

selfbuilder + homemaker

MAY/JUN 2024

How to select your colour palette

Dulux Heritage's Dawn Scott sketches out a route through the colour landscape

The Window View

Victoria Brocklesby of Origin looks at what the Future Homes Standard means for the energy efficiency of glazing

A dramatic rescue

Bringing a Cornish cottage in Poldark's village back from the brink of collapse

Green dreams

Simon and Sarah designed their new home to bed into the Southwold countryside, with a green roof and a host of details that show sustainable builds can also be very beautiful

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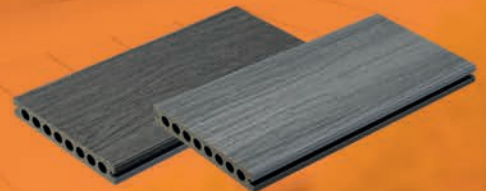
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FROM THE EDITOR...

I hope that you have managed to find a few hours at least in the last few weeks to enjoy your outside space, even if that might be in your current home or a muddy building site, while you wait for the construction to complete on your dream project.

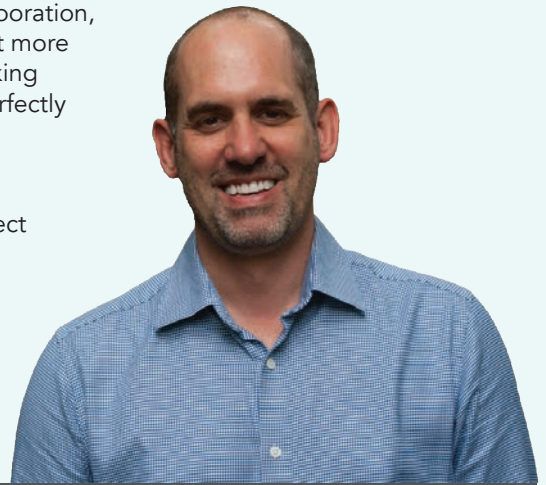
Being outdoors in your own garden, no matter how small, is one of the great pleasures of life – which creating your own home can help to maximise. Being able to grow your own produce as well as flowers and shrubs adds to the warm glow that being a gardener can create, and linking such outdoor spaces to your interiors with terraces and glazed doors is the finishing touch.

I was lucky enough to visit the Chelsea Flower Show the other day (courtesy of AkzoNobel, the paints and coatings people), and despite the five-deep crowds and persistent rainy weather, it was an amazing experience. With life becoming increasingly stressful, the show gardens seem to generally focus on providing a sanctuary, often using stone or metal to set off the plants and create shelter and calm.

But as our contributor Ronan O'Dowd from AG Outside Rooms says in our feature on page 65, a garden can be a fully functioning entertainment space, as much as a place to find peace and quiet, or it can be both. By contrast, Debbie Jeffery's case study in Suffolk (page 22) shows how you can create a new green space on your roof to help your home blend in, even if it's not necessarily somewhere you could hold a party!

Probably the only positive of global warming for us in the UK is that we will get a longer season of warmth to enjoy our home outdoor spaces. However (and sadly shown by 2024 so far), by heating up the atmosphere and increasing sea evaporation, global warming also means that we will get more rain. So you might want to think about making your new gazebo waterproof, as well as perfectly proportioned!

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Selfbuilder + Homemaker* – if you have an ongoing project you'd like to see featured in the magazine, please email jparker@netmagmedia.co.uk.

JAMES PARKER**ON THE COVER...**

© DAVID VALINSKY (PAGE 22)



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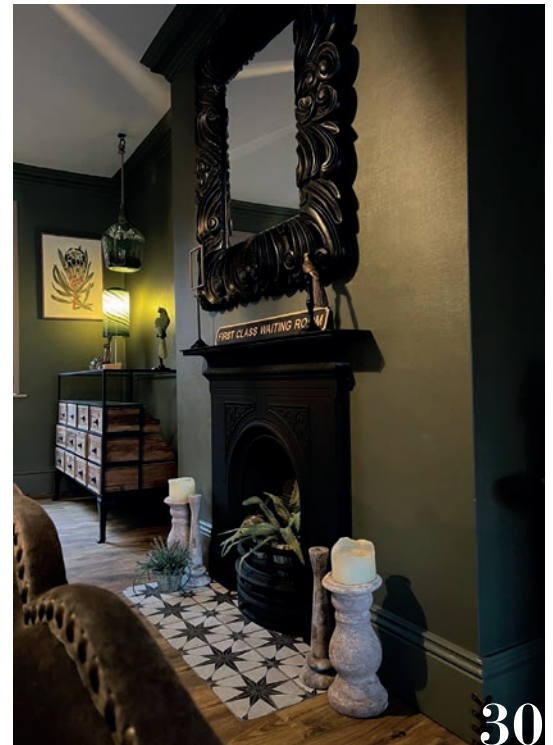
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selfbuilder Diaries

Jo and Andrew's dream New England-style home on the Dorset coast is finally taking shape after years of planning woes, and their original builder dropping out a week before demolition began! Jo takes up the story...

When we purchased our property in Dorset, we were living in Brisbane, Australia, and so hadn't stepped foot in it. But as we were drawn in by its great location and beautiful sea views, we perceived it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. However, securing the property required numerous middle-of-the-night Skype conversations to convince the previous owner's son we were the right buyers for their property. But, in 2017, it was finally ours.

Given its century-old vintage, the property suffered from persistent leaks, extreme cold, and extensive dilapidation. After seeing it in person for the first time, we decided that we'd achieve a better outcome if we knocked it down and undertook a complete rebuild, given the scale of work needed to bring it up to modern standards.

We returned to live in the UK a year later, appointed our architects, and thought we'd be demolishing the old house within a year. We were wrong!

Planning took two and a half stressful years – the planning committee were beyond slow, and it felt like our lives were on hold while we waited. The process included appealing to three refusals due to the council not following their process, engaging planning consultants, resubmitting plans and finally lodging a complaint to the council CEO. Despite all this, we finally managed to gain our planning permission in December 2021.

We engaged a different architectural practice to support us through the build itself. They have been great to work with, even when we probably drove them mad with our changes and endless questions!

We chose insulated concrete formwork (ICF) as our build method and viewed a



couple of other local ICF projects before finally committing. We chose to manage the build ourselves. This means that my day job is now sourcing trades, managing the timeline and budget, researching all things build related (we're learning as we go along), and getting stuck in wherever and whenever!

We've experienced the highs and lows you hear of and see on TV. So far, the worst moment has definitely been our original builder dropping out. We'd just moved out of the old house into a rental, and the demolition team were starting the following week. The builder had not been responding to our messages/emails for a few weeks. A Sunday evening WhatsApp confirmed our worst fears, that we'd lost our builder – cue lots of tears and sleepless nights.

We carried on with the demolition and groundworks while trying to find a replacement builder and accepted the inevitable delay. Our new builder delivered us our superstructure shell at the end of 2023 and is now working on the house exterior, most importantly wrapping and cladding the house to become watertight. Our builder has been great at interpreting my 'vision' of a New England style coastal home, patiently looking at the many Pinterest images I've shown him and incorporating changes during the build.

When you're self-building it's really important to take all the pleasures, small and big, as these are what keep you going. I never thought I'd get emotional watching the first concrete pour into our ground floor walls, but it turns out it was

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Jo & Andrew

a seminal moment for me – and happy tears this time! The day we finally got to stand on the second floor and saw the new and vastly improved sea view we'd gained by going up an extra level made all the stress and sleepless nights totally worth it. We'll never tire of that view and when we have a bad build day, that's where we head to remind ourselves why we're doing this.

We're currently fully immersed in the first-fix phase – equally busy but in a

different way. We'll be doing a lot of work that doesn't need to be signed off, for example laying the underfloor heating, installing the stud walls, plumbing bathrooms, fitting the kitchen and decorating throughout.

When we're not onsite, we spend hours online, researching things like smart technologies, designing lighting layouts and learning new DIY skills, as well as sourcing items for our home.

It's exciting to now have a 'house'

to work on – it's intense; at times overwhelming. 'Decision fatigue' is a real thing and you need a lot of resilience to build your own home. We've still got a huge amount of work to do, but standing back and looking at what we've achieved so far makes me really proud and gives us the motivation to finish what will be our beautiful home.

If you'd like to follow our build we're on Instagram @auster_icf_self_build

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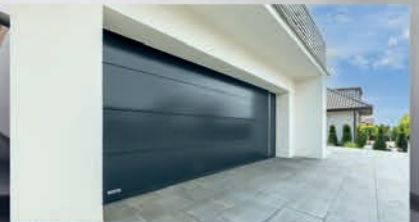
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The art of colour selection



Choosing the right paint colours for different rooms is more than just a matter of aesthetics – it's about understanding how colours interact with light, influence mood, and create

a sense of continuity. Dulux Heritage's Dawn Scott paints in some of the details

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING PAINT COLOURS FOR DIFFERENT ROOMS?

The way sunlight enters a space and the direction a room faces can significantly affect how colours are perceived. As such, light needs to be factored into the colour selection process.

For instance, when decorating a north facing room, it's best to avoid pale tones as they can look overly cool and washed-out in a room that receives little natural light. Warmer tones like Bathstone Beige, a rich, mid-toned cream with a warm yellow hue, can naturally brighten a space

and cast a warm and welcoming glow of sunlight.

On the other hand, south facing rooms, which are filled with warm light throughout the day, work well with almost any colour. However, cooler shades can help to balance the intensity of sunlight.

For east and west facing rooms, it's all about the time of day and when you'll be using the space. East facing rooms get natural light in the morning, so to maintain the feeling of light right into the evening when the room will feel cooler choose a warm shade like Potters Pink. West facing rooms feel cooler in the morning and brighter in the evening, so natural tones that keep the room feeling fresh and light during the day and make the most of the warm natural light during the evening are recommended.

HOW CAN YOU CREATE CONTINUITY BETWEEN ROOMS, WHILE SELECTING DIFFERENT COLOURS?

When choosing colours, a good place to start is the '60/30/10' rule. This is centred around the recommendation that no more than three main colours are used – 60% of the colour in your home should be the primary shade, 30% a secondary colour that complements the primary, and 10% an accent colour that either complements or contrasts with both the primary and secondary tones.

To help decide what your primary, secondary and accent colours should be, look to the other aspects of the home for inspiration. For example, period features or hardwood floors cannot be easily changed, so using colours that



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complement these existing shades will help provide some continuity.

Alternatively, you can find inspiration in your furnishings. The colours in your favourite pieces of art or furniture can guide your colour palette. A designer has already selected hues that work together in these pieces, so you can use them to your advantage.

WHICH COLOURS WORK BEST FOR BEDROOMS TO PROMOTE RELAXATION?

While the quality of your mattress, pillows, and bedding all contribute to a restful sleep, the hues you choose for bedroom walls can be equally impactful. Bedroom colours, whether light or dark, have their unique benefits. Light shades can help clear the mind, while deeper hues can foster a warm and relaxing atmosphere.

