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FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the first issue of The Selfbuilder! After many years publishing as Selfbuilder + Homemaker, we felt it was time for a refresh and rebrand, to better reflect the magazine and focus in on the great self-build content that we will continue to bring you.

I'd also like to introduce myself as the new editor of the magazine. Having joined netMAGmedia back in 2013 as a journalism graduate, I've worked on the magazine for the past 11 years (bar a couple of years spent on maternity leave when I had my two boys), mostly as assistant editor under James. With his hands now more than full editing our three other publications, it's time for me to step up to the plate!

I'm looking forward to getting stuck in, bringing you great content in the form of our in-depth self-build case studies, informative product features and other regular articles to help you get the best out of your builds. In this issue, Nik Hunter reports on a unique home built in a remote hamlet in the Scottish Highlands (page 16). Debbie Jeffery's case study on page 36 shows how one couple gained planning permission in the countryside under 'Paragraph 84' provisions for 'exceptional circumstances' – by utilising a low carbon, modular building system.

I hope you enjoy the issue, and if you have any ideas for future issues or a project you'd like to see featured, please do email rfield@netmagmedia.co.uk.

ROSEANNE FIELD

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A long time coming

Plans had been approved and Mark and Theresa Edwards were ready to get to work on their building project, but then they met architect Stuart Bagshaw...

Embracing nature's light

Paul Trace from Stella Rooflight discusses the importance of effectively introducing the biophilic benefits of natural light into the home.

Selfbuilder Diaries

For Carys and her family, their project has been an ongoing journey from a bungalow fit for retirement to a complete demolition and rebuild, knowing that the value is in the plot rather than the bricks...



ON THE COVER: © ELLIOT ROBERTS (PAGE 16)



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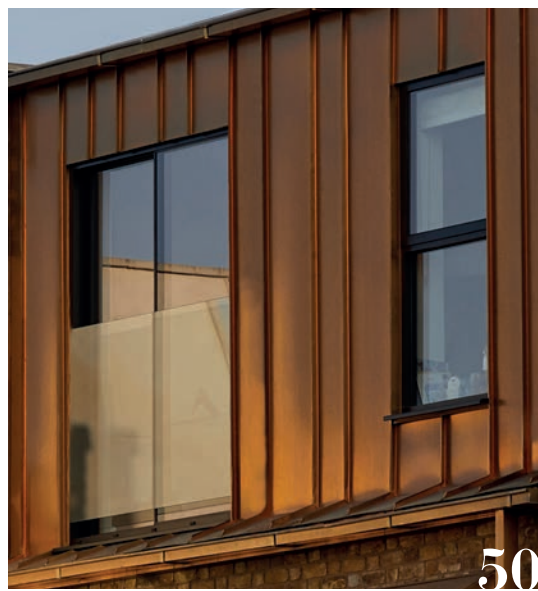
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ON TREND WITH TILES

Following a year of exciting innovations and technological advances, María D Arráez of Tile of Spain UK and Clara Vicedo of ASCER outline the key tile trends set to dominate homes this year.

From sensory, calm textures to dynamic dimensions, the latest ceramic tile collections promise to bring depth, character and interest to all interior schemes. These key trends are set to dominate homes throughout this year.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSION

Abstract expression is a celebration of creative expression, through geometric pattern, colour and striking designs. Tiles lend themselves perfectly to creating unique and striking visual statements. From mixing and matching different colours of the same tile, to eye-catching geometric designs, homeowners and designers have started to exude even more abstract expression through their surface choices.

In some cases, tiled surfaces will become almost kaleidoscopic in appearance, delivering a new elevated level of creativity when it comes to interior design.

From walls to floors, kitchens to bathrooms, decorative expressions can be presented in the form of geometric patterns as well as multiple colour variations, and even unique swirl-like effects.

BEYOND COLOUR

2025 will see explorations of otherworldly iridescent effects and decorative overlays that go beyond simple colour. A trend for more 'out of this world' finishes and colourways has started to make itself known through tile design. These striking tile effects are set to show a significant increase in popularity in the coming year.

From metallic, layered hues to shaded variations, this trend can be beautifully represented through wall and floor tiles, both indoors and outdoors, offering homeowners the opportunity to inject a touch of ethereal beauty into schemes.

Transforming traditional and contemporary spaces alike, truly exceptional tiles that go beyond the norm are gracing surfaces, particularly in varied forms of green.

CALM TEXTURES

This trend sees the use of tiles that evoke warming and calming appeal through subtle, detailed textures.

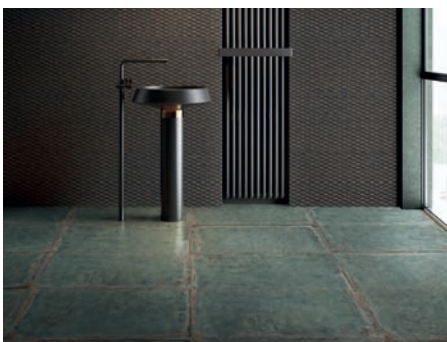
Texture in tiles has developed further than a simple structure in the surface. Thanks to continued developments in manufacturing technologies, tile designs are increasingly presenting more depth in



pattern and structure, exuding a calming, sensory effect through a very subtle sense of movement. Mostly seen through more neutral, pared-back tones, subtle movements can be observed in marble and stone-effect tiles across both walls and floors.

DYNAMIC DIMENSIONS

Tactile and adventurous, tile dimensions are becoming increasingly dynamic and unique. Three-dimensional tiles are expanding to include more shapes and designs, creating interiors that are all about unique character. From multi-





Tactile and adventurous, tile dimensions are becoming increasingly dynamic and unique

coloured fluting to different shaped tile reliefs, there has been a significant shift in the dynamism of the dimensions in the latest tile collections.

Extending far beyond a simple 3D structure, these latest tile designs showcase a wide range of dimensions and styles that will bring striking statements to residential and commercial spaces.

PAST MEETS PRESENT

Historic influences and retro-inspired patterns come alive through new tile designs and applications. Whether

through retro-inspired palettes or pattern clashes and combinations, a nod to nostalgia can be seen through the latest modern tile collections. Combined with shapes, finishes and accents that bring a nostalgic interior scheme together, tiles are set to take centre stage within this past-meets-present trend era.

SENSORY TEXTURES

Sensory textures are restorative and soothing, creating a sensory experience through surface design. From beautiful veining in warming tones to sanded stone, rough wood and brushed concrete

effects, tiles are injecting a calming aesthetic through a stunning palette of neutral yet textured designs.

Unique, luxurious statements can be made through nature-inspired palettes and textures.

Exceptional interior schemes can be created through sensorial textures. From 3D geometric patterns to exquisite rough reliefs, this trend is taking tile design beyond where it has been before.

María D Arráez is director at Tile of Spain UK and Clara Vicedo is marketing and communications executive at ASCER



INTERIOR INSPIRATION: Home Office

Whether you'll be working from home full time or only part, creating a cosy dedicated nook or designing a whole room, we've compiled products from desks and chairs to storage and lighting solutions to provide all the inspiration you need for your home office.

1. For the ultimate home working space, the **Xtend 4 cabin** from **B&Q** comes with a single door, two full length fixed windowpanes to the front plus a full-length quarter opening window. The building pack includes timber base, SIPs panels, exterior and interior tongue & groove cladding and exterior roof covering. The Xtend cabin is delivered untreated, and it's recommended you apply a wood oil. Price: £12,800. www.diy.com



2. Incorporating mid-century elements into the home office work space, the **Paige Office Chair** from **Cult Furniture** features a classic button design on the padded upholstery. In luxe olive green velvet, with padding on the armrests, the Paige is a no-brainer when it comes to comfortable office chair design, with easy height adjustment, swivel function, and five wheels. The velvet used is made from 100% recycled PET yarns so it is kinder to the environment. Price: £149. www.cultfurniture.com

3. Featuring sleek metal legs for stability and a contemporary look, this **Standing Desk with Drawer** from **Laura Jade Home** is ideal for home offices. The standing desk promotes better posture and productivity by allowing you to alternate between sitting and standing throughout the day. The integrated drawer offers convenient storage, keeping essentials within reach while maintaining a clean, organised work surface. With a modern design and quality construction, the desk brings both efficiency and elegance to your workspace. Price: £159.99. www.laurajadehome.co.uk

4. With its strong iron frame and reclaimed oak shelving and drawers, this **Reclaimed Oak Shelf Unit** from

Cox & Cox is a noble as well as practical piece of furniture. Five open shelves and four drawers ensure there is plenty of space to display the things you want to and conceal the items you don't. Metal cup handles on the drawers complete the grounded industrial appeal. Price: £1,775. www.coxandcox.co.uk

5. With its on-trend, rich dark wood finish and modern metallic handles, the **Drew Desk** in dark walnut from **Danetti** is all about luxe style and practicality. It features two spacious drawers that are perfect for keeping your working from home essentials close to hand, and a cable management hole for neat and tidy charging. Price: £429. www.danetti.com

6. The **Acorn Desk Lamp** from **Home of Sibling** is a practical and stylish piece, emitting an ambient, even light. The hemisphere shade is crafted from solid brass, with each evenly spaced slot precision milled by hand. The shade snugly cradles a blow-moulded textured opal glass globe. All metal work is skilfully polished, finished and assembled with care in Britain. Other metal, base and glass options are available. Price: £460. www.homeofsibling.com

selfbuilder Diaries

For Carys and her family, their project has been an ongoing journey from a bungalow fit for retirement to a complete demolition and rebuild, all the while knowing that the value is in the plot rather than the bricks...



We had absolutely no intention of demolishing our bungalow when we first bought it in 2013. It was a standard, retirement style bungalow with questionable decor and it certainly wasn't what we had imagined as our first home together. However, it was in a beautiful rural location and my father wisely told us that the value was in the plot, not the bricks, and encouraged us to imagine its potential. We enjoyed updating its interior, knowing that one day we would like to extend.

Seven years and two children later we enlisted the help of Matthew Jones Architects to draw up some plans for an extension. Despite coming up with a

great design we realised that this would not satisfy our wish list without major structural work. After considering our options we went back to Matthew several months later and asked him to design a new replacement dwelling. Matthew immediately recognised our vision and designed our perfect house at first attempt, with only a few minor changes required. To our surprise the planning process was smooth and we were granted permission in November 2022.

