedrooms (one with ensuite and dressing room), utility room, and main bathroom.

"The entire house flows really well," says Kim. "From the bike store, the entrance is through the utility room and all the muddy clothes can go straight into the washing machine – it's little details such as these which make it so easy to live here."

The main living space incorporates a sitting

HIGH POINT

"I'd say the real high point was when we had our housewarming party in June," says Kim. "The landscaping had just been finished; the garden was starting to take shape; we had all the doors fully open, and we were delighted at how well the house worked in 'party' mode. It was lovely to invite all our friends round to finally see it in the flesh! Everyone was full of praise, and it was great fun showing it off to them all!"

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room, dining room and kitchen and can be used as one large open plan area or the sitting room can be closed off to create a cosier space. "Graeme's had a poker night in the dining room while I've been watching TV in the sitting room, and it worked brilliantly." Graeme adds: "This flexible design feature is one that Richard includes in many projects, and it works. However, I think the best feature is the way the windows disappear. The entire wall and corner of the house can be opened to the outside and disappear. It completely blurs the line between inside and outside."

Another design feature that completely alters the way the rooms are perceived are the wedges of mirrored glass which Richard specified. Fitted between the walls and the roof the mirrors make the rooms appear larger and lighter by bouncing the light around and creating the illusion of 'infinity.'

Each of the three bedrooms also has access to the garden and a window-sized vent for ventilation. "We didn't think we needed an external door in every bedroom," says Kim. "However, Richard said you have teenage children, and they can come and go through their own door without disturbing you – we didn't think they'd use the doors, but they do."

After the initial design was finalised, Richard handed it over to his associate, Tom Hetherington who also had several tricks up his sleeve. As Kim explains: "Tom is an architect through and through, but his interior design skills are also second to none. He was instrumental

After selling their flat to fund the build, the couple moved into a rental for the duration of the build. However, with the advent of Covid, the process took longer than normal

in the planning of the kitchen suggesting the larder instead of adding more kitchen units and it is fantastic." Tom also suggested the slimline hidden cooker hood and incorporating the recycling bins into the units. "I've never had a property with such a generosity of space and cupboards," explains Kim. Another of his ideas was the hidden drinks cabinet in the bookcase between the pocket doors – "it's genius."

"When it came to the colour scheme, Tom had a vision in his head which I couldn't comprehend," Kim remembers. His focus was all about beech and light woods to maximise the natural light and he suggested white walls

LOW POINT

"When Storm Arwen hit, we had just put the roof on, and it was very worrying. However, the storms are usually from the south, but Arwen came from the north, and it flowed over the roof. Our builder, Phil knew it was coming and did a brilliant job of boarding everything up before it arrived."



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to counter that. "From carpet colours to kitchen design, we just went with what he said. I think when I need to buy a new dress, I'll give Tom a call! He has exquisite taste."

While the couple were keen to keep a tight rein on the budget, there was an overspend. "The advice from Richard was to make up your mind at the start and if you're on a tight budget don't change anything. If you can keep to that it'll keep the timescale and cost from getting away from you.' However, we did go over budget."

This wasn't due to underestimating, however. There were a few changes implemented such as the bookcase between the sitting room and dining room which now incorporates a hidden drinks cabinet in the wall. "I'm so glad we did that," says Kim. "But there were things we were faced with that would be better to do during the build rather than at a later date." The couple chose to up the specification on the external cladding for a lower maintenance version and to pay for the additional carpentry to box in the flue around the wood burner. "It continues the symmetry in the room, and it also gave us lots more storage and hidden charging points."

The couple did manage to make some savings by shopping wisely, however. In the bathrooms, the cabinets are Howden's kitchen units fitted with mirrored doors. "Our builders said if we bought IKEA or Howden cabinets they could adapt to fit," says Kim. They also sourced the bathroom tiles from a high-end website outlet which sells end of run tiles purchased from larger hotels. "This was a huge saving and gave

us a really high-quality finish."

The builders also made all the built-in wardrobes using IKEA carcasses. Kim continues: "The principal bedroom is so uncluttered because we have a dressing room and again that was created from IKEA carcasses that the builders customised."

As Graeme and Kim hadn't lived in a modern house before, they had a huge declutter before they moved and got rid of a lot of furniture that they knew wouldn't work in their new home. "I decided to make a 3D model before we moved in because I'm useless at visualising in 3D," Kim recalls. "It really helped me decide where to place the sofas, the wardrobes etc. However, it still seemed really vast when we saw it finished. We'd convinced ourselves it was going to be much smaller, but we have plenty of room and now need another sofa!"

In September 2022 when the couple finally moved in, there was still work to do but since then, they've enjoyed every minute of living in their 'Murphy'. "There are still things on the to-do list," says Kim. "We're planting a beech hedge along the perimeter so we can have a bath with a view and the landscaping will take some time to mature. We have nine trees in the garden that are still protected but we've built the driveway even further away from them than the original one was so they're being well looked after." "I will admit the project was stressful at times," says Graeme. "However, at the same time I quite enjoyed the process and everyone that visits the house seems to love it, as do we." ■

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

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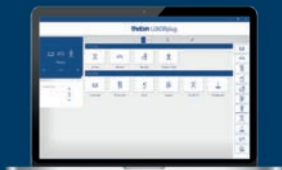
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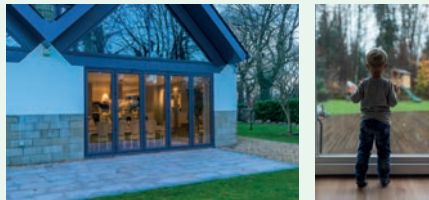


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"We understand that with such revolutionary ideas, our fabricators and



their installer customers need additional support. TuffX is offering full training on Glow's features and benefits, and correct installation methods to our approved trade partner fabricator customer base, which they can then disseminate to their installers.

"The system comprises of a standard sealed unit that is layered with intelligent coatings to create conductive heat transfer into the home," continues Paul. "With the radiance technology used, it can be utilised as a primary heating source with temperatures reaching 35-40°C and has the added benefit of eliminating unsightly condensation. And speaking of aesthetics, we are pleased to bring this product to market with

no visible trace of a heating system inside. The coatings we have used are completely undetectable and the glass is not tinted. From a homeowner's perspective the glass will look the same as that found in any other bi-fold door.

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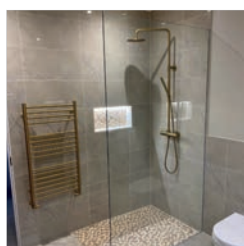
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In a bid to escape city life post-pandemic, Una and Laura embarked on a journey to create their dream home as well as workspace in rural Ireland, filled with innovative features and design solutions

TEXT TOM BODDY IMAGES UNA & LAURA

The couple's lack of construction experience drove them to educate themselves



Over the past decade, couple Una and Laura have had to deal with urban living to support their careers, initially residing in Cork for seven years before relocating to Dublin in 2020. Both have busy and demanding roles – Una works as a vice president in the fraud department for a ‘fintech’ firm while Laura is a manager at a large tech company.

When the pandemic ushered in the new era of remote working, the pair realised the traditional confines of city living were no longer essential. This discovery opened up possibilities for them to consider relocating elsewhere, and together with their cockapoo, Bear, they decided they wanted to move closer to their families.