Green is an ideal choice for tranquil bedrooms due to its soothing influence

and association with the natural world. Sage Green – a blue-based green – is an excellent mid-tone that has become a modern classic for interiors.

Pastel shades are another great option as their gentle, muted hues can help to create a sense of peace. Lavender Grey – a blue-based purple with a dash of black – is pleasant to the senses and can instil a sense of calm the moment you step into your bedroom.

WHAT COLOURS ARE IDEAL FOR KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS?

When it comes to selecting the perfect colour for your bathroom and kitchen, there are several factors you should take into account. First, the size of the room plays a crucial role. Smaller spaces benefit from lighter colours that open them up and make them feel larger – whereas darker hues can add a sense of depth and warmth to a larger room.

The mood you want to create is also a key factor. For instance, if you want to create a calm and serene atmosphere in your bathroom, a cool tone, like Country Sky, is an ideal choice. Conversely, warm colours like Red Ochre can stimulate the appetite, which makes them a great option for kitchens, whereas blue is shown to have appetite-reducing effects.

The overall style of the home should also influence colour choice. If your home has a modern design, bold and contrasting colours might be a good fit. However, if you prefer a rustic style, earth tones could be a better choice.

Choosing paint colours isn't always an easy task but with the right approach and tools, you can create beautifully balanced spaces that reflect your style and meet your needs.

Dawn Scott is senior colour designer at Dulux Heritage



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DESIGN YOUR VERY OWN WONDERWALL

Interior designer Judith Harrop describes how with careful design, you can make a media wall for all your home entertainment needs that's an integral part of your interior design, and provides the right balance of aesthetics and function

The term 'media wall' has come to define an interior wall where the TV and associated media equipment are positioned and arranged to create a practical feature in the home.

Historically the television was situated in the corner of a room; the depth of older televisions not allowing them to be accommodated square onto any wall. With the introduction of flat screen TVs occupying a corner position was no longer necessary. Increasingly homeowners have chosen a more central position for the screen, either on a wall hung frame/bracket or on a low piece of furniture (commonly known as a 'media unit').

There has been a trend in recent years for these large screen TVs to get ever larger, and with the introduction of streaming, gaming consoles, and a variety of other plug-in units, we now require storage space close to the television.

These technological developments have grown hand in hand with changes to the interior design of our living spaces. Modern houses are built without chimneys and therefore lack chimney breasts. The lack of a fireplace has allowed the TV to become that central focal point.

So now the media wall is increasingly becoming a desirable element for many homeowners.

ADVICE FOR CREATING A MEDIA WALL

Ideally, work with a professional to help in the design and install, however for the enthusiastic DIY-er, planning (as with most things) is key.

The installation of a fully fitted media wall has become a potentially complicated undertaking. The complexity



will obviously depend on the design but a more elaborate construction, housing a variety of desirable elements can involve numerous trade contractors; joiner, electrician, plasterer, gas engineer, decorator and possibly specialist finishers.

Incorporating gas or solid fuel fires, will mean special non-combustible framework and reference to Building Regulations Part J. Ideally, let the supplier of the fire build this element as part of their installation. Whilst electric fires don't require the same level of protection, the heat given off will still potentially impact finishes, and the TV

itself. If you have a soundbar don't forget to make room for this.

The television is recommended to be fitted within its own recessed niche; this not only looks more streamlined but also protects the back of the TV from heat rising from your fire source.

Another way around the protection of your TV is to create an asymmetric design, when the TV is not directly above the fire but offset to one side. This can create an interesting aesthetic.

Cabinet, panelling, and a variety of textured finishes can give your room a real wow factor. Subtle LED lighting under shelves, along the underside



You can enhance 'media units' by using a surface finish such as wallpaper, slat walling or tiling

of cabinets or even back lighting the television all help to create a really special ambience.

Cable management and the position of your sockets is important. You can have sockets fitted inside cabinets or at the back of shelves. Ensure you have sufficient. Be careful where you put the socket behind the TV. A central position always seems like a good idea but be mindful of how the TV bracket is constructed; the frame may clash with the socket and not allow for the depth of socket and plug. It's a good idea to have purchased both the television and the bracket prior to building the wall detail.

Consider the weight of your TV. If you are building out a 'faux' chimney breast you will need to make sure that the TV's recess is lined with something substantial

in order to get a solid fixing.

Make sure cabinet is the right size for your other equipment, check dimensions prior to making or purchasing these.

Should you want to go a simpler route there are numerous furniture companies offering suitable options. For a modest cost you can find low-level storage designed for housing all the kit and allowing the TV to sit on top on a stand. You can enhance this by using a different surface finish such as wallpaper, timber slat walling, tiling or other decorative finishes behind the unit; defining the space and creating a feature.

Other companies provide modular units to create a more co-ordinated group of cabinets at varying heights and sizes.

Have fun with your planning, and detail

your ideas in advance and make sure you sketch out the design to scale. This way you can ensure that sockets are in the right place and that you have suitable storage. Assemble a collection of all the surface finishes you propose to use, and then be sure that they are suitably fire retardant (if you are incorporating a fire).

There are numerous ideas on Pinterest and Instagram to take inspiration from, and if you are familiar with the software, AI programmes such as Midjourney can be hugely helpful.

If you need help talk to your local joiner, cabinet maker or interior designer – their expertise will help bring your ideas to life.

Judith Harrop is partner at Judith Harrop Interior Design



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www.satara.com.au

2. The **Kew Penthouse Kitchen** by **Naked Kitchens** features cherry wood handles for a unique, characterful touch. Subtle blue and white hues create a relaxed atmosphere with textured finishes. The quaint kitchen boasts character; the pieces of art delicately showcased around the room give a homely yet well-travelled feel. Price: £12,000.
www.nakedkitchens.com

3. With its small footprint, this stylish **Inglesham Whitewash Oak Shaker Cupboard** by **The Cotswold Company** will give you ample storage room while taking up little floor space. The versatility of this unit means it will be just at home holding linens in a hallway as it is holding cereals and other dried goods as a kitchen larder. Price: £650.
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4. This **GoodHome Loreli Stainless Steel Effect Filter Tap** from **B&Q** provides a convenient and eco-friendly alternative to bottled water, bringing clean filtered water directly to your home. The dual function spray head allows for versatile and efficient cleaning performance. The stainless steel effect finish adds a contemporary touch to your kitchen. Price: £165.
www.diy.com

5. The **Phantom Frame Kitchen** by **Novy** includes an innovative box-in-box design which is surrounded by translucent glass on all sides, creating a floating aesthetic over a kitchen island. Providing the on-trend industrial look is the subtle linear black metal frame that supports the appliance and attaches to the ceiling. Price: £4,039.
www.novy.com

6. Introducing the **Ringo Counter Stool** by **Umbra** – a stylish and practical addition to any indoor or outdoor space. Crafted with an attractive bent metal frame and an organic shape, this counterstool is not only rust-proof but also durable. Its moulded mixed wood fibre composite seat is eco-friendly and features a long-lasting powder-coated finish. Price: £159.46.
www.umbra.com

Greening future homes

Victoria Brocklesby of Origin discusses how the Future Homes Standard legislation will impact housebuilding, and offers her advice to self-builders and renovators on how to comply when it comes to windows

The UK is placing more onus on 'green building' than ever before, demonstrated by the new Future Homes Standard legislation which is set to push the bar higher for thermal efficiency in new properties and home improvements.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE HOMES STANDARD?

The Future Homes Standard is landmark legislation that was first announced in the Government's 2019 Spring Statement. It states that all new homes built from 2025 will have to produce 75-80% fewer carbon emissions than previous regulations, and renovations to existing properties should be more carbon efficient too.

Although the full details are yet to be announced as a consultation process is currently underway, energy efficiency requirements for buildings, as of 2025, will be far more stringent.

This will impact self-builders and renovators planning new properties or home improvement projects for 2025 and beyond. Even those looking to replace windows or build an extension will also be subject to these higher standards.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE HOMES STANDARD CONSULTATION?

Currently still in progress, the Future Homes Standard consultation is discussing the requirements for energy efficiency within the housebuilding industry. This is to support the industry in achieving the targets initially outlined in 2019. The consultation had been scheduled to end on 6 March 2024 but was extended through to 27 March 2024.

The consultation is a result of the pushback from the wider construction industry against the proposed changes. Many argued that meeting the higher standards may lead to increased costs, which potentially could result in higher house prices or fewer building projects. Others stated that the transition is too fast and does not leave manufacturers enough time to adjust their products or develop new ones.



All new homes built from 2025 will have to produce 75-80% fewer carbon emissions than previous regulations

It will certainly be interesting to see how it develops, and whether the government is brave enough to stick to its original plans, despite the industry pushback. We know first hand how challenging it is to meet these stricter regulations, but it is possible.

My advice to self-builders is to be as prepared as you can be. If you're planning a project for 2025, ensure you're carrying out comprehensive research into how best to meet the requirements, which products you are investing time and money in, and which suppliers are already compliant or have plans in place to be as it proves their commitment to energy efficiency.

Both self-builders and renovators should pay close attention to the U-values in a project; a measure that tells

us the energy efficiency of all building materials, including windows and doors. Put simply, the lower the U-value, the better the insulating effect.

The government is currently asking for window U-values of 1.2 and door U-values of 1.0. However, the consultation could bring these U-value requirements lower, meaning that manufacturers that have only just met the Part L changes, which were introduced as a halfway measure, may struggle to meet the new requirements. What's more, as per the Future Homes Standard guidelines, retrofitting later is not allowed – so if you go ahead regardless, you may be in troubled water.

Victoria Brocklesby is co-founder and COO at Origin

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CASE STUDY

WETLAND WONDER

Simon Roberts and Sarah Bruml managed to achieve their innovative, sustainable and flood-resilient cabin on a highly sensitive site next to a tidal creek and natural wetland in Southwold, thanks to a bedded-in design

TEXT DEBBIE JEFFERY IMAGES DAVID VALINSKY





Serendipity led Sarah Bruml and Simon Roberts to buy a modest holiday cottage on the east coast, and to later relocate from London and make the area their permanent home. “We’d been looking for somewhere to spend our weekends when we came across Southwold, a small seaside town with a harbour,” explains Simon. “After viewing a property there, which wasn’t quite right for us, the owner mentioned a friend with another cottage for sale just up the road.”

At first, GP Sarah and industrial physicist Simon had been somewhat deterred by the proximity of a busy road, but were swayed by the one acre plot, nestled in a hollow within a shallow valley and beside a tidal creek which attracts all manner of birds and wildlife. “There were no immediate neighbours, and the location really swung it for us, so we bought the old cottage back in 1997 and enjoyed many happy times there over the years,” continues Simon.

Originally two 19th century reed cutters’ cottages, which were later combined to form one property, the building had stood empty for years after being flooded in 1953. The previous owners had rectified damp issues by the time Sarah and Simon purchased the property. “We’d been thinking for some time that we wanted to improve the layout and overall performance, possibly by building a replacement house, but we weren’t clear what restrictions might apply,”

says Simon, who has a long-held interest in energy efficient buildings.