Being complete novices to building, we took guidance from Matthew and his team and the following months were taken up waiting for structural design drawings and sustainable drainage

designs (SuDS).

Navigating the SuDS process has probably been one of the most frustrating and stressful aspects so far. The initial proposed design would have taken a considerable chunk of our budget. Being in a rural location with no immediate neighbours, and having experience of living there for a decade, we did not agree with the proposed changes. After several discussions with the design engineer we were unable to reach an agreement and we made the decision to approach another engineer for a second opinion and another design. Following realistic discussions about the options and involving the

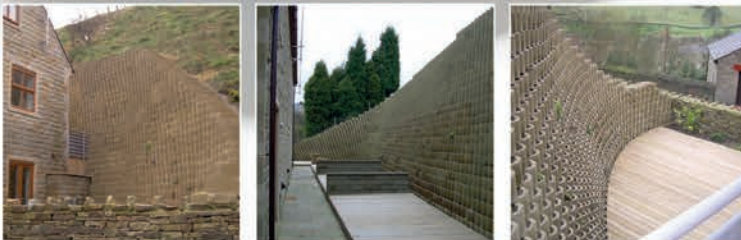
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local SuDS Approval Body (SAB) we were able to secure approval for a much more straightforward design. This whole process took months and we had to pay twice for drainage surveys and designs, but we estimate it will still have saved money overall.

One of the planning conditions, relating to the bat survey, was the requirement to complete demolition work between the months of November and March. We were keen to start work in early 2024, and so with the expert help of our quantity surveyor we had several competitive tender responses and were able to confirm the appointment of our building contractors in November 2023. The following two months were a hectic time of packing, decluttering and enjoying our last Christmas in the old house before moving out in mid January 2024. There were early delays due to snow and the unexpected finding of asbestos, but by mid February the bungalow was demolished; a bittersweet mix of emotions and excitement for what lay ahead.

We are now almost a year into the build and it's been great to see the progress. We are lucky to have found a great building firm, who are project managing and are reliable, very tidy and friendly. We are currently aiming to



finish in summer 2025 – it can't come soon enough!

I'm sure we have much more to learn as the project evolves, but some of our main learning points and top tips so far are:

- Find a local architect and have a look at their typical style of design. They will be familiar with your local planning department and what they are likely to accept, which could save you a headache! They will also be able to recommend local building contractors and trades.
- Don't underestimate the upfront costs before you even put a spade in the ground. The architectural and structural designs, drainage surveys and designs, ground surveys,

ecological surveys, energy efficiency reports, to name a few, all add up. After all this expense we felt too far in to turn back!

- Don't take recommendations at face value and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- For a big project, unless you already have experience, we would recommend employing a quantity surveyor. Although he or she will be an extra person to pay, we feel our QS has held our hands through the process and has helped everything run smoothly. Their experience and guidance in writing up the tender documents, drawing up contracts, monitoring costs and chairing monthly progress meetings is invaluable.
- Meet your builders before employing them. I'm sure that all the contractors who submitted a tender for the project would have done a great job, but it was so important for us to have a friendly, communicative team on board who we wouldn't be afraid to call in the event of any problems.
- Have a healthy contingency!

To follow our progress, take a look at our Instagram @dyffrynconwy.new.build

Homebuilding Centre earns Good Business accreditation

The Homebuilding Centre Limited, the employee-owned business behind the award-winning National Self Build & Renovation Centre, is delighted to announce that it has been awarded the highly respected Good Business Charter (GBC) accreditation, underscoring its unwavering commitment to ethical business practices and social responsibility.

The Good Business Charter is an independent certification recognising responsible business behaviour across ten key components. These components ensure that businesses operate with integrity, fairness and respect for all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers and the environment.

To earn the GBC accreditation, The Homebuilding Centre Limited adhered



to the following ten principles:

- Real Living wage – Fairer Hours and Contracts – Employee Well-being – Employee Representation – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Environmental Responsibility – Pay Fair Tax – Commitment to Customers – Ethical Sourcing – Prompt Payment to Suppliers.

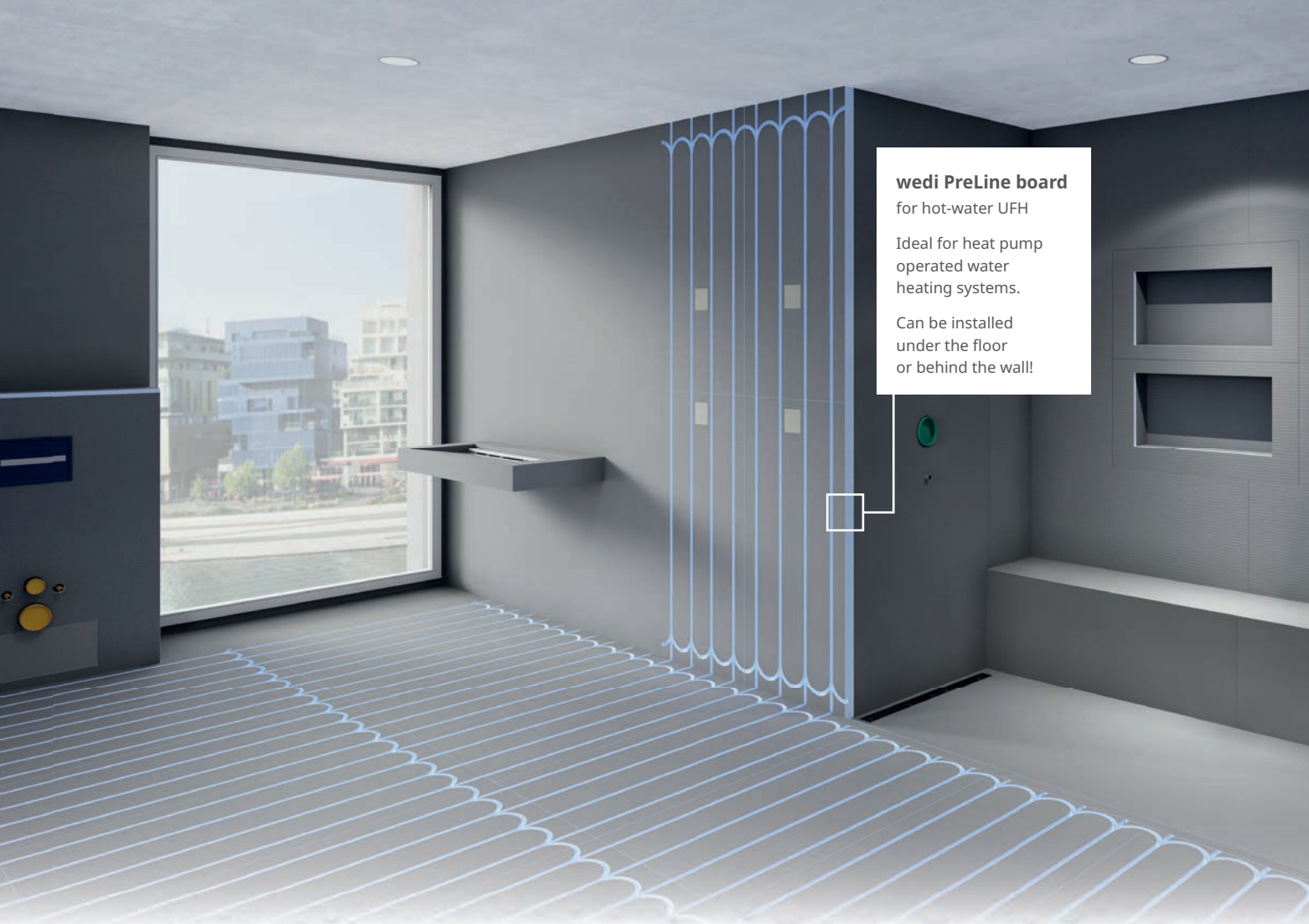
In a recent survey, 97% of people expressed that they value businesses that operate ethically and sustainably.

The GBC's independent certification distinguishes The Homebuilding Centre Ltd as a leader in ethical capitalism, highlighting its commitment to putting people and the planet first.

We invite everyone to join us in celebrating this significant achievement. To learn more about the Good Business Charter and how it promotes responsible business practices, please visit goodbusinesscharter.com.

The National Self Build & Renovation Centre's next event is the winter edition of the 'National Self Build & Renovation Show' taking place from Friday 31st January to Sunday 2nd February. This is always their best-attended event of the year, offering guidance and advice on sustainable and energy efficient homes.

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To add a touch of opulence to your project, look no further than the Dulux Heritage collection. At Dulux Trade, we understand that you need paints that not only look luxurious on the walls, but also apply smoothly and stand up to the rigours of modern living. In this article, Dawn Scott, Senior Colour Designer at Dulux Trade, discusses the benefits of the range.

Dulux Heritage was crafted by professionals to offer the trade a selection of paints that provide the perfect blend of modern style and substance with superior application. Over 90 years of expertise and craftsmanship have gone into the making of Dulux Heritage and its premium paints that create a lasting, luxury finish.

A FINISH THAT LASTS THE TEST OF TIME

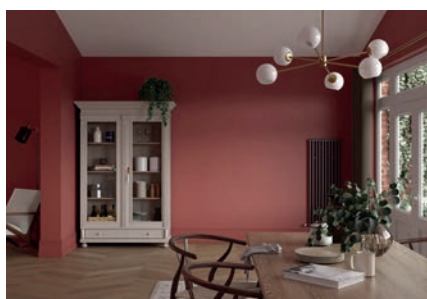
The Dulux Heritage range has been expertly curated to offer two standout, durable finishes that ensure professionals can find the right product for their project.

For walls and ceilings, use the soft-to-touch Dulux Heritage Velvet Matt that has been formulated to ensure seamless cutting in and even distribution across surfaces. This means that picture framing and roller marks are a thing of the past. It's washable and long-lasting formula makes it perfect for high-traffic areas.

Alternatively, for smooth woodwork and metal, the Dulux Heritage Eggshell finish is ideal. As well as even distribution, it delivers a flatter finish, improved washability, wipeability and reduced dust attraction – which can be attributed to a formulation that enhances the flow of the paint and reduces brush marks.

DELIVERING PREMIUM AESTHETICS

The timeless Dulux Heritage colour palette blends modern and classic shades that suit every home. Inspired by the very best British interior decorating styles from past to present, the Dulux Heritage range offers a stunning palette of 113 colours, including the most recent addition, Dulux Heritage True White.