Yet, amid a turbulent housing market, finding their ideal home proved to be a challenge. “Houses were being sold as soon as they were listed and there were generally many competing bids driving up the prices,” Una recounts. “We felt that we would be paying over the odds for a home that wasn’t built to suit our needs.”

This realisation saw them gravitate towards self-building. Despite being fully aware of the rising costs of building, they saw this option as a more cost-effective alternative, and one that would afford them the opportunity to craft a bespoke home tailored to their desires.

Una grew up in rural Tipperary. As her family still owned farmland there, her parents were in a position to generously offer them a site, ideally situated 30 minutes from Laura’s parents’ in County Clare. “This was a win-win in terms of location for both of us and we were both excited to live in the countryside again after living in the city for so long,” explains Una.

THE VISION

Una and Laura envisioned their future home to be a modern yet inviting space infused with a touch of tradition. The goal was also to have large open spaces but at the same time avoid the house feeling “empty,” explains Laura. “Good lighting was important to us but we equally didn’t want wall to ceiling windows as we felt this would make it difficult to get the cosy feeling we were looking for.”



HIGH POINT

"The electricity being turned on. This was the first point where it felt like the end was in sight and we could visualise ourselves living in our home."

— Una

These concepts were presented to Brian Aharn, a skilled architect who's based in Limerick. Laura attests to how he truly grasped their vision, and highlights an invaluable advantage he brought to the project – flexibility. "Brian presented options to us based on our wish list, and always created space for changing the design or trying a different approach to make sure we were 100% happy with everything."

Securing planning permission was the next hurdle in their journey. The body responsible in Ireland, Rural Ireland, is renowned for its stringent approach, a rumour which was well-founded in this project. Even with Brian at the helm, navigating this stage was "lengthy and complicated," says Una. Their initial choice of site was rejected due to concerns over 'ribbon development.' (In Ireland, this is classified as a high density – almost continuous road frontage development – which means five or more houses on any one side of a given 250 metres of road.

Given the circumstances, they found themselves with no alternative but to abandon the original site. However, by another stroke of fortune Una's parents owned a similar site nearby. Without needing to modify the design, the team managed to seamlessly shift the home to the new location. "We were very lucky to be in a position to do this and get approved for planning," explains Una.

BREAKING GROUND

Una and Laura recognised that with them lacking in construction expertise, they'd need to opt for a contractor-led build as the most practical choice. "We both have very busy full time jobs

so we didn't feel we had the time to invest in an independent self-build," explains Laura. They selected a local builder with a strong reputation, and they provided invaluable guidance throughout the project.

The home has been constructed chiefly using concrete blocks, a deliberate choice made by the couple due to their familiarity with the building method; and they believed that local building contractors would be better equipped to handle this approach. Additionally, a key requirement for them was to incorporate a concrete floor upstairs to minimise noise, in fact it was a 'non-negotiable' for their design.

Spanning 18 months, the construction process saw Una and Laura renting temporary accommodation for the initial 12 months of the build, then residing with family for the final six months before moving in.

The couple's lack of construction experience drove them to educate themselves as much as possible. This was to enable them to make key decisions to get the house to a 'builders' finish,' ie a completed building fabric. "Having a contractor was a huge help here and took the burden off us in terms of coordinating the different stages of the build. They always let us know what we need to start thinking about next."

Once the structural framework was complete, Una and Laura actively oversaw the interior finishes, managing aspects such as bathrooms, kitchen design, colour schemes, and furniture selection from start to finish.

A SEAMLESS BLEND

The finished home seamlessly blends

“Stone cladding was a design feature that we both wanted from the outset,” says Una



contemporary styles with intricate, clever details, incorporating snippets of traditional elements that infuse warmth into the space, resulting in a stunning and thoughtfully designed residence for Una and Laura to enjoy.

The site on which the home sits upon is a tranquil and deeply rural locale, offering an escape from the hustle and bustle of urban living which the couple have known for so long. The home also boasts panoramic views with minimal neighbouring dwellings.

The external appearance of the home exudes clean lines and a symmetrical shape. The blend of the sleek grey render, rustic stone cladding,

and dark grey roof tiles, adds texture and depth to its overall aesthetic. “Stone cladding was a design feature that we both wanted from the outset. We think it blends in nicely with the countryside and is a timeless feature,” explains Una.

The downstairs offers a seamless flow between spaces, featuring an expansive open kitchen and living area, with an office, boot room, utility room, wet room, and main sitting room situated at the back. Laura highlights how they spent a good amount of time designing the kitchen: “We wanted a large space where we could entertain friends and family but equally wanted it

LOW POINT

“We found bathroom design really complex and difficult to navigate; it was a steep learning curve with so many options to choose from and lots of decisions to be made.”

— Laura

UNA & LAURA'S TOP TIPS

- * "Make sure to consult with a kitchen expert before you submit your planning to allow you to make changes."
- * "Think about getting your lighting plan early and again consult an expert if you need help as there's a lot to think about and it's important to get lighting right."
- * "Research your suppliers in advance and secure your first choices as soon as possible because the best tradespeople book up fast."
- * "Use Excel to plan and track a detailed budget. Make allowances for optional extras that you really want to include at the beginning so you know where to invest your money and always keep a contingency fund for unanticipated extras."
- * "Remember that it's your home. What suits your taste won't suit everyone. Don't worry about what other people think and make decisions that meet your needs."



to be functional."

They chose a bespoke 'in-frame' solid wood, hand-painted kitchen for the "seamless look," plus Farrow and Ball paint in Lamp Room Grey and Downpipe for the units and island respectively. A Silestone Calacatta gold quartz worktop and backsplash added elegance and practicality to the space.

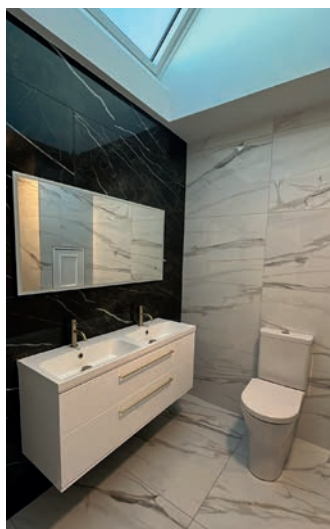
In designing the kitchen island, the couple aimed for a clear surface conducive to both entertainment and food preparation, opting to keep the hob and sink separate. "This was important as we had to make sure we had enough wall space in our kitchen design to accommodate our 'must-haves,'" asserts Laura. Some of these included a pantry, five-ring induction hob, double side-by-side ovens, larder fridge, and larder freezer.

The TV room adjacent to the kitchen was designed to strike a balance between openness and cosiness. To achieve this a sliding pocket door allows the space to be an open plan kitchen, dining and living space when open, yet retains the option to create a snug environment

when closed. A square panelling feature wall and wall-mounted television further enhance the room's aesthetic appeal and functionality. "This is a very simple and cost effective design using MDF panels that finishes the room really well," tells Una.