The site is in a prominent position on the road into Southwold and was not an obvious choice for redevelopment. Located in internationally recognised wetland, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the Suffolk Broads, it stands adjacent to a creek, reedbeds and a salt marsh which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), creating a perfect storm of potential issues from a planning perspective. Any new building would also require a flood-resilient approach to construction.

Simon and Sarah therefore needed to meet a demanding brief: to create a new building which would enhance the surroundings, respect the environment, and deal with the risks from flooding, while meeting exceptionally high energy standards appropriate to the 21st century and sustainable into the future. “We asked if someone from the council planning department could advise whether it might be possible to build a house on stilts, to keep us above any potential flood water, and the planners then asked to see a design,” says Simon. “We took the decision to start big, so that we could always reduce the house size later as part of any negotiation.”

Using an online 3D design tool, Simon produced a drawing of a large, elevated house, which the planners responded to with a long list

LOW POINT

“Being so open plan means that sound does travel, despite all the insulation.”

– Simon

HIGH POINT

“Everyone comments on the view! We hadn’t really appreciated our outlook at the design stage, and the far-reaching views to which everyone gravitates.”

– Simon



MATERIALS

The house was built using a traditional palette of local materials, including yellow Gault bricks and weathered timber boarding to the mezzanine and first floor. The highly insulated and airtight building was designed from the 'inside out' to maximise views

UNEXPECTED FEATURE

"Our mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system brings in constant fresh air through ducts, which actually helps us to sleep better."

of policies with which the building would need to comply. At this point, in May 2013, Sarah and Simon invited several architects experienced with low energy buildings to visit the site and discuss their ideas.

"We chose architectural practices who understood the principles of sealed buildings and Passivhaus design, and whose websites also showcased interesting buildings – not just blocky 'passive houses' with small windows," explains Simon, who trained as a Code For Sustainable Homes assessor, a now discontinued environmental assessment method for rating and certifying the performance of new homes.

"Our first designer didn't fully grasp our ideas," says Simon, "so in 2014 we began working with prominent architect Jon Broome, who wrote *The Green Self-Build Book* and is highly experienced in working on Passivhaus projects, as well as being a self-builder himself."

Simon and Sarah collaborated over a period of 18 months to build up their design with Jon Broome and Sam Brown, his assistant. Featuring an undulating green roof to mimic surrounding fields and reduce the building's visual impact, *Creek Cabin* explores the possibility of creating a low impact home for the future while also conserving surrounding flora and fauna. The result is a building which sits within its unique site with the grace of a living object and is largely constructed with local, natural materials.

Covering 287 m², the layout includes an open plan upper floor of living, dining, and kitchen space with extensive views in all directions and across the creek. A pop-out pantry and larder have been clad externally in corten steel. Below this is a mezzanine with a bathroom and two bedrooms – one of which is a bed-sitting room with a balcony – and separate external access.

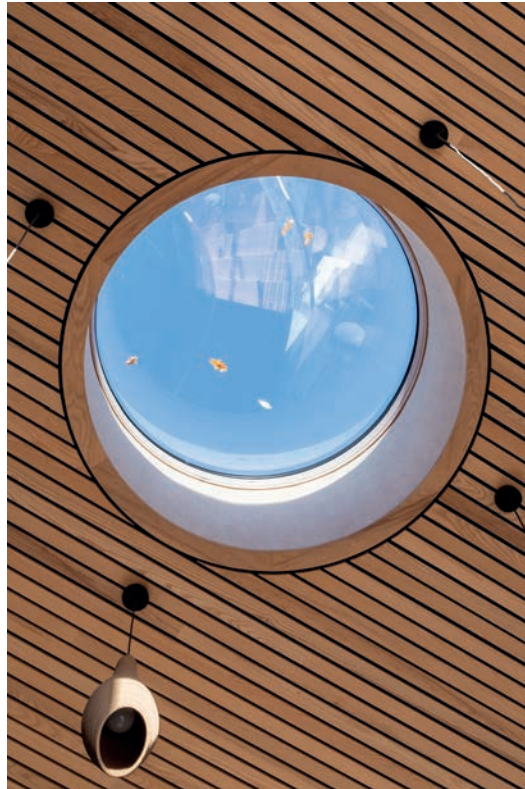
Instead of standing the house on stilts, as originally proposed, Jon Broome suggested infilling this potentially wasted undercroft space to create a flood resilient ground floor to include a snug and live/work office. A pneumatic lift for ease of access is expressed externally, with a full-height curved, triple glazed window.

Window positions have been located to frame views to the adjacent wetland and woodland, providing different vistas throughout the year, and the building features three raised terraces to maximise views of the surrounding AONB and provide blended inside/outside living, maximising the modest footprint.

"Suffolk is actually quite enlightened in encouraging modern architecture, and the planners appreciated that the house has a strong design element and convened a design review," says Simon. "A panel of architects and other experts visited the site and listened to the case presented by our architect, to assess the proposal. The only real alteration they wanted was to replace the mezzanine flat roof with an

LIVING SPACE

The first floor kitchen/living/dining space features circular skylights, timber and birch ply and large windows



additional wavy one, which we were happy to do.”

When it came to awarding contractors, Jon Broome stepped back and his assistant, Sam Brown, transferred to MAP Architecture – a young, forward-thinking architectural practice based in east London – to progress to construction.

“This project was about finding a way to live in harmony with the surrounding environment,” remarks MAP Architecture partner Robert Mawson. “The local area is rich with biodiversity, and a sensitive approach to all areas of the building has led to a home that not only sits within, but interacts with, the local wildlife.”

During Covid, monthly site meetings were conducted virtually, and Simon and Sarah divided their build into two phases – enabling them to continue to use the original cottage every weekend, then live on the building site during 2020. Once phase one had been completed, the cottage was demolished, and the couple moved into the new part of the house while the other section was built.

“We had a great relationship with our main contractor, MS Oakes, and although living onsite made the build and insurance cover slightly more complex, it meant that when Covid hit we could remain in Suffolk for lockdown,” says Simon. “We rented out our London home and basically never went back.”

From the start of the project, Simon and Sarah hoped to create something more than just a home for themselves. They wanted a

building which would have a light impact on the environment and would benefit the surrounding AONB, walkers, and visitors to the area. To achieve this, the house has been built into the existing bank, far back from the road to reduce its impact. Sunlight studies showed that the original cottage was in prolonged shade, and so the new house was positioned to minimise shading from large trees and to maximise sunlight and passive solar heating.

Situated within a flood risk zone, the building needed a flood-resilient approach to construction, and the ground floor was designed with a solid concrete floor slab and brick and block wall construction. Bricks needed to be selected with a low moisture absorption, limiting the choice of local options, and Cambridge Gault was chosen.

First floor cladding is Kebony, a sustainable softwood processed with an environmentally friendly bio-based treatment, which densifies the wood for long term stability and develops a natural silver-grey patina after exposure to sun and rain. The first floor was designed to sit above the one in 1,000-year flood event level and allows for climate change. A terrace bridging to the adjacent bank provides a safe evacuation route.

The curved living roof, with an integrated irrigation system, was original to this project and unseen elsewhere. Created using only straight sections of engineered timber joists, to avoid an overly complex structure, the tops of the timbers were boarded with three layers of 6 mm ply,

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECTS

Jon Broome (Phases 1-3)
www.jonbroome.co.uk

MAP Architecture (Phases 4-6)
map-architecture.co.uk

MAIN CONTRACTOR/JOINER
MS Oakes
www.msosakesltd.co.uk

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
Structure Workshop
structureworkshop.co.uk

STEEL FABRICATOR
Popper and Carter
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ISOLOHR SYSTEM
Groundwork Engineered Systems
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TIMBER CLADDING
Kebony (supplied by Brooks Bros)
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Kestrel Kitchens

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Stove Solutions

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Aline Johnson Glass Design

(Glass Hanky Shades)

www.alinejohnson.co.uk

Light Shopping (Cacio & Pepe cheese grater shades)

www.lightshopping.com/en

Made in Design (Libellule wire shades)

www.madeindesign.co.uk

Graypants (wasps' nest shades)

graypants.eu

Panik Design (Innermost Jeeves & Wooster bowler hat shades)

panik-design.com

UPHOLSTERY

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ROOF

The undulating planted roof is one of a kind, and was designed to echo the surrounding countryside.



flexed to follow the curved surface of the joists. The depth of the overhang increases as the roof height rises, to provide shading and prevent overheating in summer.

Creek Cabin required a bespoke glazing solution, and the GreenSteps Scandinavian Slimline timber/aluminium triple glazed system was chosen for a crisp, modern appearance. Unusual features include a four metre curved triple glazed window, Signal Yellow coloured opening sashes, and special installation detailing to allow completely hidden upper frames in the clerestory glazing.

Another challenge was the requirement to achieve high levels of thermal comfort while keeping the embodied carbon low – achieved using a mostly timber structure, with sheep wool and wood fibre insulation on the upper levels.

Throughout the detailing it was important to avoid thermal bridges, and this led to a highly insulated structure, including the ground floor slab, which sits on Isover IsoLohr loadbearing insulation formwork, manufactured offsite. The external walls at first floor level were constructed using Steico insulated joists, with wood fibre insulation fixed to the outside to complete the thermal envelope.

The project was a technically complex challenge for the couple, with Sarah and Simon requiring a range of off-grid energy systems and innovative features. "Although we built to Passivhaus guidelines, we chose

not to be restrained by seeking full Passivhaus certification, so we did install a boiler, which makes up for having so much glass," Simon asserts.

Even the family pets were considered in the design, with a thermally broken and digitally controlled petWALK pet door installed through the ground floor wall, allowing them to come and go without increasing the heat loss of the house. "Costs did go up and up," says Simon. "We went for an open book arrangement because the build was so complicated, and the final cost was around £1,950,000."

The annual energy demand for space heating and lighting has been optimised using Passive House Planning Package (PHPP) software, which also modelled the risk of the house overheating in summer.

A PV array is sited near the south east boundary, facing the adjacent field where it is not visible from the road or the footpath alongside the creek to the north. Top-up heating and hot water are provided by a wood pellet boiler, sited outside on the bank above flood level.

"We were extremely involved with every element of the build, and even mocked up our kitchen with chipboard, balanced on dustbins, to check spacing," says Simon. "Passive houses really should be the norm, and we wanted to show that low energy buildings can still look great." ■

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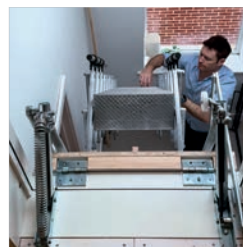


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Easy-to-use wall access loft ladder



This New Forest family home features an impressive double-height landing space. A small hatch positioned 2.65 m above the floor-level provides access to the loft, which offers useful storage and contains the boiler. The homeowners wanted easy access to the loft. The easy-to-use 'Supreme Vertical' wall access loft ladder from **Premier Loft Ladders** provided the perfect solution. Counter-balance springs and gas-strut mechanism make the ladder particularly easy to extend/retract. And the heavy-

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A LONG TIME COMING

For Paula and David Matthews, creating their dream home began back in the late 90s when they first bought their house, completing decades of good (and not-so-good) alterations before finally unlocking its full potential

TEXT HEATHER DIXON IMAGES PAULA & DAVID MATTHEWS

Paula and David Matthews' house in West Yorkshire has been a 'work in progress' ever since they bought it, nearly 30 years ago.