The collection includes colours inspired by the most notable interior styles; from the elegant light-enhancing shades designed for grand Georgian homes, to the rich, saturated hues favoured during the Victorian era, and the fresh, garden-inspired colours of the Edwardian age.

While these heritage hues can be used to nod back to times gone by, the range also lends itself perfectly to contemporary styles. The versatile Dulux Heritage collection provides the perfect palette to suit any design vision.

CREATING COHERENT COLOUR SCHEMES

The key to creating stand out interiors is embracing individuality and adding a touch of emotion and personality to the space. This will help you to achieve designs that are both unique and cohesive.

When planning a colour scheme, it can be useful to take inspiration from other elements. For example, period features, hardwood floors or cherished furnishings can be used to identify complementary colours.

To put this into practice, mahogany floorboards may stand out more with lighter colours like Copenhagen Blue or Silver Fern on the walls, while a natural stone fireplace could pair beautifully with bolder hues DH Grass Green or



Maritime Teal.

It is also important to think about the use of the space, to help identify colours that will evoke the desired emotional response. For example, soft and soothing hues such as muted blues, greens, and warm neutrals are particularly effective in bedrooms and bathrooms as they can help to promote relaxation and bring a sense of comfort and wellbeing.

GETTING THE RIGHT BALANCE

To achieve a balanced colour scheme, follow the 60/30/10 rule: 60% of your space should be the primary colour, 30% a complementary secondary colour, and 10% an accent colour. Whilst this approach can be used in each room, it could also be the inspiration for the whole home. You could use the same wall and trim colours to connect communal spaces like hallways and landings.

TOOLS FOR CREATING BEAUTIFUL DESIGNS

To assist with colour selection, Dulux Heritage offers an online Colour Wall and a free printed Colour Card that allow you to browse curated palettes and identify complementary shades. You can explore by tonal matches (pale, mid, deep, white) or colour groups (either by colour, cool neutral or warm neutral).

To make things even easier, the Dulux Heritage Colour Wall and Colour Card have been organised so that the tones in each column and row complement each other. With everything carefully arranged by Dulux Heritage experts, you can let your imagination run wild and be confident that the shades you choose will work harmoniously.

By blending modern technology with premium ingredients and stunning colour choices, Dulux Heritage strikes the perfect balance between resilient performance and timeless beauty. If you are seeking seamless application and a luxury and sophisticated finish, the Dulux Heritage range is the perfect choice.

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CASE STUDY



A LONG TIME COMING

Plans had been approved and Mark and Theresa Edwards were ready to get to work on their building project, but then they met architect Stuart Bagshaw...

TEXT NIK HUNTER IMAGES ELLIOT ROBERTS





The Edwards had been holidaying in Cove in Wester Ross with their small children for about 10 years when the opportunity arose to create a more permanent base. “We fell in love with the area,” Theresa recalls. “Eventually we thought, what if we could have something up here to escape from our busy business life and create a legacy for the children?”

The family knew the locals well and when one of them decided to split up his croft, they asked if he would consider selling them part of it. He said yes and in 2010 the couple took ownership of a plot of land overlooking Loch Ewe. Initially there was no planning permission and not even a road to the plot but over time, plans were put in place for a conventional timber frame dwelling. “It had taken a long time to get that permission as the planning department were quite fussy about what could go up in the area and quite rightly so,” Mark explains.

During this time, through their work with their business, Strathearn Stone & Timber, the couple encountered architect Stuart Bagshaw. “We were on a job in Harris and the builder said that the architect would like to speak to us as he was interested in what we were doing,” Mark remembers. “We met with Stuart and his signature build was everything we wanted but couldn’t put into words.” After a phone call to planning, the plans for the current build were scrapped. “We said we wanted to build a Stuart Bagshaw house. The planners knew of Stuart, and they said if we were building one of his designs, we wouldn’t have any problems with permissions, and they were right.”

Stuart’s design of Black Sheep House was one of Mark’s favourites, but the couple were aware that this design wouldn’t be large enough for them and their family. “I think because I

had seen Black Sheep being developed, it was my idea of the perfect bothy; something small where you could hunker down in wild weather.”

“Mark wanted a small house like Black Sheep but of course that wouldn’t have worked for family living,” Stuart recalls. However, regardless of the size of the property Stuart affirms that his design process always starts in the same way. “Where is north? Where does the sun rise and where does the sun set? Then I look at how the sun will move during the day, the prevailing winds. After that you can site the rooms around where you get the views and where you get the sunlight.” And that’s exactly what Stuart did here.

Once the rooms are sited, Stuart starts to consider volume as he explains: “My own house is an old croft house, but it still has double height spaces which always surprises people. Volume is important, I liken it to when people lived in caves; creating different volumes creates different atmospheres.”

The other thing that all Stuart’s designs have in common is the absence of CAD: “I draw everything by hand on tracing paper and then layer up the tracing paper.” That’s not to say that Stuart isn’t familiar with CAD. “I did learn to use CAD but it didn’t work for me and there are certain things that CAD will just not let you do or add into the design.”

Even without the assistance of computers, the design evolved quickly, Stuart remembers: “We swapped a few rooms, and the boat house wasn’t in the original brief but once that was firmed up, Mark was really involved and hands on and he came to me for technical info and spatial details.”

“What Stuart designed here was right,” says Mark. “The only changes we made were to make

LOW POINTS

“One winter we had a leak, and it was before we had put the internal linings on – it was soul destroying. There was nothing obviously wrong and it took a long time to work out what had happened.”

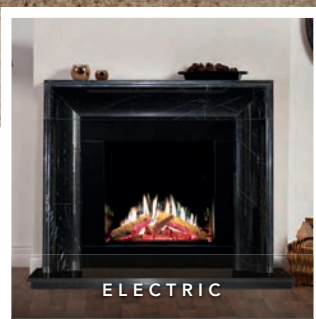
– Theresa

“It was a simple error in the roof drainage. We’d puddled the soil on the roof when we were walking on it and instead of it draining it was overflowing. However, it took a long time to work that out!”

– Mark



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the utility room into a bar and the log store into the utility and we changed one square window to an arched one. The bar space was too good an opportunity to waste!”

Theresa adds: “One of the first things Stuart asked us was how would we live when we were here? When you turn up in the car from Perthshire?” The response was there had to be a fire, there would be family and people and the kitchen would be the hub of the house. “However, while we knew it made sense to have an open plan design, we didn’t want a vast, cold space. Stuart did things like lowering the ceiling in the kitchen/dining area to make it feel cosier. The space is perfect for us, and I think that was because of the relationship we had. He understood us and we could trust him.”

Stuart’s design incorporated an entrance hall, den, bathroom, bar, and a staircase to a bedroom and bathroom at the front of the house. Once into the main body of the building there’s an open plan kitchen/living/dining area, a utility room and the main bedroom suite with a dressing room and ensuite. Mark came up with the design for the handcrafted staircase which is a work of art in itself, and this leads to a mezzanine level and an upstairs bedroom and ensuite.

With the design finalised quickly and planning permission granted, the couple were good to go, but the next part took a little bit longer.

“Mark was learning on the job and for his first build he couldn’t have picked a more difficult one.”

“In 2010 we bought the land, and we finished the build last year! It did take longer than we thought,” says Theresa. “After planning was granted, the next two or three years included the purchase of a caravan so we could continue to holiday here along with working on site, then Mark built the shed and next came the foundations. It was during the financial crash, so we were trying to pull funding together.”

Once the foundations were in, the couple secured funding for the timber structure and the huge steels that were required, and Mark made the decision to work on the build full time. “I took a step back from the business and concentrated on this for approximately three years and for two of those years it was only my son and I working here,” Mark remembers. “There’s nothing conventional about this

HIGH POINT

“The high point, quite literally, was when we fitted the round stone cap on top of our epic stone chimney. This was a moment that signified the beginning of the end of the build. We could at last imagine ourselves sitting in front of the blazing fire, sheltering from the winter winds. And of course, we had to celebrate the capping off in the traditional way, with a wee dram or two!”

— Mark

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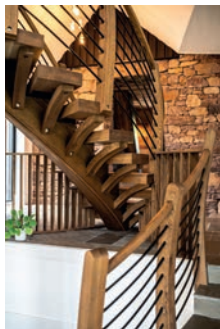
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building," Theresa explains. "Mark was learning on the job and for his first build he couldn't have picked a more difficult one."

One of the most difficult aspects of the build was the roofline both for Stuart and Mark. "Part of my approach is that I like my buildings to mature into the landscape," Stuart explains. "If you use materials from the site they grow into the landscape. However, the roofline was probably the biggest challenge, designing it in such a way that it fitted into this natural and wild environment."

While Stuart had deliberated over the design, Mark had the pleasure of making the design come alive and the roof certainly kept him occupied for a while. "The main house is a 200mm timber frame kit with steel supports, block skin and then rock," Mark explains. "But the roof is an entirely different entity." Layered up with a sarking board, membrane, batons, two layers of marine ply, fibre glass tape, rubber coating, geotex tile, drainage membrane, geo web, mesh, soil and turf, "it's about 500mm thick and it's not maintenance free."

Fortunately, Stuart was on hand to provide

moral support and professional help. "We worked together very closely, and the relationship was absolutely as it should be between client and architect, but we had no problem asking questions," Mark remembers. "We see it a lot through our business when clients use an architect to get planning permission, ditch the architect and then suffer the pitfalls. Architects can bring a lot more to the table than just a set of drawings. Stuart advised us on aesthetics and the internal design."

Internally, the design also dictated many of the decor and furniture choices as Mark recalls: "The beauty and cleverness of the design is that it's actually very simple, but it hides a lot of complexity, features and angles. It therefore made sense to choose a couple of materials to run with as much as we could."

And, while Theresa and Mark have access to a vast range of products and new innovations through their business, they were surprisingly decisive. "We chose the oak flooring relatively early in the process," says Theresa. "Of course, new products came in over time, but our first decision was the right one. Fortunately, Mark



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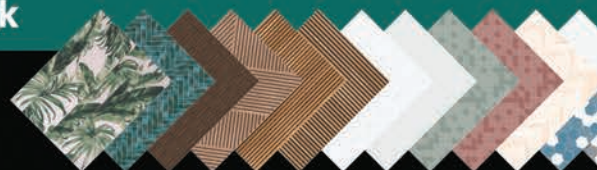
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and I tended to agree on most things, we always had the same vision."