There are some innovative design features that stand out; particularly in the downstairs area with the vaulted ceiling to the staircase, where the two skylights flood the space with natural light. "We wanted our entrance hall to feel like an open space but we equally didn't want to make this excessively large as we didn't think that would be a good use of space," explains Una. The ceiling was the "perfect solution," creating the illusion of a large expansive area without having to add extra floor space. Complementing this architectural design, the couple selected a 10-bulb pendant light fixture.

The staircase design itself was crucial; a walnut finish is used for the handrail, steps, and scroll which adds warmth to the home. Poplar spindles, risers, and posts painted white creates a striking contrast. The ambient kicker lights



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on the steps highlight the staircase's intricate details, Laura exclaims that they "love how this turned out!"

The upstairs is designed to cater to the couple's needs, featuring an office, a master bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe and ensuite, a second ensuite bedroom, a standalone bedroom, and a main bathroom. Laura explains, "The office room doubles as a potential bedroom in the future, but for now, it serves as our dedicated workspace."

Laura elaborates further, stating, "Our main goal for the upstairs was to create a generous master bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe and ensuite, as well as a second ensuite bedroom." A notable practical feature is the laundry chute accessible from both the master ensuite and the hallway, providing convenient access to the utility downstairs. Laura enthuses, "Adding this was one of the best decisions we made. We remember watching Home Alone and seeing it! So we made this fantasy a reality."

Reflecting on the overall interior, Laura describes it as both functional and stylish, with a focus on clean lines and a relatively minimalist finish. She adds, "We aimed for timeless neutral tones complemented by warm, feature tones to make it feel homely."

SOME 'ECO' EXTRAS

Sustainability may not have been their primary focus during the design process, but the home is filled with eco-friendly aspects which add to the house's energy performance. Some of these include triple glazed windows, high-grade insulation, and energy-efficient appliances.

When it comes to heating their home, the couple opted for air to water underfloor heating. "We felt that this was the most efficient way to heat our home in the long run and we love that we can keep a consistent temperature in our home 24/7," explains Una. Additionally, they implemented a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) system to ensure good ventilation with a continuous supply of fresh, filtered air. All of these aspects combined resulted in Una and Laura achieving an A-rated EPC for their home.

Reflecting on their completed build, Laura and Una express how thrilled they are with the end result. "We feel that it really brought our dream to life, and it works really well day-to-day. We love our kitchen/dining/living room space in particular as this is the heart of our home!"

Learn more about Una and Laura's self-build journey by following their Instagram page @house_by_luna. ■

Four trends for '24

Bathrooms have evolved from practical spaces to stylish sanctuaries, merging function with design. Jasmine Rowe from HiB explains how self-builders can tap into this year's key design trends to discover the mix they need

For bathroom designers, there are the classic schemes that in the UK we have come to expect, such as white suites and minimal, clean decor, but there are also the hugely popular design-led trends and emerging styles that self-builders should pay attention to, especially if they want their home to stand out.

This year, brands are highlighting four captivating trends, which promise to redefine the modern bathroom experience, catering to the diverse tastes and preferences of self-builders seeking to create spaces that resonate with their individuality and lifestyle.

The first trend we are seeing this year is 'Exhale', which offers a breath of fresh air with its homage to nature-inspired design. Departing from the 'nature-stuff' of previous years, Exhale embraces a more restrained approach, channelling the laid-back allure of 'California Casual' aesthetics.

This trend harmonises minimalism with mid-century sensibilities, favouring clean lines, stone finishes and tactile textures. By avoiding rustic elements, Exhale exudes refinement through its neutral palette and rounded shapes, offering a serene escape from the rigours of daily life. For self-builders yearning for a tranquil oasis within their homes, Exhale promises to deliver a space filled with understated elegance and natural serenity.

In contrast, the 'Euphoria' trend, also key for bathroom builds in 2024, invites a blend of nostalgia and contemporary flair into the bathroom space. Defined by graceful arches, fluid curves, and playful geometries, this trend infuses spaces with a sense of movement and joy. Abstract patterns and fluted textures add a modern twist, while a muted yet colourful palette evokes a connection to the organic world.

Euphoria promises to give bathrooms rejuvenating energy, transforming everyday routines into moments of stimulating experiences. For self-builders seeking to give their spaces a sense of



whimsy and vitality, Euphoria offers an irresistible opportunity to indulge in playful design exploration.

For those drawn to darker, edgier aesthetics, the 'Elements' trend offers a captivating alternative that is sure to be popular in 2024. Inspired by the philosophy of Wabi Sabi and the raw beauty of Brutalism, Elements embraces imperfection as a source of allure. Moody neutrals and cool blues set a

stormy backdrop, while raw textures and industrial accents add depth and character. Brushed bronze and gunmetal brassware offer a rugged elegance, celebrating the inherent beauty of organic materials in their unadorned state.

For self-builders with a love of industrial styles, using the Elements trend is an opportunity to create a space full of atmosphere.

By considering the shapes such as arches or fluted furniture, organic textures and touchpoints, those designing a bathroom space can create a contemporary space that also offers a timeless appeal and functionality required

The final one of the four key 2024 bathroom trends, is 'Enamour', a look that evokes the feeling of vintage glamour and timeless sophistication. With a nod to the opulence of Art Deco design, Enamour seamlessly blends old-world charm with contemporary themes.

In Enamour, upcycled elements lend a sense of history and sustainability, while a commitment to simplicity fosters an atmosphere of understated luxury. By curating a harmonious balance between old and new, Enamour invites homeowners to bask in the tranquillity of a clutter-free environment, embracing the ethos of 'quiet luxury' and vintage glamour. This trend really is a celebration of curated luxury and considered design.

Through all four of these trends, reoccurring themes such as curves,



metallics and minimalism are all present, offering key themes that all self-builders can use to make their bathroom space on trend, no matter what their preferred overall look.

By considering the shapes such as arches or fluted furniture, organic textures and touchpoints, those designing a bathroom space can create a contemporary space that also offers a timeless appeal and functionality required of the room.

Also, by maximising space with sleek storage solutions, multifunctional furniture and statement items pieces like freestanding baths, illuminated mirrors or bold tile patterns, self-builders can add their own personality and flair to make the space individual and tailored to their needs.

By combining these elements, anyone can create a stylish and functional bathroom that reflects the latest trends of 2024.

Jasmine Rowe is product designer at HiB



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HEIDI'S HAVEN

Building a home tailored for a child with complex medical needs, required innovative design and careful planning by Sarah and Steve Land and their architect, resulting in a space both functional and inviting

TEXT JAYNE DOWLE IMAGES TRANSFORM ARCHITECTS





When Sarah and Steve Land decided the time was right to build their own house, designed with their severely disabled young daughter at its heart, their overriding aim was to meet all her complex medical needs, without ending up with a home that looked like a hospital.

Working with architect Martin Bell, whose West Yorkshire-based practice, Transform Architects, specialises in accessible home design, the Lands devised a new house that would give eight-year-old Heidi a comfortable, supportive and stimulating environment to grow up in. She has cerebral palsy and multiple medical conditions following a HIE (Hypoxic-Ischaemic Encephalopathy) event, meaning she went without oxygen shortly after birth.

The start of Heidi's new home was her parents purchasing a 1970s bungalow, then demolishing most of it and starting again. Sarah and Steve had been looking at plots for their self-build project for months. After one purchase fell through, Sarah admits to becoming a Rightmove obsessive. As soon as they saw the property, which cost £720,000, they knew it felt right.