Most of that time has been a long and expensive learning curve as they have added, reformed and modernised their 1960s detached property to try and achieve the home of their dreams. Yet no matter how hard they tried, they never felt the house had quite reached its full potential, and they were always left wanting more.

That was until they were introduced to architect Mark Scratchyard of Guiseley-based MAS Design Consultants in 2019. With a visionary eye and an (almost) unlimited client budget, he came up with a grand plan that would shake out the property's niggles once and for all and turn the relatively uninspiring house into an 'eat-your-heart-out' family home with the Matthews' eagerly sought-after 'wow' factor.

The design was so radical that Paula and David fleetingly wondered whether it would have been better to demolish the house and start again, but the architect's main focus was to open up the disjointed ground floor rooms, replace an entire rear wall with glass and create free-flowing spaces that would transform the way in which it was used and lived in.

For Paula and David, it was a game changer.

"We spent a lot of time and money and made a lot of mistakes trying to get the house as we wanted, but we never quite felt we had got it right," says David.

"I think the house looked quite ugly before this," added Paula. "It was just an ordinary red brick house with white windows on the outside and a series of rooms inside. Lots of things didn't work from a design perspective. There had been so many additions over the years, including ours, yet nothing seemed joined up and we made some expensive mistakes trying to get it right."

The protracted story of their dream house began in 1997 when the property they had often driven past and commented on came up for sale.

"At that time we were living in a four-bedroom detached estate house, in a cul-de-sac, and had

reached a point where we wanted something bigger," says Paula. "We were young and starting out, and wanted to up-scale. We had no idea, really, what we were taking on."

The house they had their eye on was a five-bedroom detached property sitting in four acres of land in the middle of the countryside. It was close to Harrogate and Leeds, where David ran a packaging factory, and was well located for their two daughters' schooling. For large chunks of the year it was standing empty, the former owner spending a lot of time abroad, so when it eventually came up for sale Paula and David's offer was readily accepted.

On the day of completion, the house was still full of furniture and personal belongings, which the former owner then had professionally cleared while he was still in Italy.

"After that it was all systems go, and not long after moving in we decorated, recarpeted and generally gave the house a refresh," says Paula. "It had been neglected and was quite dated, but we wanted to live in it for a while before making any major changes."

Over the next 10 years they made a number of key changes to the floorplan to create more living space and join the garage to the house. They built a single-storey games room and replaced the dark brown stained wooden windows with Georgian-style white PVCu windows – a decision they later regretted even though it was a popular choice at the time.

They also built dormer rooms over the garage. These adjustments gave them three extra rooms, increasing the house from a four bedroom to eight-bedroom property with four family bathrooms.

Things settled down again while work and family commitments occupied most of their time but then, in 2019, they found themselves with enough time and funds to be able to revisit their plans for the house and take it to its next phase.

By this time the girls were young adults, David had diversified into property development alongside the packaging business, and they had reached the crossroads of either selling up or getting the best out of their family home.

LOW POINT

"Changing our minds over small things which were then changed 10 times."

– David Matthews

"Delays with deliveries or days when I couldn't see progress being made. I learnt that you have to allow for factors beyond your control, that even though you have a timeline in mind you have no control over unexpected problems that crop up along the way."

– Paula Matthews



“Even though we had made all these changes, we still felt the house wasn’t reaching its full potential. We could have moved, but we love the location,” says David.

Through his property development business, David was in an ideal position to get a team of builders and contractors on board to do any major structural work and to link up with architect Mark Scratchyard via their builder, Jamie Carter of Leeds-based Albion Builders.

“Mark helped us to see the house totally differently,” says Paula. “I was always thinking about things we could have done differently or better. I was always coming up with new ideas of designs I liked or rooms that inspired me on social media. I think we both realised that the house wasn’t quite where we wanted it, but we weren’t sure what we did want!” Not only that, but they had no idea where to start. With so many alterations and additions over the years, the only thing they were sure of was that the house didn’t flow very well. It was, says Paula, very disjointed and, in many ways, still quite dated.

But when Mark came up with an alternative plan for the house, Paula and David were bowled over by his vision and ideas.

They included a radical redesign of the whole ground floor, knocking out an exterior wall across the back of the house to make way for a wall of sliding doors opening onto a covered patio area; removing a wall between the kitchen and dining room; reconfiguring the hall and stairs and turning the entrance area into a two-storey glass atrium which would draw masses of natural light into the main living spaces.

“Between Mark and Jamie, they managed to get as many square feet as possible into the areas being developed,” says David. “The footprint of the house remained the same, but that was it. Everything else changed beyond recognition.”

The plans were passed by Leeds City Council without any changes to the design or objections and the builders were on standby to begin work straight away – just months ahead of lockdown.

The family – including both daughters, their son-in-law and infant grandchild – all moved into one side of the house while the work was being done. The build team meanwhile started to demolish the internal walls between rooms that were being opened into large, light living spaces.



During this early stage they also demolished an exterior wall at the back to create the opening for large, sliding glass doors that would seamlessly link the house and garden.

Paula and David relied heavily on Jamie's experience and expertise to turn the architect's plans into reality, after giving the architect 'free rein' to come up with a radical design.

"It's really important to have a good relationship with your builders," says David. "We relied on Jamie to do what he does best. You need to have a good rapport with your builder and know that they will do their best job, at the best price, on your behalf."

Jamie also helped them to understand the order of the build itself – and to be flexible when materials failed to turn up on time.

While Paula and David were very happy with the way the build progressed overall, there were a few points of frustration and learning curves for both of them. Paula became particularly frustrated when she felt progress wasn't being made – especially when the sliding doors took eight weeks to arrive. David, meanwhile, began to wish he had broken down the costings into

more manageable sections, so he had a better overview of the spend – which ultimately came to around £300,000.

"In hindsight, I would have been less inclined to rush into things and taken more time over the detail. It's not the big jobs which catch you out, it's all the smaller expenditures which mount up, especially things like fixtures and fittings."

In spite of that, they made very few changes to the initial design.

Those they did make included swapping bi-folds for sliding doors across the rear of the property, changing the style of the units in the kitchen and swapping their original plans for internal Crittall doors to look-alike alternatives to save money. None of these changes delayed the renovation works, however, and the project – which started in September 2022 – took the best part of a year to complete.

The entrance atrium at the front of the property was done first. The original entrance comprised a single-storey porch set into a two-storey overhang at the centre of the main part of the house.

This was extended upwards and outwards to

HIGH POINT

"When the build was finished, the process was still quite raw in my mind and it took a while to forget the negatives, so the high point came about six months later when we came to truly appreciate what a fantastic house it's become."



create a two-storey glazed atrium, supported by three steel girders, which has transformed and modernised the front of the property, inside and out.

With this section complete, the builders turned their attention to the back of the house, demolishing internal walls to open up living spaces between the old kitchen and dining room, along with the utility and a room which was being used as a gym. A partition was built between the new-size dining-kitchen and the rest of the house so the builders could take down the rear external wall to create a nine metre-long opening. This required two major steel girders to support the upper floor.

It was a nail-biting moment for Paula and David. "It could have caused massive problems because the wall was supporting the rest of the house across the back," says David. "I was very relieved when it was secured."

There was still a knock-on effect on the rooms above, however, where cracks began to appear in the plasterwork due to the shift in the overall structure.

"We had to support the exterior wall with

acrow props before installing two long steel beams across the width of the opening," says Jamie. "It was quite straightforward in building terms, but we had to seal off the rest of the house as efficiently as possible to keep the dust and debris to a minimum, and there was some remedial work to be done in the rooms above further down the line."

At this point, the builders created the basic structure for an all-weather canopy from the back of the house, with a corresponding veranda directly off the main bedroom above.

Floors inside were relaid with a mix of concrete and suspended floors to accommodate Karndean floor coverings. In conjunction with this, all the old white Georgian-style windows were replaced with flush fitting PVCu windows in anthracite and two sets of sliding doors across the main opening into the garden.

Two smaller rooms – a cloakroom and toilet which had no natural light – were also fitted with lantern lights and space-saving sliding pocket doors, whereby the door slides into a purpose-built wall cavity.

All the restructured rooms were rewired and



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BUILDER

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WORKTOPS

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replumbed before being plastered out ready for second fixes. The new kitchen was last to be completed, but proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the renovation for Paula and David.

Their original preference had been for something really modern but Paula was struggling to see how that would complement the age and essence of the 1960s/70s house. They finally settled on a hand-built 'modern-vintage' kitchen from Wharfedale Interiors, choosing a rich deep green colour to complement the wood-style floor.

With everything finally complete, it took a few months for Paula and David to get past the upheaval of living on a building site for a year and start to really enjoy their new-look home.

"Not all the rooms were affected by the changes, so we still had the old games room – now a media room – and two bedrooms above which were untouched," says Paula. "It meant we had somewhere to escape to while the house was in chaos. There was a point where we had no kitchen at all for a couple of months, which was quite challenging. We had a kettle in the garage and lived off takeaways for a while."



Once everything was finally complete, it took a few months for Paula and David to get past the upheaval of living on a building site for a year and start to really enjoy their new-look home

But now the dust has – literally – settled, Paula takes a more pragmatic view of the process.

“Looking back, the fact that we were without a kitchen for a while seems like nothing in the great scheme of things, but at the time I would get frustrated when things took longer than we anticipated,” says Paula. “I was happy as long as progress was being made, but you have to allow for delays and things outside of your control.”

Most of the renovation work was carried out during lockdown which presented its own unique set of challenges, including an increase in material prices, but it had its bonuses too. The builders were able to focus 100% on the job, while Paula and David were onsite to oversee the build and make quick decisions when necessary.

“You do get decision fatigue,” says Paula. “Sometimes the smaller decisions – like what style door handles you’d like – are the most challenging because there is almost too much choice, and you know you have to live with those decisions.”

That said, there is nothing about the house they now regret.

“It’s taken many years and many changes to get the house to this point,” says David. “It might have been cheaper to have knocked it down when we bought it and started again, but we didn’t know back then what we know now. Not only that, but we would have lost all the layers of the building’s history, character and unique story. So we have no regrets. We finally have the house we always wanted.” ■

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Limitless possibilities

Here, Paul Higgins of TuffX explores the key reasons for self-builders to specify bi-fold doors, from slimline sightlines to revolutionary heated solutions.

Bi-fold external doors offer the ideal balance of practicality, aesthetics, and functionality, whether used to create unobstructed garden views in a new build, or add a contemporary touch to a period property renovation. Expert design and specification of the bi-folds are crucial to ensure the view beyond the windows is maximised. Depending on the width of the opening, opting for wider individual doors will automatically reduce the number of mullions, for better sightlines. Slimline frames allow the panel/glazing to be maximised with fewer panels per opening to flood the internal space with even more natural light.