The kitchen was also a quick decision: "We saw the worktop in Granite Systems in Glasgow and that was it. The rest of the kitchen came from Birkwood, which is a small family business – again, it was the people that made the process so much better."

When it came to the colour scheme, the couple heeded Stuart's advice as Theresa recalls: "Stuart said we should paint the walls white and that was another thing we trusted him on and of course it meant there was no deliberation over paint colours." Mark adds laughing: "We did talk about multi-coloured doors at one point – I have no idea where that idea came from!"

Stuart continues: "I always told my children they could have any colour on the wall as long as it was white! Mark and Theresa were very co-operative and with all the angles and details in the interior, white makes them work best."

"This project worked because we found the right people," says Theresa. "The right architect, the right stonemason for the internal stonework, the right plasterer. We had a brilliant team come over from Scoraig to do the external

drystone walls; they were incredibly skilled and real characters." Mark continues: "We were also fortunate that we had a lot of skill in-house. It was out of everyone's comfort zone, and consequently I think we achieved a better result. When tradespeople and craftspeople have an input into the project, everyone gets so much more out of it. They add to the quality, they're proud of what they're doing."

Today, the couple are still holidaying in Cove but they're out of the caravan and inside the house which now goes under the moniker Lewie's Croft, named after an owner of the land in the distant past. Their children also now have a legacy although they are a bit older than anticipated as Theresa explains: "Our kids are past the partying stage which is probably better for the house but now we have grandchildren to enjoy this with us too. I think we were a little naive about how much it would cost and how long it would take but there's no regrets."

For Mark, it's still taking a bit of time to sink in: "It's taken me a while to realise and understand what we've built and that it's a great place to be. There's just a few more things I want to do..." ■

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Clay brick: A timeless material

With clay bricks capable of retaining structural integrity for more than 150 years, Rob Fello of the Brick Development Association (BDA) explains why self-builders are increasingly viewing them as a long-term investment.



Whether you consider buying or building, a home is life's biggest expenditure and our most valuable asset, so it must hold its value and be low maintenance

Consequently, clay brick continues to be the tried and tested building material of choice for self-builders, and one that has dominated the UK's architectural landscape for hundreds of years. Walk down any street and there will be buildings made of clay brick, and it can work in a historic or modern context. From the grandeur of Georgian-era homes to the charm of Victorian terraces, affordable post-war estates to stylish new-build housing developments, clay

brick remains a constant.

Clay brick's timeless appeal is matched by its exceptional durability, with the building lasting centuries, reducing the need for frequent repairs and replacements. With a minimum active lifespan of 150 years, clay brick's appearance remains consistent throughout its active life and doesn't fade or weather in comparison to other construction materials. In fact, brickwork weathers well which results in buildings becoming more attractive with age. This means that a brick home retains value for multiple periods of ownership.

Unlike render, timber or other building materials which require periodic

maintenance, clay brick's resilience minimises its environmental impact. Non-combustible, clay brick facades often survive fires structurally intact, enabling renovation and reuse.

Clay brick's classic beauty and durability is matched by its incredible versatility, making it the ideal building material to inspire your dream home. It can add flair to a home's design and distinctive characteristics across styles and eras. Whether gracing historic estates or sleek urban lofts, traditional cottages and farmhouses, or countless contemporary homes and buildings, clay brick complements and enhances any architectural vision.

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Clay brick's classic beauty and durability is matched by its incredible versatility

With its wide selection of colours, textures, shapes and sizes, clay brick allows for immense creativity and flexibility in design. Some brick products have colours applied to the faces of the brick or paver to create a unique effect or finish. It can be easily adapted for extensions, renovations or changes in use. Clay brick also pairs beautifully with many other building materials and systems. It can also be deconstructed and rebuilt to create exceptional brickwork features and detailing.

New clay brick products provide

even more options and include thin joint mortar brickwork, brick slips, clay thermal blocks and thin bricks mounted on insulated backings. Ongoing innovations in the industry ensure that clay brick continues to offer new possibilities for creative design and durable construction.

Beyond their enduring aesthetic, clay bricks provide ongoing benefits through energy efficiency. Noted for its excellent thermal mass, clay brick's ability to absorb, store and release heat energy helps to regulate indoor

temperatures and can reduce energy consumption for heating and cooling. This contributes to lower operational carbon emissions, as the building requires less energy to maintain comfortable temperatures throughout the year. While a clay brick building will stand the test of time, its energy performance also makes them an investment that pays dividends through energy savings.

For self-builders, clay brick's peerless blend of sustainability, adaptability and endurance will ensure this impressive building material remains an architectural mainstay for generations to come.

Rob Fello is chief executive at Brick Development Association (BDA)

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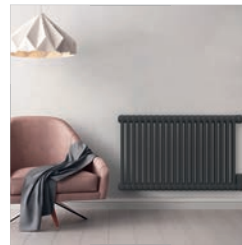


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Embracing nature's light

Paul Trace from Stella Rooflight discusses the importance of effectively introducing the biophilic benefits of natural light into the home.

In an era marked by technological advancements and urbanisation, the longing for a connection with nature has never been stronger. Biophilic design, a concept rooted in the idea of incorporating natural elements into built environments, offers a promising solution to bridge this gap. One key element of biophilic design that holds immense potential for enhancing wellbeing, health, and productivity is natural daylight. As the trend of home working gains popularity, the significance of natural daylight in home design becomes even more pronounced.

THE RISE OF BIOPHILIC DESIGN

Biophilic design is an innovative approach that draws inspiration from nature and aims to create spaces that foster a sense of harmony and balance between the built environment and the natural world. This design philosophy recognises the innate human inclination to connect with nature and seeks to harness its benefits for individuals' physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing.

The notion that access to green outdoor spaces and naturally bright indoor environments improves wellbeing and productivity is not a new concept. During the 19th century industrial era, wealthy factory and mill owners would create parks to ensure their workforce had access to clean fresh air and places to relax when not working. This idea has evolved into the post-industrial age. Today, this relationship between humans and nature, and understanding of the essential human need to connect to a natural environment in the workplace is being taken increasingly seriously by architects, developers and housebuilders, and is described by the phrase 'biophilic design' or 'biophilia,' the practice of incorporating nature into the built environment.

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURAL DAYLIGHT

Among the various biophilic design elements, natural daylight is arguably one of the most influential. The introduction of natural light into a living



or working space has far-reaching effects on occupants' overall health, productivity, and mood. Researchers have found several compelling reasons to prioritise natural daylight in home design:

- **Improved wellbeing:** Exposure to natural light has been linked to enhanced mood and reduced feelings of stress and anxiety. Sunlight triggers the release of serotonin in the brain, which contributes to feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Homes that receive ample natural daylight offer a healthier and more uplifting environment for their inhabitants.



- **Enhanced health:** Natural daylight exposure plays a crucial role in regulating the body's circadian rhythm, which governs our sleep-wake cycle. A well-regulated circadian rhythm is associated with better sleep quality, increased energy levels, and improved immune function. By incorporating natural daylight into home design, occupants can enjoy a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.
- **Boosted productivity:** For individuals working from home, the impact of natural daylight on productivity cannot be underestimated. Research indicates that exposure to daylight in workspaces can result in higher productivity levels, increased focus, and reduced instances of eye strain and headaches. A well-lit home office that embraces natural light can create a more conducive environment for efficient and creative work.

THE RISE OF HOME WORKING

The concept of working from home has undergone a seismic shift in recent years. The global pandemic significantly accelerated this trend, compelling countless individuals to transform their living spaces into productive work environments. With home offices becoming more common, the importance of optimising these spaces for health and productivity has never been greater.

DESIGNING HOME WORKSPACES ENHANCED BY NATURAL LIGHT

Integrating natural daylight into home workspaces requires thoughtful planning and design. Here are some practical tips for maximising the benefits of natural light in your home office:

- **Positioning:** Choose a workspace that allows ample natural light to flow in throughout the day. Position your desk near the brightest part of the room to make the most of the available daylight.

- Solar control: Opt for glazing treatments, such as solar controlled glass, that control the amount of sunlight entering the room. This way, you can avoid glare on screens while still enjoying the benefits of natural light.
- Reflective surfaces: Incorporate reflective surfaces, such as light-coloured walls and furniture, to help distribute and amplify natural light within the workspace.
- Biophilic elements: In addition to natural light, consider adding other biophilic elements to your home office, such as indoor plants and natural materials. These elements further enhance the connection to nature and promote a calming and inspiring atmosphere.



as an integral part of the building's architecture. They can provide views of the sky and promote a sense of wellbeing and connection with the outside without the distractions encountered with views through vertical glass windows.

These facts are well understood by most people involved in building design. However the huge potential of rooflights to provide exactly the amount, type and distribution of natural light required to meet any given specification is not always appreciated.

As our lives become increasingly urbanised and technology-driven, biophilic design emerges as a powerful tool to reintegrate nature into our built environments. Natural daylight, a fundamental aspect of biophilic design, has a profound impact on wellbeing, health, and productivity.

For those embracing the trend of home working, the incorporation of natural daylight into home design is an essential step towards creating a nurturing and productive workspace. By prioritising the inclusion of natural light via rooflights, we can foster a more balanced and harmonious living environment that promotes our overall happiness and performance.

Paul Trace is director at Stella Rooflight

THE ROLE OF THE ROOFLIGHT

Rooflights can help to provide natural light with qualities appropriate to the use of the building. Rooflights let in light from the brightest part of the sky and are not generally affected by external obstructions, such as trees or other buildings. They also provide a more even pattern of light than vertical windows.

Rooflights can form part of an effective technical lighting scheme, particularly in conjunction with efficiently controlled

artificial lighting, to produce specified illumination levels for particular tasks. According to leading consultants, horizontal rooflights provide three times more light than vertical windows (the equivalent of 10,000 candles on a sunny day), which is more than 200 times the light needed for most educational or work related tasks.

In addition, rooflights can also add to the more subjective qualities of spaces

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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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AS NATURE INTENDED

An innovative home, built as a flatpack from modular timber blocks, has been constructed on a highly sensitive and much cherished family site in Norfolk.