"The plot was perfect because it has level gardens which were really appealing for us to suit Heidi as she enjoys being outside," explains Sarah, 45, who runs Peeps, a charity she set up in 2018 which supports parents of HIE children. Steve, 40, is an insurance broker and co-founder of Peeps, and their architect Martin is now a trustee of the charity.

Accessibility is all in a project like this, Martin

explains. For Heidi's new home, this involved designing wider doorways and corridors, no-step entries, wheelchair-accessible spaces and bringing in smart home technologies to open doors, for example.

"We have ensured there are no barriers or steps that would impede movement within the home," Martin says. "Level access is crucial for wheelchair users or anyone with mobility issues. This means designing thresholds, entrances and pathways that are flush with the ground, removing potential obstacles."

To promote well-being – and to help energy efficiency through solar gain – large windows, strategically-placed skylights, and an orientation that captures the surrounding natural views were crucial considerations. Steve says one hugely practical addition was "lots of plug sockets," providing flexibility all over the house for Heidi's equipment.

"We were fortunate to be in a financial position to be able to do this project, so thought we would go for it," Sarah says. "Heidi's equipment takes up a lot of space, as she gets older she's growing bigger and her needs are increasing, so this was a much-needed move."

Heidi's condition means she is non-mobile and non-verbal. Fully tube-fed, and with a tracheostomy (an opening in her windpipe to help air and oxygen reach her lungs), she also suffers from dystonia (abnormal muscle tone), epilepsy, hearing and vision impairments and global developmental delay.

The family's former home, a semi-detached

HIGH POINT

From seeing Martin, our architect, doing the 3D walk-through on his computer screen to getting into the house and it being just as we imagined it. We felt that we had lived there for 12 months before we moved in. It feels exactly how we wanted it to feel, and for Heidi too.

— Sarah



LOW POINT

The delays and extensions to the build. It felt at one point like we were never going to get in. Originally, it was said it would take between six and eight to complete, then it took 14 months. There were various hold-ups; for example, as the builders were taking down some of the old structure they discovered a problem with the floor they didn't expect; more piles had to go in. There were various construction-related issues that hadn't been factored in at the start.

— Sarah

house 15 miles down the road from their new home, in Uppermill, near Oldham in Lancashire, had an open-plan kitchen/living room/diner. The Lands had installed a through-floor lift from the ground floor to Heidi's bedroom, where there were also ceiling track hoists from the bedroom to the bathroom. They stayed here during the build, from April 2021 to June 2022, selling it afterwards.

Now they live in a spacious 401.15 sqm, four-bedroomed property. The only complete part of the existing bungalow left is the garage, with its dog shower, retained as the family own a cockerpoo named Betty, and half-mezzanine floor for storage. Steve's one regret is that during the build he didn't have the mezzanine extended to full-floor, to provide further storage.

Martin's plans were bold. They dispensed with the existing conservatory at the back of the house, adding a full-width extension in its place. This is designed with two apex roofs – one over the kitchen, one over the living room – with sliding doors opening off each space, and a French door in the central connecting area. Underfloor heating and a wood-burning stove keep this open-plan space cosy.

The front of the bungalow, between the garage and the front door, was reconfigured to create a spacious hall with a gentle entry slope and ample space for Heidi and her wheelchair.

The exterior combines cedar cladding, echoed in natural internal touches such as the living television's wall cabinet, with white render and anthracite windows and door frames

for a highly contemporary look. Even though the existing bungalow was being extended, it wasn't increasing in height or affecting any of the neighbouring houses, so the planning permission process did not hit snags.

Martin explains that a key priority was to ensure that Heidi – and her waking carer, who looks after her four nights a week – had her own space and privacy. There is a sofa bed in the sensory room should a sleep-in carer be needed in future.

He has zoned the house so that Heidi's bedroom, fully wheelchair-accessible ensuite, sensory room – she's a huge fan of BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, so there's a glitterball hanging from the ceiling where there's also a hoist so she can explore and engage with the room safely – and a carer's kitchenette where medication can be prepared and equipment cleaned, all sit together. As Heidi grows older, this area of the house will be established as her own, allowing as much feeling of independence as possible.

Two bedrooms, including Sarah and Steve's with its own ensuite, sit across the hall. The family's communal living space is towards the back of the house, directly onto the rear garden.

The communal living space comprises an open-plan kitchen, living room and dining area. There are also practical additions including a pantry and utility room off the kitchen, and a home office next to the garage.

The first-floor dormer bedroom was re-thought and made larger by incorporating loft storage space into the room's floorplan. Storage has



The couple also took online advice when deciding what they needed to make their new house as practical (there are hoists in Heidi's bedroom and bathroom) as well as good-looking as possible

been incorporated within the new, extended ground floor. The first floor now feels spacious and light as a rooflight has been added on the landing.

To match what was left of the original bungalow, the new house has piled foundations and traditional cavity wall construction. It is highly insulated to keep energy usage as low as possible. Cavity walls have full 100 mm fill Rockwool batt insulation. Floors have Kingspan K103 to a thickness of 75 mm. The roof has 100 mm K107 Kingspan Kooltherm Rigid Insulation and 42.5 mm K118 Kingspan Insulated plasterboard with staggered joints, with blanket-like insulation batts fitted between rafters where necessary.

Sarah and Steve belong to several online forums of parents with disabled children in similar situations. That's how they found Martin, as he came warmly recommended. The Lands say it's important to take time to chat with other people who have undertaken similar work when planning such a project.

"Always go with your gut feel," says Steve. "Everyone spoke so highly of him and his was the name that kept popping up. Our first

conversation with Martin was such a positive one, we knew we wanted him to design the house. He understood what life might be like for us, asked about Heidi's needs, and took time to discuss what was important to us as a family. We loved the design as soon as we saw it and knew it would work well for us."

The couple also took online advice when deciding what they needed to make their new house as practical (there are hoists in Heidi's bedroom and bathroom, where there is also a rise and fall bath and a changing table) as well as good-looking as possible. Working in collaboration with Martin, they looked at online projects and magazines too to see how other people had adapted homes, and soon got a feel for what they were looking for.

It took time to decide exactly what Heidi would need and balance the budget so every penny of the £550,000 build and fit-out budget was spent wisely.

"It's not necessarily that there's a limited choice of accessible equipment for the home," says Sarah. "A huge barrier for a lot of people is the cost. It's a narrower market, anything with special needs or adaptable in front of it, there's

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the question of it being affordable."

They took well-considered decisions, for instance not paying for a rise and fall sink – "you're looking at £4,000, just for a sink", Sarah points out – because Heidi is always in her wheelchair, at the same height.

Choosing a durable material for the floor, which will receive a lot of wheelchair traffic, was a key priority of the specification. "We have Amtico throughout, except in Heidi's wet room where we have Altra flooring, and the first-floor bedroom is carpeted," says Sarah. "Amtico is hardwearing and looks good, so it's ideal. Everyone says it's easy to look after. But it's not so easy when you're mopping the floors, I didn't anticipate how you would have to keep on top of it in an open-plan house. Steve keeps saying we need a ride-on floor machine."