Generally, the minimum recommended width for a bi-fold design would be 140 mm (4.7 ft), allowing for two panels – a configuration that would benefit from a slimline sightline solution. Then, upwards, there's no limit to the number of doors; there would be increased requirements for how many tracks must be joined together during installation.

While not strictly 'bi-fold', as they're usually a slide-and-fold system, fully frameless options further minimise interruption of the vertical sightlines to create a 'wall of glass' effect visually.

REVOLUTIONARY HEATED GLASS FOR BI-FOLDS

Taking bi-folds to the next multifunctional level, it's now possible to specify heated glass into bi-folding doors, enabling both natural daylight and thermal comfort to be enhanced simultaneously. A sealed unit can be combined with an intelligent, invisible conductive coating that is electrically heated to convert electric power into radiant heat. The units are thermostatically controlled, creating ambient temperatures ideal for aluminium bi-folding door systems.

The glass surface temperatures reach 35-40°C and are controlled via a wall-mounted thermostat, allowing the unit to become the primary heat source, freeing up wall space where radiators would be, and enhancing interior layout opportunities. The average hourly cost of around 9p per bi-fold door means that for example, a three-door bi-fold configuration running for five hours



per day will cost around £1.35 (based on an electricity cost of 25p/kWh). The installation costs are lower than electric underfloor heating or traditional radiators, making it a more budget-friendly option.

Heated glass also dramatically reduces condensation, preserving uninterrupted views and potentially contributing to a healthier indoor environment. Plus, no ongoing maintenance is required, providing a 'hassle-free' heating solution compared to systems that need regular servicing.

CUTTING (OUT) CORNERS

For some projects, a cornerless bi-fold configuration will truly open up a property's interior to the outside by installing two sets of doors at either 90° or 135° to each other to create a seamless transition. Aside from the specification of the doors themselves, whether they are slimline, frameless or incorporate heated glass, another key consideration with a corner-less design is the structural implications.

When removing a corner of an existing building or incorporating a corner-less design into a new build or extension, there are a couple of ways to achieve the structural requirements to ensure the weight of the building's upper floors and roof is supported. A structural engineer may advise installing either a corner post potentially together with RSJs on either

side of the opening or a cantilever roof.

Both options will provide reassurance that the building is structurally sound and ensure there isn't too much weight on the door frame once in place, as this could prevent the doors from sliding and functioning correctly. Once the opening is structurally sound, the bi-fold door design itself and, notably, the costs are no different from specifying doors for any other opening.

ACHIEVING THE IDEAL BALANCE

Whichever product and design specification works best for the project, it's important to take a broader view of how the bi-folds work with surrounding spaces. When choosing whether to incorporate a traffic door for easy access to the garden or which direction the doors should slide and gather into, consider how this will look and function outside. For example, when open, will the doors be stacked in the middle of a patio creating layout issues, or if they fold inside, will it prevent furniture from being placed by the window?

Walking through and planning these aspects at the design stage is critical to ensuring the finished installation provides the perfect balance of aesthetics, functionality, flexibility and, with heated glass, thermal comfort.

Paul Higgins is commercial director at TuffX

Collard Towers, Hilton, Cambridgeshire



Seasoned self-builders Sarah and Rob Collard have designed and built not just one family home but two. 'A few years ago we bought a plot of land, demolished the existing house and self-built our dream home,' says Sarah. 'It was featured on Channel 4's 'Build the Dream' programme and we really thought it was our forever home. But we'd always loved another plot, in the same village, and when it came up for sale we couldn't resist starting again and building our current home, 'Collard Towers'.'

A FOCUS ON OPEN PLAN, LOW ENERGY LIVING

Although the new plot was smaller it was set back from the road, wasn't overlooked and had a south facing garden with fabulous countryside views. For Sarah and Rob, building Collard Towers was also a chance to capitalise on the skills and knowledge gained during the first build: 'Although we loved our home, we knew we would have done some things differently if we'd had more experience,' says Sarah. 'So we decided to go ahead and create a more contemporary home with a real focus on open plan, low energy living, with plenty of space for our family and dogs, and with lots of VELFAC triple glazed windows and VELFAC doors. In

fact we'd installed the VELFAC system in our first home (having seen VELFAC at a Homebuilding & Renovating Show) and didn't think twice when specifying it again for Collard Towers. We really like the slim, durable aluminium / wood frame, and we knew the windows would flood every space with natural light, make the most of solar gain to help reduce energy costs, and provide some great views over nearby fields. We also knew VELFAC was very competitively priced.'

EXPLOITING VELFAC FRAME VERSATILITY

When it came to frame finish for Collard Towers, Sarah fully exploited the versatility of the composite VELFAC frame construction: 'Externally, we've gone for a black finish for every window frame and door, while internally we've specified white window frames in bedrooms and bathrooms, and black frames for ground floor rooms, shared spaces and the five VELFAC doors.' These statement frames add real impact to the property, not least in the stunning entrance hall. Here, an impressively large black-framed VELFAC window screen rises above a VELFAC front door and up into the vaulted roof space, illuminating both the hallway and a beautiful

oak staircase.

Sarah and Rob (an engineer) designed and managed the whole project - including window design, specification, and energy efficiency calculations - while also working with a builder and range of contractors, including local VELFAC distributor Viewnique. 'We found Viewnique on the VELFAC distributor database and they've been great from start to finish,' says Sarah. 'Everything has gone very smoothly - even the installation of the large windows above the hall - and in fact the company will soon return to touch up any VELFAC doors damaged by other trades while the build was being finished, which is a great level of service.'

The process of building Collard Towers was not without its challenges but Sarah and Rob are delighted with the end result: 'Coming through the VELFAC front door always brings me such joy,' says Sarah. 'I have a real 'pinch me' moment when I walk into the house that we have spent so much time planning and building. It takes me a moment to remember that this isn't a beautiful rental property but all ours and that we live here!'

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Why door and window colour matters

Victoria Brocklesby of Origin discusses the impact of colour when choosing doors and windows, and its importance in design decisions

For self-builders and renovators, the decisions are endless: layouts, materials, and of course, aesthetics. One element that can be overlooked, however, is doors and windows – the ‘eyes’ of a home. While their functionality is important, the colour of these elements plays a surprisingly significant role in shaping the overall character and personality of a home.

Doors and windows have a big impact on both the interior and exterior of a property. The colour of a front door, for example, plays a big part in creating first impressions and boosting kerb appeal – setting the tone for the entire property. Opting for soft pastel colours can create a warm and inviting look, whilst choosing monochrome or grey shades can contribute to a sleek, modern aesthetic.

The colour of door and window frame can also either complement or clash with a home’s architectural style. Traditional homes might benefit from classic creams or neutrals, while contemporary spaces can handle bolder pops of colour or sleek grey and black hues. That being said, when chosen carefully, contrasting tones can add a unique stamp to any property. For instance, a statement red door can look fantastic in a traditional, brick property, while warm pastels can add instant character to a newbuild.

Colour can also influence the perceived amount of light and space in a home. Opting for lighter colours such as white or cream will help reflect sunlight, making rooms instantly feel larger and airier. On the other hand, if looking to create cosier, more intimate spaces, opting for darker colours can help absorb the natural light.

Before choosing coloured doors or windows, it’s worth double-checking whether the property is covered by any restrictions. For example, if a property is in a conservation area, renovators may need to seek permission if they plan on opting for a colour which is out-of-keeping with neighbouring properties.

It’s also important to consider how



the interior will interact with the colour scheme with the doors and windows. Remember, most people redecorate rooms much more frequently than they replace their doors and windows, so it’s important to select a colour that will stand the test of time and complement a variety of interior schemes.

As well as the interior, the frames will need to complement the property’s brickwork, cladding, or render. Some bespoke doors and windows will also offer dual-colour options, allowing selfbuilders to opt for a different colour for the interior and exterior of the frames.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MANUFACTURER

With so many door and window manufacturers in the UK, selecting the right one is crucial for achieving the desired look, especially when working with a specific colour scheme.

When researching a supplier, selfbuilders and renovators should consider the colour range they offer. Do they offer a diverse palette? Do they offer dual colour options? Fenestration is a big

investment, so we’d never recommend compromising when it comes to colour.

For those desiring an unusual shade, it’s best to opt for a manufacturer that makes its products bespoke to ensure there is plenty of choice. Some premium quality doors and windows are available in over 150 RAL colours.

It’s also important to investigate the quality of the finish as this will have a big impact on the colour and how it lasts over time. High quality aluminium doors tend to be powder coated, a process which involves applying dry paint and baking at extremely high temperatures to form a hard coating. The better the powder coating, the better the finish and the more durable the doors will be. There are several ways to determine this. Ideally, we’d recommend opting for a company that has complete control over its own powder coating process to guarantee quality. Selfbuilders and renovators should also check the guarantees and warranties offered on the finish.

Victoria Brocklesby is COO at Origin

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CASE STUDY

A DRAMATIC RESCUE

A cottage in the Cornish village which hosted Poldark saw its own share of drama when it was rescued from the point of collapse by Mark Semmens

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT IMAGES CORNISH GEMS



In 2018, a tiny cottage in a Cornish village made famous by the Poldark TV series was well-known locally for all the wrong reasons. Derelict for two decades, the cottage was roofless, windowless and the first-floor bedroom – complete with bed – had ended up in the ground-floor living room. Reminders of the home's former occupants were poignant; personal belongings ravaged by time and water ingress spoke only of decay and neglect, where once there was a family.

"We had been trying to buy it for 20 years," says Mark Semmens, who runs a fuel supply company with his father, Stephen, in the county. "My parents live very close by and cared for the former owners Mr and Mrs Farrar before they passed away." The cottage was subsequently neglected by the elderly couple's son, who lived elsewhere, and Mark was were repairing it at his own expense [with the owner's permission] before they even bought it, "to stop debris from hitting my parents' home." He remembers

With the chimney having collapsed, the lean-to kitchen detached from the main structure, and ivy everywhere, it was a challenging renovation

The cosiness factor of this little cottage cannot be overstated, and is further enhanced by the new wood-burning stove, creating that indefinable sense of 'hygge' that makes a Cornish cottage so desirable



a night of 95 mph winds, which saw the roof of the old lean-to lifting. "My dad and I were there with some friends, trying to hold it down with sandbags and rope. Then, the main roof blew off – we were lucky we heard it going and got out of the way in time to not be hurt."

After the Farrar's son also passed, family tracing company Heir Hunters found distant relatives, and the property came to market. With the chimney having collapsed, the lean-to kitchen detached from the main structure, and ivy everywhere, it was a challenging renovation prospect, but "we weren't daunted," says Mark.

However, Mark and his father had an advantage, come the auction: "People came to view it, but they had no clue what was inside, as there was no access. We knew what would be involved." Yet despite being familiar with the cottage, the day Mark and Stephen got the keys, they had a surprise.

"We couldn't get through the front door," recalls Mark. "We eventually broke through and realised the front wall had collapsed on the inside, so we boarded it up again."