TEXT DEBBIE JEFFERY IMAGES JIM STEPHENSON





Gaining planning permission to build in a peaceful Norfolk meadow, surrounded by mature trees, seemed an impossibility for landowner Clare and her husband, until a pioneering architecture studio and an award-winning builder became involved.

"A special piece of land had been left to us by a close family member," explains Clare. "We lived nearby and visited the meadow with our children, enjoying it as a peaceful retreat, until by chance I saw an episode of *Grand Designs* about building Periscope House, which was designed by Studio Bark. It sparked an idea, as their village site is so close to our land."

Located in a beautiful, isolated location in rural Norfolk, the new home had been granted permission unanimously at planning committee through Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (previously paragraph 55, 79, 80). Paragraph 84 relates to building in rural areas, where only designs of exceptional quality are approved, and Studio Bark has a successful history of gaining planning permission for such homes. "They came and met us in the field and understood how important it was for us to keep the setting as it was, so that any new build would be surrounded by meadow grass," Clare recalls. "They were so passionate and gave us the confidence to move forward."

The couple visited the practice at their London office, taking just two pictures as inspiration for their proposed new home. One was cut out of a newspaper, featuring a contemporary sustainable new build, and the other was a photo taken while holidaying as a family in Scotland. The timber-clad cottage was almost invisible in the natural beauty of the barren

wilderness at the edge of Loch Ossian on the Corroul Estate, and encouraged the choice for their own exterior cedar cladding.

"We were so keen that whatever we built shouldn't spoil the setting and would be highly sustainable," says Clare. "Studio Bark did all the hard work, designing a contemporary three bedroom house with an open-plan kitchen, living and dining space. Our two children are adults now, but we still wanted to be able to offer them rooms to stay when they visit, and the third bedroom also doubles as my office on the ground floor, opening onto the central courtyard."

The design team had ongoing discussions with the local community and parish council, as well as pre-application conversations with the case officer, which helped to inform and influence the proposal. The design itself developed through the use of mixed media, sketching, photography, CAD drawing, computer modelling, physical modelling and environmental testing. It then evolved through detailed collaboration with a range of specialist consultants, including surveyors, ecologists, structural engineers, drainage consultants, environmental specialists, CNC fabricators, plywood suppliers, Passive House designers, off-grid specialists, sewage treatment consultants and many more.

The architectural brief was to blur the distinction between the home and the beautiful plot of land in which it sits, and the two storey design shelters external space while enjoying the openness of the wider site. Arranged around a south facing, three-sided courtyard, the building was positioned in the north-west corner of the plot – offering long views and glimpses of the

HIGH POINT

"Wet weather was the biggest issue during the build, which happened around the Covid pandemic."

LOW POINT

"Seeing how the house works so beautifully with the landscape and the way the windows capture surrounding views."



CLARE'S TOP TIP

Make a comfortable safe haven with a desk from the start, because you're going to be doing so much administration

village church beyond – and is Studio Bark's sixth house to have gained planning consent under Paragraph 84.

"If there ever was a part of a planning policy that could be described as truly interesting, then Paragraph 84 would be one of the contenders," states practice founder, Wilf Meynell. "For a client, the policy allows the possibility to build an unprecedented home on a piece of land that would otherwise be unsuitable for development, and in so doing, to commission and own a bespoke piece of architecture.

"The majority of national planning policy is strongly weighted against development in open countryside, and the network of designated green belts was established to prevent urban sprawl, limiting rural development to agricultural uses. Paragraph 84 is an exemption clause that leaves open a route through planning policy for landowners hoping to build their own home and recognising the long tradition of English countryside houses. It mandates that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as the exceptional quality of the proposal."

When it came to finding a contractor to take on the project, the couple chose award-winning specialist builders, Grocott & Murfit, who are based in the heart of North Norfolk. The company offers a complete building service, from design to completion, incorporating the latest products and eco-friendly technologies combined with best industry practices to deliver outstanding results.

"We enjoyed working collaboratively with the architects and clients to see this new sustainable

The architectural brief was to blur the distinction between the home and the beautiful plot of land in which it sits

building come to life," says company co-founder Daniel Grocott. "It was a fascinating build using the pioneering U-Build modular construction system developed by Studio Bark, and is the second largest project ever completed with this system. Clad in cedar, the property only looks better with age."

The low-carbon U-Build construction system can be reused or easily modified, is environmentally responsible, and gives a high level of cost certainty. The system doesn't require expensive cranes or specialist crews, offering a simple, low impact solution which is manufactured offsite using computer aided cutting to create a flat pack system on a 300mm repeating grid, which fits perfectly on a standard sheet of plywood to minimise waste.

Developed over several years, the system was designed to simplify the construction process for self-builders, speeding up the process and hugely reducing the overall embodied energy in comparison to traditional construction

The predominantly timber construction results in a very low impact and low energy house



techniques on a build of the same scale. Building modules are both material efficient and incredibly precise, cut to 0.1mm accuracy. This minimises the overall waste generated and ensures that elements fit together with ease to create an airtight building envelope.

Each module has been carefully proportioned so it can be easily manoeuvred by a single person, which importantly eliminates the need for heavy, disruptive machinery and therefore reduces the overall impact onsite and minimises disruption to the surrounding residents. "Studio Bark talked us through it, and we undertook our own research," says Clare. "It really is an exceptional building method which allowed us to help out at every stage during the build."

The U-Build boxes are incredibly easy to piece together using just a mallet, a screwdriver and a spanner. Made of solid plywood or OSB, the system is bolted together with standard coach bolt fixings, and the resulting structure is robust,

resilient and cheap to maintain.

"Of course there were a few trials and tribulations during the build – mostly associated with the weather, but the Grocott & Murfit team cleverly installed a scaffold roof, which protected the building during construction throughout the seasons," says Clare. "We were only living half an hour away from the site, and also had a caravan on the land, so it was a pleasure to visit the meadow almost every day and spend time there."

The couple assisted in assembling the timber boxes and became part of the team, tidying the site, making tea, and helping out wherever possible. "We were fortunate to have the team of builders that we had, as their work ethic was supreme," says Clare. "The excellent carpentry skills of the Grocott & Murfit team to the external cladding and interior woodwork were empathetically finished."

Green roofs help the building to further

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

MAIN CONTRACTOR

Grocott & Murfit
www.grocottandmurfit.co.uk

ARCHITECT, PLANNING AGENT

Studio Bark
www.studiobark.co.uk

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Structure Workshop
www.structureworkshop.co.uk

BUILD SYSTEM

U-Build
www.u-build.org

ARBORICULTURALIST

Oakfield Arboricultural Services
www.oakfieldarb.co.uk

DRAINAGE CONSULTANT

GH Bullard & Associates LLP
www.ghbullard.co.uk

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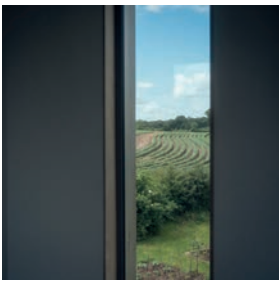
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disappear into the landscape, and its narrow plan with high-level openings makes the most of natural ventilation, lessening the risk of overheating in the summer months. Underfloor heating was laid throughout and connected to an air source heat pump, with additional power supplied by photovoltaic panels hidden on the roof.

The predominantly timber construction results in a very low impact and low energy house. Controlled openings to the south, with heavyweight floor and surface finishes, store warmth from passive solar gain which is released slowly during the cooler parts of the day and night.

"As an environmentally focused practice, we relish taking on Paragraph 84 schemes as they offer a chance for us to really push the ecological credentials of a design," says architect Wilf Meynell. "Paragraph 84 is an exciting piece of policy, and we're pleased that it exists to protect the countryside, yet also provides creative possibilities for the very best that architecture can offer."

With its square form, high ceilings, and elongated windows, the building was constructed on different levels, with lower, more intimate spaces such as the snug creating contrast. Once the interiors had been plastered, the couple finished this with a mist-coat of white paint for a clean feel. Hard flooring was laid downstairs, and birch panelling creates a feature wall in every room.

"I admire the simple, pared-back, modern designs of architect John Pawson, and wanted to keep the interiors as minimalist as possible after visiting an exhibition of his work which was just so peaceful," says Clare. "Before now, we always had period properties and are still trying to reduce our belongings to create a less busy feel."

As guardians of the site and passionate gardeners it was important to Clare, and

especially her husband, that the landscaping would be sensitively developed and central to the project. Studio Bark collaborated with local ecologists, Torc Ecology, to create a light touch proposal that would enhance the site, encouraging new flora and fauna through carefully selected planting of fruit trees and wildflowers. An indigenous orchard was a particular request, and vegetables are also grown on the plot.

The surrounding meadow remains untouched around the house, with only a small margin framing the timber building, and grass paths lead to the pond and the newly planted orchard. A small stream runs through the field, and the boundary hedgerow has been repaired and infilled, with oak trees planted and a willow on the stream's edge.

Access to the 125m² house is just a farm track with a gate at the end, and fences were prohibited by the planners to allow the free flow of wildlife. "I feel as though I'm living in their world at times, watching birds of prey, hares, deer, butterflies and dragonflies," remarks Clare.

"Our upstairs hidden terrace creates a private space where we can enjoy views upwards of both the sky and birds in flight, as well as the wildlife that visits the site. Moonlight floods the house at night, and bats circulate the courtyard at dusk."

The couple even decided to keep their upstairs bathroom window as clear rather than frosted glass as the plot is so private, and the window overlooks nearby woodland. "The house is such a clever design, opening to its natural surroundings with views of the majestic oak-framed fields and Bintree Woods beyond," says Clare.

"A friend commented that they would never be able to get anything done living here, because they would always be stopping to stare out of windows at the view. You really do feel totally immersed in the countryside." ■

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A modern approach

With the controversy over wood burning stoves, BFCMA's Dennis Milligan explains why it is worth looking at the benefits of modern stoves.

Combined with quality wood, modern stoves offer significant benefits that align with reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality.

At the start of 2025 the Scottish Government changed the law on the use of bioenergy heating systems in new builds and amended the Scottish New Build Heat Standard (NBHS) to allow bioenergy systems, including wood burning stoves, to be installed in all new homes and in existing buildings that are being converted. The minister heralded it as a "common sense and progressive step". The Scottish Government now considers the combustion of biomass to produce net zero CO₂ emissions at the point of use.