It's hard to guess how Heidi feels about her new home, say her parents, because she can't tell them exactly what she's thinking, but she settled in without any problems at all.

One of her favourite things is to go outside – there are aluminium-framed French doors from her bedroom and sensory room, to match the aluminium-framed sliding doors into the garden from the living room and kitchen. The garden now includes a hot tub and barbecue hut, and has relaxing views over the nearby hills, so it's both a sociable and relaxing space.

She also loves her sensory room, where she

can enjoy her favourite things, lights, music and Strictly Come Dancing, of course. "Since we moved in, her sleeping routine is much improved too, the air conditioning is much better than trying to cool her down with fans," says Sarah. The ventilation and air conditioning in Heidi's bedroom, part of the whole-house MVHR (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) system, and in the sensory room help regulate her fluctuating body temperature when she's asleep.

The benefits of transforming this bungalow for family life with a disabled child are immeasurable. Sarah and Steve can now safely and easily do things at home with Heidi, with everything at hand, customised specialist equipment and plenty of space.

"At the other house daily life was becoming a struggle," says Sarah. "And as Heidi has got bigger, it was becoming difficult for us to visit other people if their houses weren't accessible. Heidi's sociable, and now our friends and family can come to us, we've had some lovely times together – and that's just fantastic."

For Steve, the new house has made a huge difference to daily routines. "Heidi has always been our priority," he says. "So having a home that meets all of her needs, and is future-proofed for when she is bigger, means it's easier for us to manage day to day, and we can focus more on enjoying life." ■

Take design up a level

Staircases are fundamental to the flow and functionality of a home. Richard Harding of British Spirals & Castings discusses what to consider when choosing a design for your property

Staircases are situated at the heart of many homes, and are often one of the first things you see when you open the front door. Despite their prominence, it's surprising how often these features are almost an afterthought in the design process. By giving some careful thought to your staircase at the start of your project, you can not only achieve an aesthetic which is tailored to your taste, but also optimise the flow and sizing of the spaces across your home.

The most fundamental decision when selecting a staircase is its style and layout. This will impact both the footprint of the staircase, the size and the dimension of the opening needed on the upper floor. There are a range of staircase styles available which can suit different homes.

STRAIGHT

Straight staircases are the most common choice for homes of all sizes. Their long linear footprint makes them a good option for narrow halls, but they can equally work well as a statement piece when centralised in wider spaces.

KITED & COMBINATION

These add a quarter turn at either the foot or head of a straight staircase (or both). These turns reduce the linear length of the staircase – making them a good option for more rectangular hall spaces.

The quarter turns can also provide clear benefits for loft conversions, helping to minimise any loss of living space at the foot of the staircase and ensuring the upper steps run out into the centre of the attic, allowing you to maintain the minimum headroom of at least 2 metres beneath pitched roofs.



HALF-TURN

As their name suggests, these staircases incorporate a full half-turn at the mid-point of a straight staircase. In addition to creating a more rectangular footprint, this mid-level landing can also act as a resting spot for occupants or even a display area for favourite decorative pieces.

SPIRAL

Winding around a central pillar, spiral stairs provide a solution when you need to keep the footprint of the staircase to an absolute minimum. This is not only beneficial when overall floorspace is limited, but also provides a great option if the staircase sits in an open-plan space,

making a beautiful talking point.

HELICAL

Helical staircases feature a flowing curve but without a central pillar. This means the radius of the curve can be adjusted to your preference, either providing a gentle curve with a linear footprint or a tighter turn similar to a spiral design.

A bespoke manufacturer or joiner can also work with you to develop designs which may combine different elements of one or more of these styles. This can be particularly beneficial where you need to work around obstructions in an existing space such as the location of doors, fixed furniture or the pitch of a roof.

To ensure the staircase is safe and easy to walk up, it is recommended that the maximum pitch for straight stairs is 42 degrees



for a clear tread width of around 800 mm as a minimum in line with building regulations. For staircases serving a single habitable room (such as a loft conversion) it may be possible to reduce this to 600 mm.

To ensure the staircase is safe and easy to walk up, it is recommended that the maximum pitch for straight stairs is 42 degrees. For spiral and helical staircases, the total measurement of two rises (step-up between treads) plus 1 going (tread depth) should generally be between 550 and 700 mm and should be identical all the way up.

Spindles, treads, and handrails can all be selected in a range of profiles and designs, providing the balustrade height is at least 900 mm and no gaps are large enough to allow a 100 mm sphere to pass through.

With a bespoke staircase, there is also a huge range of design options to add a personal touch to your chosen style. For materials, you can choose conventional timbers, a combination of timber and metalwork with integrated metal supports and balustrades, or go for a full metalwork staircase manufactured from a material like cast aluminium. This can add a more traditional or contemporary feel, depending on the design you choose.



The right staircase can really transform and elevate a home. By working with a bespoke manufacturer or joiner, you can ensure the finished staircase not only works within your home's layout and usage but stands as a piece of personal design in its own right.

Richard Harding is the director of British Spirals & Castings

FINE-TUNING THE DESIGN

With each staircase layout, there is significant scope to tailor the design to ensure it works well within your home and meets your practical requirements. These include adjusting the width of the treads to provide more space for occupants to pass one another if needed. In most cases, you should plan

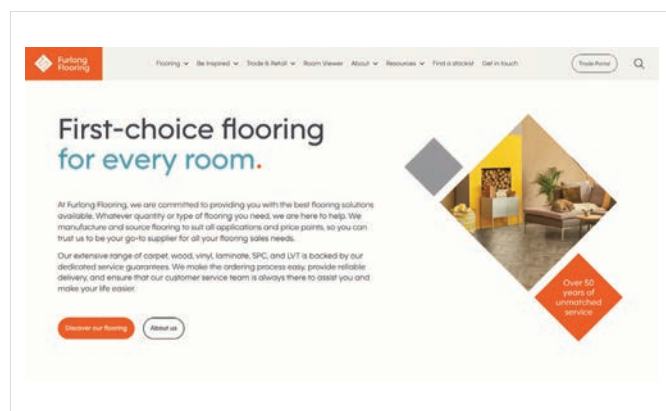
Colour psychology in the kitchen



In the kitchen and wider interiors industry, we both live for and through trends. We follow them, create them and/or ignore them. For example, the one we all hear of now is the cost-of-living crisis; and so we are turning to brighter colours to make us happier. The kitchen can be the ultimate portal for an expression of how we feel or want to be seen. **Keller** is well known for offering the widest range of colours and finishes in the kitchen furniture market – along with a vast range of cabinet options,

all produced by the most sustainable means possible. In addition, the company is proud to be a Carbon Neutral kitchen manufacturer since 2017 and is now on the way to becoming Carbon Negative.

www.kellerkitchens.com



Furlong Flooring launches new website

Furlong Flooring is delighted to announce the launch of its brand new website – furlongflooring.com. Featuring outstanding design, content and functionality this new online resource offers comprehensive information about its innovative and trusted flooring solutions. The new website has been redesigned and rebuilt on a new technology platform. With a fresher, modern look and feel, the website features new functionalities and content, and sections dedicated to new products and innovations. In addition, a 'Room Viewer' visualisation tool is designed to allow people to see exactly what each type of flooring will look like in their own rooms or offices. The new website presents and categorises Furlong's extensive flooring range which includes new and updated collections and product offerings. This includes the ground-breaking new EcoSense range of 100% recycled yarn carpets, and the luxury Beyond Wool® ranges to give customers more choice than ever before. Other new flooring products include durable and easy-to-clean vinyl flooring options with stylish designs and enhanced slip resistance, making them ideal for busy households and commercial spaces. There's also a wealth of useful information and resources for retailers, housebuilders and flooring contractors.