Fixing this structural failure was the first phase of a five-year project to rescue the cottage. As the property was unsafe and at risk of collapse,

Mark applied for planning permission to take down the front wall and roof, and rebuild them.

Yet there the cottage had another surprise waiting for Mark. When the application for phase one went to the local planning office, the cottage was treated as a listed property, despite not being on the register, but being in a conservation area.

"And, around 2002, the council wrote a conservation report on the village and named this cottage as a 'property of significance'." This meant that, although Mark was not required to apply for listed permission, the conditions attached to his permission were strict and, of course, expensive.

With planning granted, Mark hired his cousin's building firm to take on this painstaking task.

"We had to number the [granite] blocks in the front wall and put them back in the same order," says Mark.

Once the building was secured, Mark turned his attention to a full restoration. After looking at several local architectural firms, Mark had chosen James Moran and Dan Sheriff at Lilly Lewarne to work on the project from the start.

"James was brilliant, he knows the area and the planners," says Mark. "We didn't



have time to project manage and working with them was great." The second round of planning permission focused on removing the lean-to ground floor kitchen extension and replacing it with a two-storey extension to create a new kitchen and two ensuite bathrooms upstairs, as well as adding a new timber porch, incorporating the outbuilding as a 'snug', and generally restoring the fabric of the building.

"My brief to James was 'it has to be wow'," says Mark. "And it is. The front of the cottage looks like it did when it was built," – estimated to be some time in the 1700s. "It looks bigger from the outside than it is, as the granite walls are three feet thick, so we went open-plan inside and took off the back wall, extending out as far as we could go; about nine feet."

The additional requirements from the special conservation status included cladding the upper storey of the rear extension in the same Cornish 'Delabole' slate as the roof, "which together cost us tens of thousands" says Mark. There are also three rooflights on the property, as Mark was not permitted to add windows upstairs at the back, due to overlooking issues. The only rooflights permitted were conservation-

approved, marine-grade stainless steel framed units. This is because the cottage is in a coastal village, where charming sea views are offset by a fine layer of salt from wind-driven spray after a winter storm.

"The whole property has been specified to deal with the elements, using marine grade fittings, so they should – in theory – last," says Mark.

This second phase of the works turned the building from a derelict wreck to the pretty cottage Mark always knew lay beneath the neglect. Mark's builder, Darren, took out what was left of the first floor to make it safe and also took down the back wall. When this was rebuilt for stability, it was thinner and the extension added, with the stairs moved to this part of the building from their previous position in the middle of the cottage, opposite the front door.

Although the new windows are conservation-grade PVCu with the appearance of timber, the remaining new joinery was made bespoke by local craftsman Robert Clackworthy. This includes the new front porch, which ramps up the cuteness factor of the cottage considerably. Robert also made the front door and the fascias.

MARK'S TOP TIPS

- * Make sure you know exactly what the property needs before buying it
- * Use professionals who specialise in projects that you're about to undertake
- * Use builders that are realistic in terms of what they have to do – so that they price the job correctly and you don't get too big a shock before you commit



When it came to the finishes and furnishings, Mark worked with Cornish Gems Interior Design and only has praise for their work: “Tara did an amazing job. She listened to us and came up with great ideas”

Inside, the interior doors are off-the-shelf in solid oak and the bespoke stairs have solid oak treads.

Although the cottage is a solid stone-built property, granite is notorious for damp problems. The pointing is all lime mortar, which allows the building to breathe, but it still needs to be weatherproofed. Darren used a form of tanking called a cavity drain membrane, which is often referred to as having an ‘egg crate structure’. This is fixed to the interior stone face, with the bottom of the membrane extending past the new floor construction. This allows moisture to “track down the cavity and drain at the base of the wall to free-draining ground,” explains Dan Sheriff of architecture practice Lilly

Lewarne. “These types of membranes are often specified for projects such as barn conversions, and there are a wide range of manufacturers and suppliers to choose from.”

Mark then had a new timber frame slotted inside the walls, which is insulated and sealed with plastic sheeting and plasterboard. The build system in the extension is the same, as the exterior is clad in either granite or hung slate.

The new roof has a steel frame, which is supported on both the existing external walls using concrete pad stones, and a centralised vertical steel column, which extends down to the first-floor level and is supported by a series of horizontally spanning steels, which connect into the existing external wall construction.



"The central steel column is concealed within a partition at the first floor, and due to the nature of the steel design, the need to have any steelwork breaking up the ground floor accommodation was avoided," says Dan.

This deeply rural village has no mains gas, but Mark didn't want to blight the pretty front garden with an oil or LPG tank. Mark also ruled out the fashionable option of an air source heat pump, as the only possible location for the exterior unit was underneath a neighbour's window and "heat pumps don't do well in this area, as they rot out," he says. The solution was an electric boiler, coupled with underfloor heating on both floors, as they didn't want to lose space to radiators. Mark installed a super-thick engineered floor upstairs to accommodate

the underfloor heating pipes.

The old cottage never had a bathroom – the previous owners used a tin bath in front of the fire – and Mark was pleased to fit two ensuite bedrooms upstairs in the newly extended cottage, although both are shower rooms, not bathrooms. Quality and longevity were Mark's priorities throughout the cottage's internal fit-out, including in the shower rooms, where all fittings are sourced from Duravit.

Downstairs in the kitchen, the same approach meant Mark selected a countertop from Minerva, which makes solid work surfaces. These manufactured surfaces look and feel like stone, but are robust, don't require specialist installation, and offer plenty of flexibility with seamless joints.



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"We also chose a resin-based grout [in the splashback], as we didn't want it looking scruffy within a short time," says Mark.

The cosiness factor of this little cottage cannot be overstated, and has been further enhanced by the new wood-burning stove. While not necessary in a practical sense, the fire creates that indefinable sense of 'hygge' that makes a Cornish cottage, especially in winter, so desirable. There are nice details throughout the cottage, such as the vaulted ceilings upstairs, which give a sense of space. James at Lily Lewarne also designed curved walls – upstairs, these are a clever solution that allow sufficient space to meet Building Regulations on the landing, while also creating visual interest.

When it came to the finishes and furnishings, Mark worked with Cornish Gems Interior Design and has only praise for their work. "Tara did an amazing job. She listened to us and came up with great ideas."

Mark's biggest challenge was the impact of Covid on global supply chains. "It didn't impact us at first," admits Mark. "But what we didn't realise was that costs would end up

double those we had originally anticipated." This explosion in costs has altered Mark's plans for the cottage and it is now a holiday cottage for the immediate future. Yet Mark, who has a young family, sees it as a prospective home for one of his children, or even his niece.

"The cottage won't ever leave our family now," he says.

The cottage was completed in autumn 2023 and Mark says he is happy "to see the lights on." Yet, for him, the real satisfaction has been in rescuing a beautiful traditional property with which his family has such a close connection.

"We've spent 20 years watching this place fall to pieces in front of us," says Mark. However, all that is now a thing of the past, and Farrar Cottage has a new rosy future at the heart of the Semmens family, with the fabric secured for the next 200 years.

"It looks amazing," Mark proudly sums up. "As I come down the lane and turn the corner, it really does have that 'wow' factor." ■

For more information on the cottage, visit www.cornishgems.farrarcottage

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How to create a light-filled home

Whether it is a renovation, an extension or a complete new-build, creating a finished home filled with natural light starts with the design. Edward Stobart of IDSystems explains more

We know that bright, light-filled spaces within a home are appealing – but why? It is only in the past couple of generations that artificial light has become the predominant source of lighting in our homes. For almost all of the evolution of the human body, our ancestors relied on natural light and our bodies are programmed to be drawn to natural light as a result.

Exposure to sunlight prompts our bodies to produce vitamin D and serotonin. Vitamin D can impact our emotional balance, reduce fatigue and boost our physical health, while serotonin is a hormone associated with wellbeing.

With the British climate as it is, maximising the amount of natural light that enters our home all year around is crucial – especially during the winter months when it can feel like it barely gets light at all – so designing living spaces that draw light both into and through the home is a key design consideration.

HOW DO I DRAW MORE LIGHT INTO MY HOME?

GLAZED DOORS

With narrow profiles and large panes of glass, aluminium-framed sliding doors have become a hugely popular option over the past decade. Not only do the doors draw light into the home, they also allow for almost uninterrupted views out – breaking down the boundaries between inside and out.

Bifold doors are ideal for those who want to completely open up an aperture and step out into the garden on warm sunny days. With wider frames and smaller panes of glass they let in slightly less light in comparison to sliding doors but their ability to extend your living space out onto the patio has proven a huge draw for those planning a project.

Slide & turn doors provide narrow frames like sliding doors, but with the



ability to stack the panels completely to one end like bifolds and have become a hugely popular option for those wanting the best of both systems.

WINDOWS

When we think of windows it is typically the traditional casement window split into sections with one (or more) opening sashes, but window design has come on so far that larger and larger openings can be catered for.

Fixed frame picture windows are perfect for drawing more light into a home, particularly on extension and renovation projects, and can be ideally suited for loft conversions, allowing views out over the rooftops while increasing the amount of light that enters the new attic rooms.

GLASS ROOFS, ROOFLIGHTS & LANTERNS

Particularly important for extension projects, glass roofs, rooflights and lanterns are great at drawing light further

into a home.

One thing to consider when planning an extension is not creating a bright, contemporary new living space, but leaving the rooms on the existing structure darker and less inviting now that they are further from the exterior of the home.

Adding rooflights, lanterns or a glass roof to an extension design pulls light deeper into a structure, enabling every room in the house to be filled with natural light – wherever it is in the house.

INTERNAL GLAZING

Having designed your doors, windows and glass roofing to maximise the amount of light, one of the key glazing options that is often overlooked is how to draw the light throughout the home.

Internal glazed doors or glass partitions are an ingenious idea because they allow the light to spill through the house while still creating an effective divide between rooms.



Glass roof

individual areas within your new home.

FRONT DOORS

Often overlooked when it comes to drawing light into a house, glazed front doors (or front doors with glazed elements or sidelight windows) can be a great solution for creating light-filled hallways and entrances – ideal for a real wow-factor first impression for visitors.

For those concerned about privacy, satin or obscured glass is an option because it lets light in without allowing passers-by to see into your home.

WILL LARGE AMOUNTS OF GLASS NOT OVERHEAT MY HOUSE?

As glass and glazing technology has developed, so the size and quantity of glazing that is designed into homes has increased. Where once the back of a house would have been windows and perhaps a set of French doors, more recently, the whole ground floor elevation has been designed as glazing.

This has led to fears that houses could overheat with temperatures expected to rise over coming decades, so Building



Glass-to-glass corner window

Regulations for new build homes have been updated to include Part O which covers the mitigation of overheating.

Even for those planning an extension or renovation, fitting windows and doors on south-facing elevations with solar control glass is something to consider. Solar control glass features a special coating that is designed to reduce the amount of heat that passes through the glass by reflecting and absorbing some of the sun's rays.