Wood fuel is a renewable resource that, when sourced sustainably, is a very low carbon option for heating. The carbon dioxide released during combustion is offset by the carbon dioxide absorbed by trees during their growth, making wood fuel an extremely low CO₂ energy source, with the biogenic carbon content being carbon-neutral. The sustainable nature of wood burning comes from the fact logs are generally the off-cuts that come from pruning trees. Woodlands need to be managed to stay healthy and part of that management is pruning.

When used together, modern wood burning stoves and heat pumps can provide a comprehensive and flexible heating option and perhaps the most cost-effective solution to decarbonising domestic heat. Stoves can complement heat pumps by providing additional warmth during extremely cold periods.

With the pressure to reduce particle emissions, it is often overlooked that modern wood burning stoves burn wood more efficiently and cleanly than open fires and older stoves. The use of modern wood burning results in significantly lower levels of PM2.5 emissions.

When choosing a stove, it is worth checking out the independently verified Clear Skies website. Clear Skies can help you identify stoves that produce fewer emissions, including those that are



suitable for use in smoke control areas.

Secondary heating is not regarded as essential in the SAP assessment, used to measure the energy efficiency of a house design. SAP focuses on primary central heating systems like heat pumps. However, this does not mean that a stove cannot be added to a house design. In many households secondary heating is an important part of the heating mix, especially in areas off the gas grid. In the early autumn and late spring, when it is not cold enough to justify turning on the central heating system a wood burning stove can be used to keep the whole house warm. As the operation of a stove is independent of the national grid it can be used in a power cut, providing welcome heat.

It is generally accepted that the warm glow of a fire creates a feeling of wellbeing. In addition to these psychological benefits wood burning stoves are a cost effective way to heat your home. During the cost of living crisis, when energy costs dramatically increased, the sales of modern wood burning stoves grew significantly.

When designing your new home, it is necessary to think about the heating system. Stoves require a flue/chimney and to work effectively the route of the flue/chimney should be planned.

The draw in the chimney/flue is even important with modern wood burning stoves. Most people's desire is to make the flue/chimney as discrete as possible inside the building. This needs to be balanced with the need to keep the flue/chimney as straight as possible. The draw in flues/chimneys rely on the pressure differential between inside and outside the building to release the products of combustion to the atmosphere. Bends in the flue/chimney can restrict the flow of the gases. Where bends are required to suit the design of the dwelling, the number of bends should be kept to a minimum and not exceed more than four. The angle of the bends should not be greater than 45° from the vertical, and horizontal lengths should be avoided.

Insulation is another key factor in keeping the flue gases above the dew point. Clay, concrete and pumice flue liners require insulation to be prepared and added onsite. Stainless steel system chimneys are supplied with effective insulation. Double wall pumice chimney systems have an air gap between the walls of the inner and outer blocks. The air gap combined with the natural insulating properties of pumice provide effective insulation.

Stoves operate under what is referred to as negative pressure, so if you are installing a ventilation system it is important to keep the room in which the stove is to be installed under negative pressure.

Including a wood burning stove with a heat pump can provide a versatile hybrid heating system, able to deal with fluctuating temperature conditions. If you consider installing a stove, remember the flue/chimney requirements and incorporate them into the house design.

The BFCMA is the UK's only trade association representing the chimney and flue industry and works closely with the government, public bodies and other organisations to further the interest of the chimney and flue industry. It represents the majority of manufacturers and sole distributors in the industry.

Dennis Milligan is President at BFCMA

CASE STUDY

A SUSTAINABLE RETROFIT

In the retrofit and extension of his old bungalow, Michael Collins has teased something special out of the ordinary.

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT IMAGES JACOB MILLIGAN

Sometimes, the perfect home project doesn't need to be the dream building plot. Sometimes, it can be a tired 1930s bungalow in a good area close to the station. Providing, that is, you can see the building's potential. Architect Michael Collins and his wife Anna saw that potential when they bought their modest two bedroom bungalow in Hertfordshire in 2016. Located next to a nature reserve, the bungalow "wasn't well looked after," recalls Michael. "And the building left a lot to be desired, but it was a sizable plot, 50 metres deep, with a good long garden."

With a small baby taking up much of their time and another on the way, Michael and Anna waited three years before starting work on their home in 2019. Spread over several phases, their project added a single storey extension to the rear, created two additional bedrooms and a shower room in the attic and gave the existing building a deep retrofit. The result is an extraordinary home that keeps its traditional appearance at the front, yet is innovative, sophisticated and perfectly tailored to the demands of busy family life.

The two constraints Michael faced when planning the changes to their home were the budget and environmental concerns. While energy efficiency was a key goal, Michael was also keen to make sure that any new materials had 'low embodied carbon' – for example, the products they chose were produced with reduced greenhouse gas emissions. In practical terms, this meant Michael chose timber rather than steel in the construction.

This was also part of their decision to build the new rear extension at 90 degrees to the back of the existing home, rather than along the width. That approach, Michael believes, cuts out a lot of light in the original building. Turning the 8m x 4m extension at a right angle created a sheltered and private courtyard garden, with more light in both old and new parts of the building and a better sequence of spaces. The extension is

home to the living room and, at the far end, the office, while the kitchen remains in its original position at the back of the bungalow.

"Budget was a massive part of that decision," admits Michael. "But it also avoids the use of steel, as we had to retain the original openings."

The original kitchen is now a spacious open-plan kitchen and dining room. The bright and modern decor also hides a key design feature; a 'secret' utility room, tucked behind the panelling next to the dining table. Despite the fact there is no window or external door in this room, Anna and Michael can use it to dry laundry, thanks to the mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system they installed as part of the retrofit. The MVHR removes moist air and replaces it with fresh air in an energy-efficient way, using a heat exchanger to extract the heat before expelling the stale air.

Clever storage ideas also make the most of the space upstairs in the new bedrooms. In the master bedroom, for example, Michael pushed back the structure to create additional space. Rather than install conventional bedside tables, he built low-level drawers into the wall; a trick that not only reduces clutter but cuts back on dusting! Discrete panels on either side of the bed also open to reveal hidden wardrobe space.

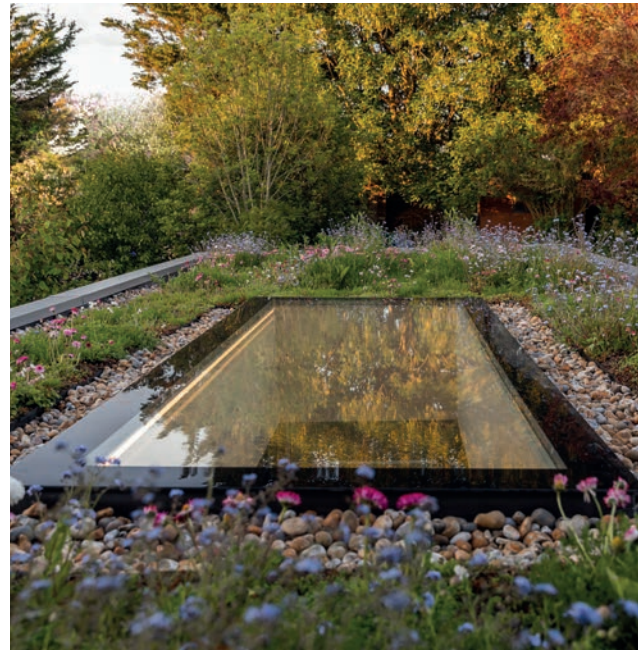
Cost-effective and sustainable material choices were key to the success of this project, and the most striking of these is perhaps the green roof on the extension. With exceptional insulating properties, it keeps heating bills down and is a nod to the meadow across the road, against which the new extension sits comfortably.

A green roof is a good system for water retention and the water is used by the plants that would otherwise run into a soakaway. Rather than choose the more common sedum roof, Michael and Anna opted for wildflowers, which not only attract pollinators but bring birds closer to the house. The meadow-like planting also draws a visual connection to the garden beyond, as well as to the neighbouring nature reserve.

HIGH POINT

"When big things happen such as the roof going on. That was a big step forward."





Cost-effective and sustainable material choices were key to the success of this project

"We can look out, across the roof to the garden and we have a terrific view from the window," says Michael. "It's also really enhanced the biodiversity."

Another advantage of a green roof is the level of insulation it provides. 120mm of earth is not only insulating but gives incredible acoustic performance. Due to the contours of the garden, the office is also partly sunken and Michael relishes his days spent working from home, as the office is a "very silent and a marvellous space to tuck yourself away in."

Elsewhere, the retrofit of the existing building meant plenty of new insulation in the floors, walls and roof. Despite Building Regulations placing no obligation on Michael to upgrade the existing building, he added insulation in the floors and roof that was double the standard

required in homes. Michael chose Earthwool and Ecotherm PIR, a rigid insulating board. While not the 'greenest' material available, both have recycled content and were the trade-off Michael had to make between very high performance, sustainability and a reasonable price tag. Many fully 'eco' products, such as clay plaster, were simply beyond the couple's budget. "We had to cut our cloth to suit our purse," says Michael.

Despite this, Michael's design is creative and innovative. Where trendy eco products were out of reach, he specified agricultural products instead, such as fibre cement. Made from recycled slates and frequently used on farm sheds, fibre cement can be used to create a sharp, contemporary look reminiscent of zinc. Michael used this around the new dormer windows with great impact and is pleased with

LOW POINT

"Were when things happened outside of my control, such as the delays with the glazing. I had to be relaxed and remember that we are fortunate to be in this position."



the results. "You can work with it easily," he says. "And it's a cheap and ubiquitous material that can be elevated."

Another careful choice was the type of blocks used to build the new extension, which are made with a high recycled content. Parts of the extension were then clad with Iroko, a tropical hardwood that is incredibly robust. "It's often used for boatbuilding," says Michael. "The cladding faces east and it gets a battering of UV light, but the Iroko should last for decades. We didn't finish it, we just left it natural, as it is very strong and gives a nice, warm feeling."

The contemporary feel continues with the windows, which are triple-glazed in the small, traditional windows to the front and double-glazed at the rear, due to the higher costs of large sliding doors. Delays with the delivery of the glazing were the only real challenge in this build which, unsurprisingly, ran smoothly.