01322 628700 furlongflooring.com

Save money on your kitchen revamp with V33



Many people are wise to the tip of repainting kitchen cupboards instead of buying new ones in order to save money. But there is still the question of what to do with a tatty worktop. Now, you can save money here too. A paint from **V33** that is formulated for use on worktops as well as cupboards means the whole job is covered. With Teflon™ technology, V33 Renovation Cupboard & Worktop paint prevents culinary and domestic staining, and allows regular and easy cleaning without altering the colour and

finish of the paint. Its complex combination of exclusive polymers means it's highly resistant to heat, scratches, knocks, water and humidity. All of which means it's a sensible choice for worktops.

01797 367 555 www.v33.co.uk

In the relaxation zone

Johanna Elvidge of Marshalls explains how a zoning approach can help organise your outdoor spaces for relaxed 'quiet luxury,' and how different landscaping materials can help achieve your vision



Most often used as a term to describe the internal layout of a home, 'zoning' now has just as much purpose in the garden. And because people want to use their outdoor space for different purposes, it makes sense for self-builders to consider how to zone their gardens during the design and build space, rather than making retrospective updates later down the line.

To support them, here are some different garden zones that are most appealing and popular, along with advice on the different materials, installations and design features that can be used to highlight an area's specific purpose within a wider scheme.

RELAXING RETREAT

In recent research by Marshalls, 27% of people said they use their outdoor space as a means of escapism and stress relief.

The desire to create an area of tranquillity in outdoor living spaces has increased in popularity since the pandemic, when people needed a safe and relaxing space to unwind that wasn't off limits.

To achieve the 'quiet luxury' trend outdoors, use soft curving forms to create a grounded, relaxed and calm atmosphere. In terms of colour, warmer, earthy shades inspired by Mediterranean architecture and design are thought to tap into a peaceful aesthetic, so porcelain and sandstone products in these tones can help create the desired look and feel.

Natural planting brings you closer to nature, while a water feature will provide a relaxing musical backdrop away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. As the healing powers of water are becoming more widely recognised – from stress relief to reducing inflammation – outdoor

bathrooms, garden spas and reflection pools are becoming more popular in garden designs.

EMBRACING OUTDOOR COOKING & GARDEN GET-TOGETHERS

Outdoor cooking areas are perfect for alfresco socialising, with 26% of respondents to Marshalls research saying they have plans to add a dedicated outdoor cooking space to their garden.

While there are plenty of appliances like standalone barbecues and pizza ovens on offer, it's becoming increasingly popular to use hard landscaping products to develop an 'in-built' outdoor kitchen that is hardwearing against the elements, looks attractive, and can be used all year round. You can use a mixture of bricks and slabs to build up your space – remembering to designate areas for food prep and serving. After adding utility supplies, you can then

To achieve 'quiet luxury' outdoors, use soft curving forms to create a grounded, relaxed and calm atmosphere

install integrated barbecues, grills and even working sinks.

More than a quarter of people (26%) use their garden to entertain friends and family. To do so, consider how to create a space which exudes positivity and togetherness.

While installations like seating areas, pergolas and fire pits are well documented for their ability to bring people together, 2024 will see highly decorative features added to gardens to create a talking point amongst your guests. For example, patterned paving and outdoor tiles are in demand, as they add a touch of style to a garden. Today, tiles and paving are available in patterns and finishes such as corten and terrazzo, while other recent garden designs have used these products to create step risers, lowered seating areas and even outdoor dancefloors.

PERFECT FOR PAWS

Almost a fifth (19%) of people want to create a dedicated pet zone in the

garden – one which offers a space to play and act out their natural instincts. However, it's still key to ensure this zone lives up to every other element of your garden design.

Use fencing, bricks or stone to create a cordoned-off, safe space for your pet to roam, and consider adding integrated planters to inject some colour – just ensure the plants you select aren't poisonous to pets. Add hard landscaping such as porcelain or pebbles to make the space easier to clean and maintain, rather than grass which can succumb to burying and browning. Allow plenty of room for the throwing of toys, as well as a clean water supply and space for an outdoor bed. Also, be sure to provide shade using trees and large shrubs so your pet can enjoy their outdoor living without the risk of overheating in summer.

NATURE MEETS NURTURE

In the research by Marshalls, more than a third of people (36%) said they want to be able to grow their own

fruits and vegetables. This also aligns with people wanting to spend more time in nature, nurturing their own produce, and improving their wellbeing.

To achieve this, think differently about what you might normally have built to dedicate to planting flowers and plants, and instead create an 'edible landscape'. Raised beds are popular for growing vegetables while adding trellises and other above-ground structures will help fruit trees and climbers to thrive.

Gardens are an extension of our home, so by thinking about the different ways you might want to use your garden during the design and build process, you'll be in better stead to create a layout which can cater to your multiple needs. The key is considering the different ways that landscaping products can help you achieve your vision – because with a little creativity, no zone is off limits.

Johanna Elvidge is head of design at Marshalls

Avoid failures with BAL Waterproof 1C

When tiling in wet areas such as bathrooms, showers, wetrooms, pools, etc. it is vital to make the correct product selection to avoid costly failures.

Ensuring your wetroom, bathroom or shower installation is fully waterproof is perhaps the most important part of any developer's work, because tiles, tile adhesive and tile grout on their own will not inherently protect against water damage.

Did you know that the British Standards (BS 5385) and NHBC Standards 2023 both state, that in wet areas or areas of repeated or persistent wetting, backing surfaces should be protected by a suitable tanking system.

BS 5385 Part 4 states that the use of a ceramic tile together with an impervious tile grout and tile adhesive are NOT a substitute for a tanked



or waterproofed bath, shower or wet room installation. The effects of water damage are well known and documented.

Therefore, using a suitable waterproofing (or tanking) product – such as new BAL Waterproof 1C – is a prerequisite for a wet room installation, either within the building structures or ideally on the substrate surface prior to the application of ceramic or natural stone tiles.

Waterproofing on the substrate

surface is often ideal as this ensures water is prevented from tracking through a screed for example into other areas.

In a wet room, waterproofing should be specified on both walls and floors.

Available now, BAL Waterproof 1C is a ready-mixed tanking solution that can be used without priming on most common substrates* and is ready to tile after only two hours!

Formulated with fibre-strand technology for improved strength, it can be applied in one-coat on walls and floors with a brush, roller or 4mm notched trowel.

No additional tapes or matting are needed as it is crack-bridging from 2-3mm.

01782 591100
www.bal-adhesives.com

Painting pointers

Paint is the finishing touch for a vital looking exterior for either new builds or refurbishments, but as Tony Pearson-Young from AkzoNobel says, there is some essential practical advice to bear in mind

A fresh coat of paint can help rejuvenate and transform a tired looking house into a stunning property that looks just like new – and if it's a newly built property, adding a lick of paint can add a touch of character, too. However, there are some tricks of the trade that you should know before tackling an exterior painting project.