Edward Stobart is sales manager at IDSystems

Internal glazed doors offer a permanent solution whereas glass partitions can be designed to slide into place when needed but be moved back when not – ideal for dividing up open-plan living spaces if you want to create

Designing living spaces that draw light both into and through the home is a key design consideration

Airtight protection for west coast of Scotland self-build

The threefold combination of the Wraptite®, Wraptherm® and Reflectatherm® airtightness and vapour barrier systems from **A. Proctor Group** has been chosen to provide enhanced thermal performance and protection for a sea-facing SIPS construction selfbuild property on the west coast of Scotland. Wraptite is installed as an external air barrier and alternative to a traditional standard breather membrane. Wraptite is certified by the BBA and combines the essential properties of vapour permeability and airtightness in one self-adhering membrane. The self-adhered nature of Wraptite and its high level of water resistance and simplified detailing made it an ideal choice. The self-adhering nature of the Wraptite allows a simple and fast installation process. It also has excellent weather protection and water-tightness properties. The membrane can be installed directly to walls and openings with speed and efficiency. Alongside the Wraptite membrane, the thermal and airtightness performance of Wraptherm is included in the build. Wraptherm is a high-performance membrane composite that is self-adhesive and consists of a 10mm Spacetherm aerogel insulation blanket bonded to the face of Wraptite. The final part of the airtightness and vapour barrier system is provided by Reflectatherm Plus, a reflective, high-resistance vapour barrier for internal walls, ceilings and floors that will significantly reduce the risks of condensation by providing the highest levels of moisture resistance.

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ease and adjusting, where the windows and doors remain in-situ and are serviced, to a full in-situ overhaul involving significant paint removal and redecoration, where possible.

www.steel-window-association.co.uk

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

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Beat the heat

Jason Bennett of Zehnder Group UK discusses ways to address the risk of overheating in homes, as summer temperatures begin to rise

The way we build our homes has changed. Allowing more natural light to enter the home – along with better insulation for energy efficiency – are both high on self-builders' wish lists. Yet this combination, coupled with solar gains from south-facing aspects, makes a property high risk for overheating – a modern-day issue that is often overlooked.

Climate change has led to increasing summer temperatures, and the Met Office's future climate projections suggest the temperature of hot summer days could increase again by between 3.8°C and 6.8°C.

Recent summers have already been characterised by extremes in the UK's climate. Temperature records soared beyond 40°C for the first time, and large parts of the country experienced

unprecedented discomfort through overheating, causing many to leave their homes in search of cooler and safer dwellings.

High temperatures in homes negatively impact people's lives. It can cause serious problems with sleep as well as heat stress, and present other major health risks such as heat stroke, impaired sleep and in some cases, even premature death.

Building design often contributes to overheating in new buildings and yet the majority of self-builders are unaware of the dangers and don't factor these into their plans.

DON'T BE A VICTIM OF OVERHEATING

The UK Building Regulations provides guidance on mitigating overheating in residential buildings, and reducing

these effects. Its prescriptive approach to optimising glazing, solar shading and natural ventilation clearly outlines preferred solutions to keeping a property cool.

However, problems occur when external factors dictate that these passive means can't be used to control internal temperatures and ventilate effectively. For example, if planning dictates that windows cannot be opened because of risk of noise, security, or pollution, then the regulations list alternative options. These could be acoustic facade ventilators and mechanical ventilation to mechanical cooling.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR PROJECT IS AT RISK, AND WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT IT?

The first step is to seek an energy assessment or Standard Assessment



Adopting a ‘ventilation-first’ approach to overheating not only provides a solution to overheating issues, but also protects the indoor air quality within the home

Procedure (SAP) for the build along with an Overheating Assessment. This must be done by a qualified assessor to gauge the risk of overheating in the property and is a process that all new builds must adhere to for compliance with Building Regulations Approved Document O.

This thermal modelling will determine which spaces in the house could be prone to overheating and recommendations can be made for effective solutions – either in specific rooms or the whole living space.

When it comes to solutions, an effective cooling hierarchy consists of stages or options that mitigate overheating issues – some of which are complete standalone solutions and others that are combined, to deliver the required level of cooling capacity.

The predicted effectiveness of these solutions must be modelled in accordance with the guidelines (TM59) in order to demonstrate compliance with the building regulations (Part O), so it is best to consult an expert before finalising plans.

Traditional methods of combating overheating often rely on air conditioning units, but this approach

can have negative effects on indoor air quality. By merely recirculating air, these systems can reintroduce potentially harmful particulates such as dust and allergens, compromising occupants’ health and comfort.

These systems use a lot of energy and therefore cost more to run. They also sit dormant through the winter months, resulting in large equipment taking up space that could be better used.

It’s time for a different living approach.

USING VENTILATION AS A STRATEGY AND SOLUTION TO MITIGATE OVERHEATING

Combining ventilation with a tempered air system can offer a better solution to overheating issues in residential properties and can be designed in conjunction with dynamic thermal modelling.

Adopting a ventilation-first approach to overheating, not only provides a solution to overheating issues but also protects the indoor air quality within the home. Optimising the overall climate within a home to create a comfortable and healthy living environment all year round is essential to the wellbeing of

those living in it.

People wrongly assume that inside the air is clean and safe but indoor air is typically two to five times more polluted than outdoor air due to airborne chemicals and particulate matter.

Without effective ventilation, harmful gases and particles can become trapped polluting the air. Ventilation extracts this dirty air providing a constant supply of clean refreshed air into the living spaces.

In most instances, a mechanical ventilation system such as mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) forms the base of the strategy for overheating. This can then be adapted accordingly to ensure compliance with best practice overheating guidance – providing two benefits in one.

To determine the best approach to take for your self-build, you should consult with an MVHR designer. They can specify what type of ventilation and air temperation system is needed, as well as offering sized plans to allow for sufficient ducting space.

Jason Bennett is indoor air quality expert and national business development manager at Zehnder Group UK

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SHORT CHIMNEY = CHIMNEY FAN

Traditional chimney design required a minimum flue height of 4.5 m. In theory, this was enough to ensure sufficient natural flue draught to clear the products of combustion from a wood-burning stove.

Unfortunately, the chimney draught was never guaranteed and the provision often resulted in unsightly tall chimneys when appliances were installed in single-storey buildings and orangeries.

A recent change in chimney design (see source) states that a chimney can be designed using the calculation method in BS EN 13384-2005 which allows for the installation of shorter chimneys, provided sufficient chimney draught can be proved. A chimney fan will guarantee this chimney draught even on a shorter flue design.

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

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

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CASE STUDY

ASCENDING TO GREATNESS

Young couple Lianne and James took the design of their home into their own hands, despite a challenging steep plot in Neath, South Wales, and managed to take full advantage of their surroundings while offering a residence that worked well for their family

TEXT TOM BODDY



The idyllic landscapes around Neath, South Wales, provided the backdrop for Lianne and James Davies' self-build project.

Situated in a rural valley, their site overlooked a scenic woodland filled with waterfalls and old stone ruins, making it a very special location to build their home.

What made the site even more meaningful was that Lianne's parents had built their house nearby when she was a child, adding a sentimental touch to the project.

However, despite the picturesque surroundings, the site presented one immovable obstacle: its steep gradient. While the street had seen several other self-builds over the past 30 years, no one had dared to tackle this particular plot, deterred by its challenging topography.

But, with James' background in civil engineering, coupled with Lianne's clear vision for the home's design, the couple had the confidence to begin planning their

project. "I knew there were ways around it," explains James.

They acquired the site during the pandemic. "The housing market was going crazy, yet we noticed the price of the plot stayed the same. That's when we thought 'this is our opportunity,'" Lianne reflects.

FOLLOWING THE SITE'S CONTOURS

With two young and lively children and two energetic dogs, Lianne and James' guiding principle for their design was to create a cosy, family-centric home, prioritising both functionality and efficiency.

With a keen eye for practicality, Lianne wanted every room in the house to serve a purpose, avoiding the inefficiencies of larger, underutilised spaces. "I didn't want a big house with several rooms not being used, because what's the point? I wanted every room to be intentional."

HIGH POINT

"For a while, the kids couldn't see their bedrooms because we didn't have stairs. My happiest moment was when they finally got to see what we were doing upstairs."

— Lianne





James focused on the structural aspects, ensuring that the design not only met their aesthetic preferences but also adhered to sound engineering principles. Yet, the steep slope posed a variety of challenges.

A friend in the industry looked at the site and said “there’s going to be too much money in the groundworks,” James discloses. To mitigate costs, they opted for a 300 mm thick reinforced concrete pad foundation, which was linked to a 310 mm thick retaining wall. “After those were done, you are then just building a house off of it!” explains James.

Though Lianne preferred not to have excessive space, the terrain dictated a split-level, three-storey design for the home, featuring a generous lower level that connects to the garden. Here, the couple faced the dilemma of either placing the primary living and kitchen area on the lower level for easy garden access, or on the middle floor to capitalise on views of the valley.

Observing neighbouring houses, which featured living spaces on the lower level, James and Lianne deliberated over their layout. “If we could include a balcony on the middle floor which would connect to the garden, we’d much prefer to have the living space on the same floor that you walk into when you come in,” explains James. Lianne didn’t want to have to descend to access the living spaces, which further cemented the desire to prioritise the views from the living and kitchen area.

Embarking on construction in March

2021, the work unfolded in two phases. Initially, groundwork saw a local contractor equipped with an 18-tonne excavator to tackle the challenging terrain, followed by a main contractor.

Being mindful of their impact on the local area, the couple proactively spoke to their neighbours to inform them on what was happening: “We made sure we communicated with everyone throughout the build, sharing copies of the plans, letting them know the duration, and any obstructions such as cranes entering the street,” explains Lianne. Thanks to this, they’ve become close friends with the neighbours, considering them “lifelong friends.”

Despite initial projections, the project was extended to 18 months. Fortunately, during this period, the family found a place to stay with the kindness of a friend who had temporarily vacated her home to embark on her own building project. “We were really lucky as she was so understanding and allowed us to stay for the length we needed, and with two big dogs!”

However, as the Bank of England base rate began to increase, the mortgage market became increasingly volatile. “We had to complete the build as soon as we could in order to secure our mortgage rate,” explains Lianne. “We had also given our friend a final date a few months before so she could advertise the house.”

This resulted in the family having to move in significantly earlier than planned. “When I say

LOW POINT

“When the Bank of England raised their base rate and we had to move in before the house was ready. It was a nightmare.”

— James



“I was stacking kitchen cabinets while they were still putting the kitchen in!”

it wasn't ready for us, it really wasn't ready," reflects Lianne. "I was stacking kitchen cabinets while they were still putting the kitchen in!"

GOING THE 'NO ARCHITECT' ROUTE

With James' experience in civils coupled with their "shoestring" budget, they decided not to employ an architect, apart from to review their plans at various stages for their self-build mortgage, costing them a mere £200 a time.