The couple's phased approach was dictated by budget and there is more to do, with an air source heat pump planned shortly to replace their gas central heating, plus solar panels for the roof. Together, these additions will further reduce the day-to-day running costs of their home, while also reducing the carbon impact of the family's energy use. Even without these measures, the EPC has gone from an 'F' on purchase to an incredible 'B'. "That's better than a new build," says Michael. "The assessor was limited by his software, and we were even pulled down by the existing building, so it's quite something."

The eco-credentials continue inside with a high/low approach that combines eco-friendly non-VOC paint with everyday products, such as an engineered floor from B&Q. Michael was also lucky that Anna agreed to take on the

Where trendy eco products were out of reach, Michael specified agricultural products instead

interior design, since she has an exceptional eye, despite not having a background in design.

Inspired by the nearby meadows, Anna's concept was to create the sense of sitting in a meadow, with colour up to a horizontal line around the room. A bold approach, but one that answered the question of how to make their eight-year-old daughter's room sophisticated.

The shower room takes the same inspiration, with light falling on almost iridescent Zellige tiles and a terrazzo floor that echoes the scattered petals of wildflowers. The interior style in the new extension edges more towards the 'raw' trend in architectural design. Michael selected joinery-grade joists for their lack of knots and then simply planed and coated them in preservative. Between each exposed beam is high-quality birch ply. The effect is organic in feel, with a simplicity that places the focus on the views through the windows and the serenity of the spaces. "It's normal materials, just done carefully," says Michael.

Although their family grew with the arrival of their son in 2019, the phased approach has made the project less of a slog. Michael was



CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT

Michael Collins Architects
michaelcollinsarchitects.com

CONTRACTOR

Arden Construction
ardenconstruction.co.uk

PAINTS

Lakeland Paints
www.lakelandpaints.co.uk

INSULATION

Kingspan
www.kingspan.com

FLOORING

B&Q
www.diy.com

the only family member to remain living onsite during all the building work, while Anna took the children to stay with family to avoid the dust and noise. Despite being the designer and project manager of the build, Michael didn't get too hands-on, beyond doing some of the decorating. The building work was left to main contractor Arden Construction, who have done a fantastic job on this most exacting of projects.

For Michael, the best decision he made was to listen to his conscience and move away from using steel and plasterboard. Timber and the application of traditional plaster directly to block walls have not only cut costs significantly but also reduced the family's impact on the planet.

With the home completed in 2023, Michael now loves sunny mornings, when the family



can move easily between the sheltered courtyard part of the garden and the kitchen or new living room.

“The garden is now like having a new outside room,” says Michael. The project has also prompted the family to rethink how they live, with the television relegated to the small snug in the front of the bungalow. “No one ever goes in to watch it!” laughs Michael. “No TV was our best decision ever. Instead, we read, the children have the space to perform plays or play the piano and we can all be together.”

The design has not only given their growing children their own bedrooms, but they are constantly outside, with all life revolving around the newly created central spaces. “It’s been transformative for our family life,” says Michael. ■



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CASE STUDY

MEDITERRANEAN TRANQUILLITY

Behind the traditional stained-glass front door of an Edwardian terraced house in Southfields lies a remarkable renovation inspired by bright and airy Mediterranean living.

TEXT JAYNE DOWLE IMAGES HATCH + MASON / CHRIS SNOOK





Belonging to 32-year-old yoga teacher Molly Salamon and husband Dylan, 34, an entrepreneur and events organiser, this three-storey house in Southfields, south London was taken apart and rebuilt, leaving only the facade and first floor intact.

As avid travellers, Molly and Dylan wanted to bring the warmth and ambience of Ibiza to south London, creating a tranquil and organic home to help them think of sunny climes even on the greyest London morning. "We wanted it to feel like we were on holiday every day," says Molly.

It was a huge undertaking, especially as Molly was pregnant with their son Otto, born just four weeks before the family moved into their totally transformed home in June 2023. "We lived at my mother-in-law's in Surrey during the build," says Molly. "There is no way we could have lived here while the work was being done. The whole thing took 10 months. It was quite a long time."

Molly and Dylan bought their house for just over £1m in June 2021. When they met, Dylan owned an apartment in Westminster. But after the couple acquired their first dog – a miniature dachshund – they moved to Clapham to be closer to green spaces.

During the Covid pandemic in 2020 Molly says they wanted to get out of London altogether and started looking at farms in Devon and Kent: "It was ridiculous, we would spend our weeks looking at different properties. It would take us four hours to drive down to Devon."

Then they decided that rather than upping sticks, they would stay in London and find a family-sized house to renovate – with Molly in charge of the design. She's the "more creative and arty" half of the duo; before becoming a yoga teacher she worked in the jewellery business as a stone buyer. Dylan's business interests include The Curling Club, an Alpline-themed curling pop-up serving food and cocktails on London's South Bank.

"We put an offer down [on a house] in

Brixton, but fortunately it was the fate of the universe, the sellers pulled out on the day of the exchange," Molly smiles. "By this point, we must have been to look at about 50 houses and put down five offers. We came to look at three properties around Southfields. This one had been on the market for a bit longer, it was definitely a bit of a renovation job."

As soon as she and Dylan walked in, "it felt like this is the one. It was enough of a project, and just right for us. It was the little things – the top bedroom windows look over everyone's gardens, our house is slightly wider than the other houses on the grid, and the garden is a good size. Within 30 minutes we'd cancelled all other offers, and went for this one. It all felt serendipitous."

The summer of 2022, with the couple having married in June of that year, they holidayed on the Balearic island of Ibiza, known for its cool, laid-back and airy interior design. "With the house purchase secured, we really started to think about how Ibizan style might influence our own design," says Molly. "We really wanted to get in the arches and the curves, and the textures – the marble vanity unit in the master bedroom, and the micro cement in the shower, it makes it feel like a cave – that inspired us on Ibiza. I love that we've achieved that, it makes the house feel really tranquil."

From the start Molly and Dylan intended to carry out a full renovation. They found their architect, London-based practice Hatch + Mason, by recommendations following a school playground chat. "My sister is an interior designer and her husband is an architect – he was too busy to do our house," says Molly. "I was talking to her about the difficulties of finding the right architect for our project, then a week later, she was in the playground and got chatting to someone who had just had their house renovated by Hatch + Mason. We knew straight away that they understood what we wanted

HIGH POINT

"Taking lots of A3 sheets of paper and around 40 pots of Little Greene paint to figure out the colour theme for the overall house. I really loved experimenting with ideas and combinations, and I'd recommend this as a great way to work out what colours will work in a space."



LOW POINT

"Our neighbours on one side fell out with us. We had to pay an enclosure fee to join the ground floor extension onto the wall belonging to the neighbours on one side. It was calculated as 50% of the cost of the wall. In the grand scheme of things, it's not a huge amount, just bricks and timber, but it was about £3,000 to £4,000 of added costs. That was one way of keeping the peace."

to achieve."

Once Hatch + Mason was on board, it then took until June 2022 to find the right builders, Surrey-based new-build and refurbishment specialists Klas Projects, and to wait until this busy firm had enough space in the schedule to accommodate such a major project.

The house came with few original period features. The previous owner had carried out a renovation 30 years earlier, during which the fireplaces had been removed, leaving the front door as the most intact traditional element. So there was plenty of scope for a new vision; a four bedroom home in the heart of London that brought the soft tones and calmness of the Mediterranean to the city.

"Escapism was on my mind," says Molly. "I wanted lots of arches in the house, to have lots of curvature, a really nice feel and shapes. This kind of leaned into the original house anyway. It's so wonky, there's no straight wall in our house."

There were also technical considerations. The loft had already been converted, but not to current Building Regulations, so upgrading the top floor was a priority, and the existing kitchen extension was poorly completed. "It was quite a big situation," says Molly. "The loft conversion had to be completely redone. None of the timber had been signed off. We bought a house with a loft conversion and a kitchen extension and you just don't expect this. We just had to face it and find a way to pay for it."

At the heart of the house there is now a double-height atrium, an impressive focal point forming the kitchen-living-dining area

At first, the plan was to adapt more of the original house. "But the extent of demolition proposed was so severe that it made better construction sense to demolish almost all of the original house," says Hatch + Mason principal architect Andreas Andreaou. "The project was nearly a new build, but we salvaged materials such as brickwork and timber wherever possible."

It sounds onerous, taking down almost an entire house and starting again, but Andreas explains that the process was fairly simple. For the most part, it was undertaken in stages. "There was a phased approach to the build, which enabled the front facade to maintain its



position while the works were being undertaken. It helped that it was a terraced house, because the surrounding properties provided their own support."

He also points out that maintaining the basic structure of the first floor throughout meant it "acted as kind of a prop", keeping the Salamons' house secure when the internal walls had been removed. The second floor structure was the next part of the build; the roof was removed and replaced with a tin covering that kept the building weatherproof while work was carried out underneath.

As new rooms were configured, the practice worked alongside a structural engineer to devise load-bearing walls and install steels for support. At the heart of the house there is now a double-height atrium, an impressive focal point forming the kitchen-living-dining area. This 4.7m high space, in a two-storey masonry-built extension topped with a sedum roof, opens up the ground floor both vertically and horizontally. With a new curved bulkhead at the back, suggesting the proportions of a Mediterranean palazzo, this north-facing room is flooded with natural light from a magnificent oculus rooflight, and finished internally with limewash plaster.

The extension, which takes the ground floor living space to 91m², is clad in thermally-modified Scandinavian Scots pine, to form a distinctive external feature wall – giving the house its nickname, 'Waffle'. Pivot doors lead into the generous 65m² garden, which Hatch + Mason landscaped in Mediterranean style, adding a useful shed to store the couple's exercise equipment.

"The ladder effect on the extension's cladding

was designed to align seamlessly with the glazing and parapets, creating a cohesive look," says Andreas. "It was done this way to give the impression that the cladding is floating, without visible fixings, screws, or brackets, enhancing a sense of upward movement."

The loft conversion was redone and now contains a study, nursery and family bathroom. It's clad in a sustainable bronze cladding, made from treated copper, which also highlights in a feature bay window in the main bedroom, one of two bedrooms (both ensuite) on the 71m² first floor. "We chose the bronze and the Scandinavian Scots pine to bring in warm colour," says Andreas. "It's a stark contrast to the industrial grey tones typical of many London extensions."