SEASON VS TEMPERATURE

The time to complete exterior painting projects is often associated with seasons, but it is less about seasons and more about temperatures, as temperature – whether too hot or too cold – can greatly impact the quality and longevity of the paint and its application. Painting in extremely hot weather (over 30°C) can cause paint to dry too quickly, leading to a poor finish and potential adhesion problems. The paint will likely crack and blister which can result in peeling and lead to visible brush or roller marks, further affecting the professional finish.

Painting in temperatures below 10°C is likewise not advisable, as it can slow down the drying and curing process causing the paint to become tacky and wet to the touch. Although daytime temperatures might suffice, it's important to check what the temperature will fall to overnight, as if it's expected to drop below 10°C, it could negatively impact the finish. At these lower temperatures, especially towards the end of autumn and early spring, there is a lot of moisture and condensation on surfaces, which will affect adhesion and the overall quality of the finish.

PREP IS KEY

Exterior painting projects require some additional preparation compared to interior projects, to ensure a perfect finish is achieved. All walls and surfaces require cleaning before work is undertaken to remove dirt, grime or loose paint, and to guarantee that all surfaces are smooth. What's more, mould and algae can sometimes be found, especially on a northern elevation, so a fungicidal wash



must be used to banish any existing mould as well as prevent the future growth of fungi, mould and algae.

Due to the way that temperature can impact exterior projects, efficiency should be prioritised. Tools such as jet washers, power-fed rollers, and spray machines all make the task of painting a lot quicker and easier to help avoid any

bad weather. In addition, using easy to apply and fast drying paint also saves time on a project.

KEEP SURFACES LOOKING FRESH

When selecting paints, it's vital to choose products that have been specifically designed for exterior use, as they have been through rigorous testing

and development to ensure maximum weather protection, shower resistance and anti-fade technology. It's also recommended to invest in premium paints from a reputable manufacturer, as they offer better adhesion, colour retention and resistance to fading and stains – helping to extend the maintenance cycle. Checking the can itself to see how long the product is expected to last is another factor in extending the decorating cycle.

Another tip is ensuring that redecoration work is planned a couple of years before the product's end of life expectancy. In those final few years, the aesthetic can deteriorate, so to keep properties looking their best, redecoration work should be scheduled before any issues arise.

PERFECT COLOUR PALETTES

Exterior walls are the biggest surface area to decorate, so carefully choosing a colour is vital. To pick the perfect colour palette, it's recommended that a small



test patch of favourite colours is done in situ, as different light conditions can change how shades look. A modern home's architecture can be highlighted through a timeless and contemporary colour palette, such as neutrals, greys or whites, with contrasting shades used for

the trim and woodwork to help maintain a clean and unfussy appearance.

When it comes to choosing colours for woodwork, timber cladding and trim, look to select a shade that complements the chosen masonry shade. If a lighter colour is chosen for the walls of a property, there is flexibility to play around with colour. For example, rich, dark colours can often accentuate a simple masonry colour. Colour accents can be added to small areas such as front doors and window frames, as their size means they can take on bolder shades with ease and allow room for experimentation. A pop of colour can also help to add a bit of personality, with deep reds and blues working well for a contemporary look.

All the essential tools, tips and tricks above will help make sure that an exterior building transformation is completed to a high quality, impressive finish.

Tony Pearson-Young is skills development consultant at AkzoNobel

Painting in extremely hot weather can cause paint to dry too quickly, leading to a poor finish and potential adhesion problems

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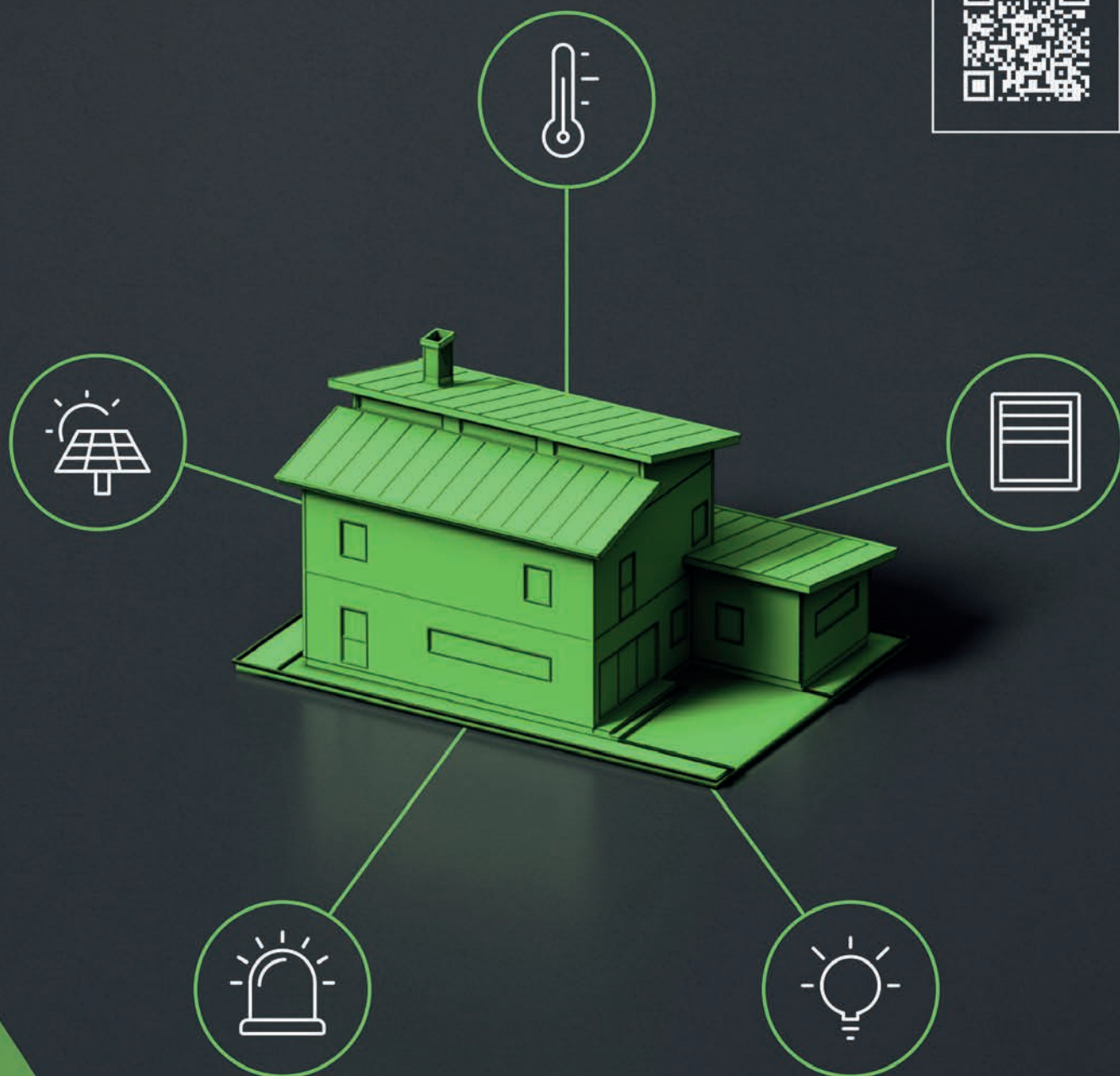
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Redefining eco-friendly living with smart home systems

Paul Foulkes of Theben explores the innovative functions of smart home systems that enable UK self-builders and renovators to create sustainable, resource-conscious homes without compromising modern lifestyles



In a time marked by growing environmental awareness, self-builders and renovators in the UK are turning to smart home systems to redefine their approach to eco-friendly living. Beyond mere convenience, these systems offer a myriad of unique functions that make homes more efficient, sustainable, and resource-conscious. In this article, we will explore how specific features of smart home technology achieve these goals, providing genuine value to those seeking to reduce their environmental impact.