However, James explains that one issue that arose from relying solely on his civil engineering expertise, was a significant error they made in the roof design during planning. It arose from a miscalculation during planning. Originally, the plan was to position the stairs leading up to the top floor directly above the stair below. Unfortunately, during construction there was a sudden realisation that there was insufficient headroom to meet Building Regulations. This meant a last-minute adjustment, relocating the upper stairs to a position on the other side of the hallway.

Reflecting on this hurdle, James admits they would have done things differently: "I think £12,000 could have been spent on an architect as there would have been fewer stress and problems." Lianne echoes this, advising other self-builders to "get an architect!"

A HOME RUN

Despite lacking architectural expertise while navigating a tight budget, Lianne and James have crafted an elegant three-storey home to be proud of. The home maximises its terrain to create distinct spaces across different levels which cater to the needs of their growing family.

Stepping through the front door onto the middle level, guests are greeted by a bright hallway with stairs branching off to the upper level and descending stairs on the left to the basement. Adjacent to the hall lies a small living area and bathroom. This leads to an expansive open-plan space housing a modern kitchen and living area, complemented by a generous balcony giving striking views over the nearby woodland.

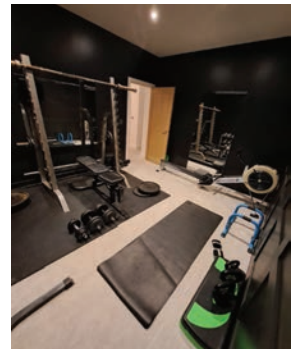
Moving to the upper floor unveils three generously sized bedrooms. "I wanted equal-sized bedrooms for the kids because I'm not arguing with them when they're older," jokes Lianne.

Lianne and James' master bedroom features a large gable window, a standalone wall creating zones for sleeping and changing, and an ensuite. "We wanted to have our grown-up bathroom which the kids can't ruin!" explains Lianne.

Meanwhile, the children's bedrooms and bathroom on this level boast bright colours and

CREATING COSY

Lianne admits that creating a cosy feel was initially a challenge as the spaces felt "vast"



playful artwork. Here the design intends to allow the children to “express themselves.”

The lower level is what the couple refers to as the “fun” area – a multifunctional space designed for both leisure and professional activities. On this floor, there is a playroom, gym, additional living area, office, and a dedicated treatment room for Lianne’s holistic therapy sessions. Towards the back of this level, three double doors open up to the garden.

Outside, there’s a spacious patio adorned with “some big steps leading onto a large flat lawn,” as James describes it. Despite initial doubts, the couple managed to create a level grassy area, providing a secure playground for the children. Another access point to the garden is through a metal spiral staircase extending from the balcony, although the dogs refuse to go down them, (“a nightmare,” says Lianne.)

The exterior design of the house seamlessly blends with the overall aesthetic of the street while subtly standing out through a mix of materials. “Other neighbouring houses mainly have red brick and white PVCu. We wanted

to add a bit more by using a render,” explains James. Black roof tiles and timber cladding contribute additional texture.

ADJUSTING TO A NEW WAY OF LIFE

Although the home now suits the family’s needs, adapting to the layout they chose posed a challenge, with Lianne confessing she “struggled to settle in.” When asked what has changed since moving in, James says, “What hasn’t?”

Over the past two years, the couple have continuously tweaked the layouts on the lower and middle floors to find the optimal arrangement for their family dynamic. The original gym became a living room, then a playroom, while the initial playroom transitioned into an office. What was the cinema room has been repurposed as the gym. Lianne’s therapy room became a spare bedroom before reverting to its original purpose. And on the middle floor, the snug transitioned into an office before returning to its original state.

These adjustments have all been part of a learning process to create a cosier atmosphere,



They faced the dilemma of placing the living and kitchen area on the lower level for garden access, or on the middle floor to capitalise on views

and spaces which cater to their children's evolving needs. Due to the home's perch on a steep gradient, its design is of a contemporary style which is a departure from Lianne's preference for more traditional designs.

While Lianne now loves the interior, creating the cosiness was a struggle initially, with their space feeling rather "vast," as she describes it. However, with time and the adjustments to the functions in various areas, plus the addition of blinds, soft furnishings, and greenery throughout, the family has now found contentment. "You just don't know, until you lived in it, how it's going to work for you as a family," Lianne reflects.

The design of distinct zones, from the playful areas to the more sleek and "sophisticated" spaces incorporating more contrasting tones, works perfectly for them. "It now all makes

sense," asserts James. "The kids have their own space, we've got our own space, and then we've got the communal areas as well. It is very much a family house."

Among their favourite spaces is their bedroom, boasting expansive windows overlooking the woodlands, and the inviting balcony on the middle floor. "We spend all of our summers sitting out there. From how we've designed it, it's part of the living space," says Lianne.

The couple's advice for those embarking on a similar project with financial constraints, is to prioritise wisely. Instead of investing endless amounts into the home, they focused on putting money aside for future holidays and the goal of "enjoying the kids grow up." She concludes: "My advice is to be realistic about your budget. Don't lose sight of why you're doing it, which for us, was family." ■

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The new Nature's Choice kitchen for Keller (pictured) is an elegant, industrial scheme which highlights natural tones and textures. There is a clever interplay between the lines of okapi wood and vibrant cactus green. Pictured are melamine-fronted Bolton doors in Cactus and Bronx doors in Okapi. The design of the back walls, with LED lighting behind the pillars and up- and down- lights on the glass shelves, accentuates the natural theme as does the tip-on island unit. Keller is well known for offering the widest range of colours (2,050 NCS) and finishes in the kitchen furniture market – along with a vast range of cabinet options, all produced by the most sustainable means possible.

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Let's go outside

Ronan O'Dowd from AG Outside Rooms shares his top tips for maximising your outside space and unlocking the potential of your garden, from tranquil sanctuaries to vibrant entertainment areas



There was once a time when gardens across the nation sat largely unused – except for the sporadic barbecue upon the first glimpse of the sun. However, despite our questionable weather, homeowners are now embracing al fresco living and viewing their gardens as a true extension of their house – another room to eat, drink, play and relax in.

As the days get longer and the temperature rises, there has never been a better time to revamp your outdoor space (which can also help maximise your home's kerb appeal).

CONSIDER THE HOUSE

Your house plays a critical piece of the puzzle when designing your outdoor space. The design and architecture of your home can help influence the space outdoors, for example, a cottage-style

garden complements a country home, whereas a minimalist garden helps set off a more modern building.

It is also important to define your requirements – do you want a cosy retreat for relaxation, a vibrant entertainment area, or a family-friendly play zone? By clarifying your garden's purpose, you can shape the design and functionality of your outdoor space.

Another top tip for self-builders is to be realistic about the level of maintenance in terms of plants and hard landscaping you can commit to. If you want a beautiful but low-commitment garden, ensure you consider this when designing your outdoor space.

HARDSCAPING

Shine a spotlight on your garden by using 'hardscape' elements to improve kerb appeal. Introducing curves and

circles as well as different laying patterns and a range of colours and heights will add depth, interest, and colour to your garden. You could also give a new look to a border with tidy edging such as our bullnose kerb sets to retain your planting.

THINK ABOUT PROPORTIONS

If your garden is flat, plants will add more kerb appeal than small, pretty flowers. Use repetitions (midsize shrubs to line a path or a row of shrubs) and choose pieces that are inspired by and complement the shape and size of the house. Choosing plants that reflect the shape and lines of the house will create an instant impact.

EMBRACE NATURE

If the clean-cut look isn't your thing, then why not embrace nature? Gather stones

Introducing curves and circles as well as different laying patterns and a range of colours and heights will add depth, interest, and colour to your garden

and rocks in their natural state – jagged edges and all. Incorporating water features offset by large stones makes for an interesting addition to your garden.

FEAST ON NATURE

Edible gardening has grown in popularity – irrespective of whether you find yourself in an urban enclave or a country garden.

Living walls and herbs in window pots are great if you are short of space and if you have a large garden why not try and grow your own vegetable patch? Not only do they look great, but they can also be used in daily living.

UPGRADE YOUR BBQ AREA TO A FULL OUTDOOR WORKING KITCHEN

Nothing says ‘wow’ like an outdoor kitchen area, meaning you won’t have to step inside and lose a moment of the fresh warm summer air. One option is to combine walling and flag ranges to create fully functioning outdoor kitchens



and bars. For example, flagstones can create beautiful sleek countertops while

the walling is ideal for workstations and storage.

BE INSPIRED BY YOUR FAVOURITE DESTINATION

Rest and relaxation doesn’t have to wait until your next holiday. Create a garden inspired by your favourite destination and you can escape all year round. Vanquish the stresses of everyday life with a tranquil zen paradise, or opt for something bright with a striking Moroccan paradise.

GO GRASS FREE

If you want a low-maintenance approach, introducing paving, flagging and retaining wall systems may be the answer to your problems. These are easy to keep and provide a flat surface which can be great for family occasions. It also means children can play in all seasons without the risk of muddy feet!

Ronan O’Dowd is landscape designer at AG Outside Rooms

EXTRA, EXTRA! Introducing new ARDEX X 7 R S1

ARDEX are delighted to introduce X 7 R S1, a new improved version of their favourite X 7 R rapid-setting flexible tile adhesive. Advancements developed by ARDEX UK R&D specialists has allowed the company to further improve a trusted technology making it more suitable for the modern demands of tiling. Superseding X 7 R, ARDEX X 7 R S1 provides a great upgrade for fixers at no extra cost rather than adding more products to the range. ARDEX X 7 R S1 comes in grey and white (X 7 R S1 W) and the new formula has: EX7RA flexibility and strength with fibre technology; EX7RA Improved consistency with a smooth formulation; and EX7RA 50% pot life – now with now with 60 minutes in the bucket. This means there is more time to use the product in the bucket before it goes off. This allows for bigger, less frequent mixes, giving longer to spread the adhesive, saving on time and wastage. X 7 R S1 is suitable for internal and external areas, without the need for any additional additives. It is classified as C2FES1 with new S1 deformability. This is in addition to current properties including the ability to mix to a semi-pourable consistency for solid bed fixing large format floor tiles, and adjustable water content for the ability to produce a slump-free mix for wall tiles. Alex Underwood, Head of Marketing at ARDEX said: “If you’re already using ARDEX X 7 R, then it’s time to switch to X 7 R S1 today. If you love X 7 R, then you’ll love X 7 R S1 even more with its improved characteristics at no extra cost.”

01440 714939 ardex.co.uk/product/ardex-x-7-r/



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. And the finish achieved is not just hardwearing but looks fantastic too. 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.

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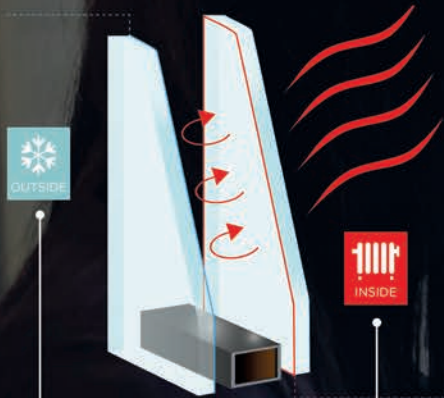
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