SMART HOME FUNCTIONS FOR ACHIEVING EFFICIENCY & SUSTAINABILITY

ADVANCED LIGHTING CONTROL

Smart home lighting systems go beyond mere on/off switches. They offer features

like dimming, colour temperature adjustments, and motion sensors. These functions not only enhance ambience but also contribute to energy savings. Motion sensors, for example, ensure that lights are only on when a room is occupied, minimising unnecessary energy consumption.

INTELLIGENT CLIMATE CONTROL

One of the standout features of smart home systems is their ability to control and optimise heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Occupancy patterns are monitored and temperatures and air quality adjusted accordingly, ensuring that energy is only consumed when needed. This not only reduces energy waste but also results in substantial cost savings over time for the end user.

SHADING CONTROL

One often overlooked aspect of energy efficiency in homes is the shading of glazing, which is crucial for regulating internal temperatures and reducing the need for unnecessary heating or air conditioning. By integrating sensors that measure sunlight intensity and direction, smart home systems can automatically adjust blinds and curtains to block or allow sunlight as needed. This not only maintains a comfortable indoor environment but also reduces the reliance on HVAC systems, contributing to energy savings and ensuring compliance with Part O of the Building Regulations.

ENERGY MONITORING

Smart home systems provide real-time energy monitoring and insights,

empowering homeowners to identify energy-hungry appliances and behaviours. Armed with this knowledge, self-builders and renovators can make informed decisions to reduce their carbon footprint by using energy efficient solutions and adjusting usage patterns.

REMOTE MANAGEMENT

The ability to remotely control and monitor a home's system is common in smart technology. This feature allows homeowners to optimise their home's energy use even when away, ensuring that lights are turned off and HVAC systems are adjusted when no one is home so as not to waste energy.

SMART HOME SYSTEMS VS. DISPARATE SMART DEVICES

A critical point to emphasise is that a cohesive smart home system, as opposed to a network of disparate smart devices, is the most effective



way to reduce environmental impact. While individual smart devices offer some benefits, they lack the seamless integration that a comprehensive smart home solution provides. A unified system ensures that all components work together efficiently, avoiding conflicts and redundancies, resulting in a more sustainable and efficient home.

The future of eco-friendly living is bright and accessible, thanks to the

innovative functions and features offered by smart home systems. For self-builders and renovators in the UK, these technologies are more than just a convenience; they are a pathway to efficient, sustainable, and resource-conscious projects and offer long-term savings that contribute to resilient, future proofed homes.

As self-builders and renovators look for ways to align their living spaces with environmental values, smart home systems are an essential inclusion that not only reduces resource consumption but also enhances the quality of life. By choosing a comprehensive smart home solution over a collection of disconnected devices, homeowners can maximise their environmental impact reduction while enjoying the full benefits of modern, connected living.

Paul Foulkes is UK manager at Theben

A critical point to emphasise is that a cohesive smart home system, as opposed to a network of disparate smart devices, is the most effective way to reduce environmental impact

Magply Boards ensure sustainable SIPs panel passes fire test

IPP Ltd.'s widely specified **Magply** Boards have been successfully employed by the Surrey based manufacturer of an innovative new Structural Insulated Panel – or Bio-SIP™ system – in order to achieve compliance with EN-1365-1 and demonstrate the environmentally produced solution can be utilised for even more types of construction. Qube Building was established in 2021 to create small and versatile habitable structures which have been utilised as garden studios, forest lodges, pool changing rooms, gymnasiums and for other applications with performance and demountability at their heart. Crucially, its Bio-SIP™ panel system is able to match the coveted PassivHaus standard and has now undergone further evolution to incorporate the ArmaPETR Eco50 insulation from Armacell. This is produced from 100% recycled material, including waste plastic and has recently been awarded Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) status with a Global Warming Potential of 23.2 Kg/CO₂ eq/m³. Qube Building's Director, Justin Murray explained: "The Bio-SIP™ system offers unique innovation in sustainable modular building systems with unmatched thermal stability." Despite offering good adhesion for decorative render systems, Magply boards are very fire resistant thanks to their modified MOS formulation that also represents an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional plywood or OSB sheets.

01621 776252 www.magply.co.uk



Introducing Loxone

In a market where smart home solutions are often fragmented, with users having to juggle multiple apps, **Loxone** stands out with its holistic and integrated approach. It is about more than control, it is about home automation. The Loxone solution can bring together features such as lighting, heating, shading, energy management, and security into a unified, intuitive system – moving beyond the clutter of multiple apps and wall switches. This not only simplifies the user experience but enhances home aesthetics too.

Overall, Loxone delivers a complete smart home experience that is as visually pleasing as it is functionally more advanced. In a world where convenience often comes with compromises, Loxone redefines the standard, offering a solution where compromise is not part of the equation.

From apartments to bespoke detached self-builds, Loxone can be scaled to your specific requirements. With a primary focus on user privacy, the system never shares or even accesses your information, and all components are manufactured in Europe to high standards.

Loxone can also integrate with thousands of trusted brands such as Vaillant, Internorm, Miele@Home, Silent Gliss, Home Connect devices from Bosch, Siemens and Gaggenau, and many more.

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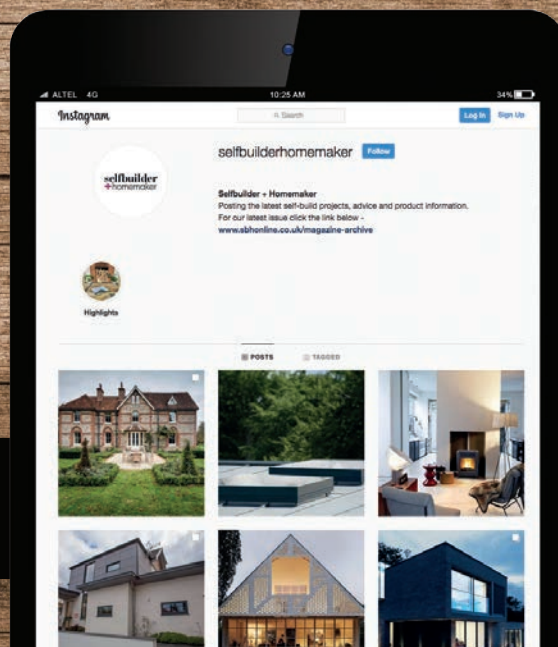
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