The house is not in a Conversation Area, and the planning permission for the work was obtained from Wandsworth Borough Council in 10 weeks, with no hitches. "It was very smooth, owing to the nature of adjoining buildings, which were significantly higher than the existing house," says Andreas. "This meant it wasn't overly challenging [to the planning authority]."

Rebuilding also meant a more thermally-effective home could be created. This was achieved by establishing meticulous levels of airtightness, adding a mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system and ensuring the entire external fabric of the building, including the existing front facade and new roof, achieved outstanding insulation performance with a mixture of fibre and solid products. The MVHR supplies passive heating backed up by a high-performance gas boiler.

As this ambitious rebuild progressed, did

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Molly and Dylan ever wonder if they had made a huge mistake and should have stuck to a more straightforward renovation? "It was quite daunting at first," Molly admits. "I really felt for our neighbours at the time, there was huge scaffolding everywhere. But I think we were just quite excited, every time we visited the house, even if loads of progress wasn't happening, we would see it evolving. And as soon as the internal walls are up, you can start to picture your furniture in place and living there." All internal walls are of timber studwork.

Molly loved becoming hands on, especially sourcing materials. "For the kitchen I wanted Calcutta quartz, with the brownish-coloured veins to tie in with the lime plaster," she explains. "Andreas gave me a fabulous contact, MGLW, a stone supplier in south London. You have to make an appointment, but they do the most amazing marble, quartz, granite and limestone. The fabricators did a really good job. The shelf in the kitchen is four metres long!"

"Our practice's mission statement is "created by us, inspired by you", says Andreas. "It's all about bringing the client on board and making them part of the team. We collaborate together. Our practice is not about imposing a certain 'look' on a client, or a house style. It's a representation of a client's ambitions, own taste and character."

Molly says she "absolutely loves" coming home from holiday now and feels very comfortable in their new family home. "It works with a toddler, people are often surprised to find," she adds. "The top floor having the

"Escapism was on my mind," says Molly. "I wanted lots of arches in the house, to have lots of curvature."

bedroom layouts as they are, Otto's got the whole space to himself. There's a stairgate so it's a safe space, his space, his toys. And the huge family kitchen and snug area – even having the kitchen island in the centre of the room – works too. Otto can run around, he's got a racetrack!"

The architect estimates a home of this size – now 203m² in total – to this specification, would currently cost in the region of £2,900 plus VAT per sqm to re-build. The Salamons' investment of around half a million pounds – and a lot of courage – paid off. The house is now both a welcome haven and ideal entertaining space for Molly, Dylan and Otto and their now two miniature dachshunds.

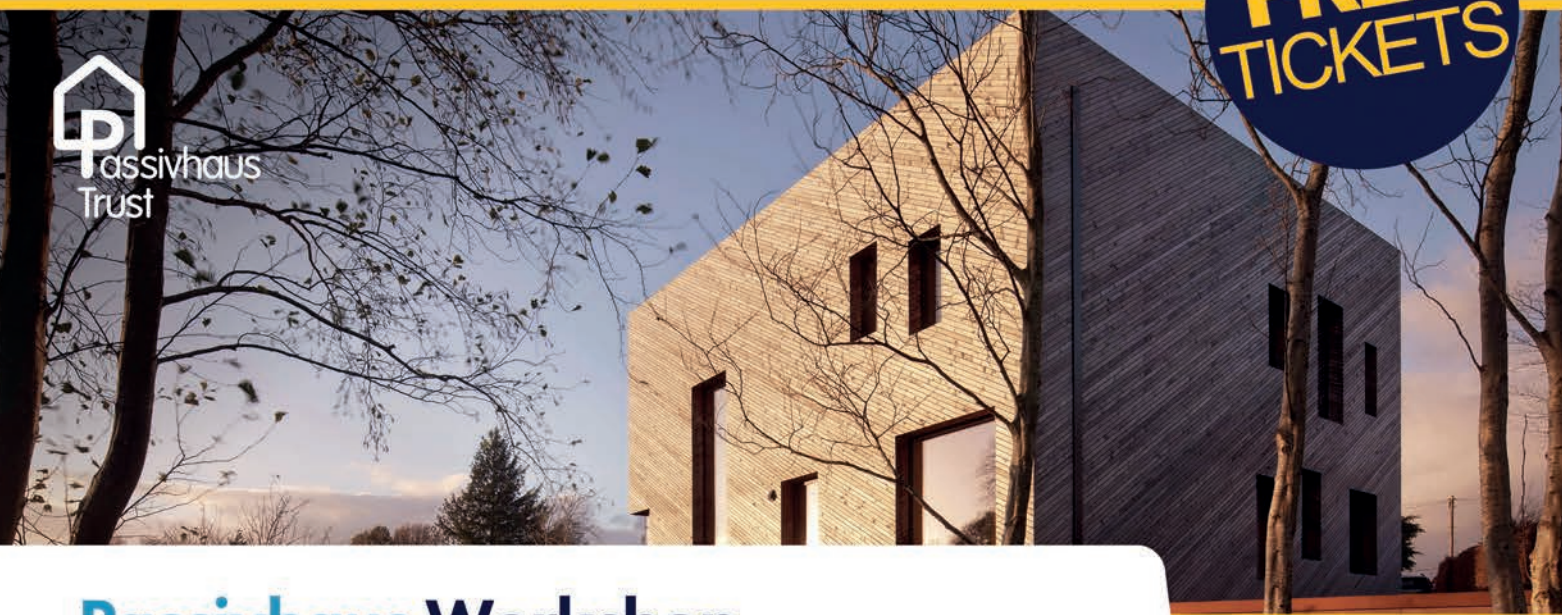
"When we had finished, we asked the estate agent who sold us the house to come and have a look," says Molly. "She was amazed at what we had done with the space. Most houses that get renovated around here very much stick with a traditional floor plan, they don't break the mould." ■

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How much do 'U-value' insulation?

Matthew Evans of Kingspan Insulation GB discusses what to think about when it comes to insulating your self-build.



Ensuring your new home is effectively insulated is an important consideration for all self-builders. It can help to significantly reduce your long-term running costs, keep spaces at a more comfortable temperature across the year and allow low carbon heating technologies (such as heat pumps) to perform efficiently. It is also typically much cheaper to get this right during the initial build than trying to upgrade the insulation at a later date, so it is worth considering properly right at the start of your project.

To achieve the best results, you need to think about the level of performance you want to achieve, which insulation products are most suitable for delivering this, and ensure that the products that are specified by your architect are actually used and fitted correctly on your project.

INSULATION FUNDAMENTALS

The measure of how well a complete construction element (floor, wall or roof) resists heat loss is known as a U-value. The lower the U-value of a construction, the more effective it will be at preventing these losses.

A good starting point when deciding what U-value the different elements in your home should achieve are the values contained in the Notional Dwelling Specification. This is a building performance specification that is used to confirm whether a property complies with the current energy efficiency requirements in the Building Regulations and Standards. The specification for your project is applied to a theoretical building with the same dimensions as the home you intend to build. The software then generates performance targets that your home will need to achieve (such

as expected carbon emissions). These U-values are not compulsory but provide a good indication of what you should aim for.

England, Scotland and Wales all use different specifications within their Notional Dwelling which are shown in the table below. Where possible, it is worth looking towards the more ambitious values used in Wales and Scotland as representing best practice for your home.

INSULATION OPTIONS

Once you have a clear idea of what U-values you would like to achieve, you then need to consider which insulation products will be most suitable for delivering this. The key performance measure for insulation products is their thermal conductivity (lambda value). As with U-values, the lower this value is, the more effective the products are at

Element type	Notional Dwelling - England (Approved Document L1 2021)	Notional Dwelling - Wales (Approved Document L1 2022)	Notional Building (Domestic) – Scotland (Section 6 (Energy) 2022)
Wall (W/m2K)	0.18	0.13	0.15
Floor (W/m2K)	0.13	0.11	0.12
Roof (W/m2K)	0.11	0.11	0.09

preventing heat loss. This can mean it is possible to achieve a desired U-value with a slimmer thickness of insulation, which can be beneficial for your project.

For example, in cavity wall constructions, the insulation is installed within the cavity between the inner and outer leaf of brick or blockwork. By specifying insulation products which have a low thermal conductivity, such as rigid phenolic insulation boards, it is possible to achieve the external wall U-values shown above with a slimmer thickness of insulation than may be possible with worse performing alternatives. This can help to limit the depth of the wall construction, allowing you to get the maximum floorspace from your building footprint.

Keep in mind that insulation materials which look similar can have quite different thermal conductivities, so it is important to confirm that what is being fitted on your home actually matches what you or your architect have chosen.

ENSURING BEST PRACTICE

Alongside choosing your U-value and insulation products, it is also important to ensure the insulation is designed and fitted to minimise any thermal bridges. These are areas where materials which are better conductors of heat than the



insulation are allowed to form a 'bridge' between the inner and outer face of a construction. This bridge can act as a fast track for heat to escape from your home and can account for as much as 30% of total heat losses.

Thermal bridges commonly occur because of gaps or inconsistencies in the insulation layer and are often found at junctions between the wall, floor and roof, and around openings such as windows and doors. The heat losses at these junctions are measured as a Psi-value.

To limit these bridges, it is best practice for your architect to plan the

interaction of the insulation at key junctions in what is known as a detail. This should include a calculated Psi-value. Rather than having to create each of these themselves, there are a range of manufacturer-created and industry-created details with pre-calculated Psi-values which can be used. These are typically supported by process sequences which provide a step-by-step explanation for installers on how to correctly fit the insulation in line with the detail. It is important that these are followed, and that insulation is carefully installed with no gaps between the boards or rolls of insulation for it to perform correctly.

A SOLID BASE

While selecting insulation may not be the most exciting part of a self-build, considering this area right from the start can really pay off in the long run. By targeting low U-values, making use of products with low thermal conductivities, and ensuring the insulation is well designed and installed, you can help ensure your home will be comfortable and affordable to heat.

Matthew Evans is director of technical and regulatory affairs at Kingspan Insulation GB

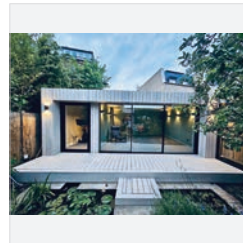


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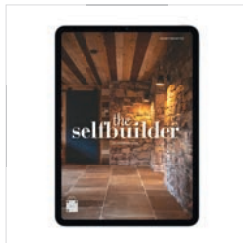
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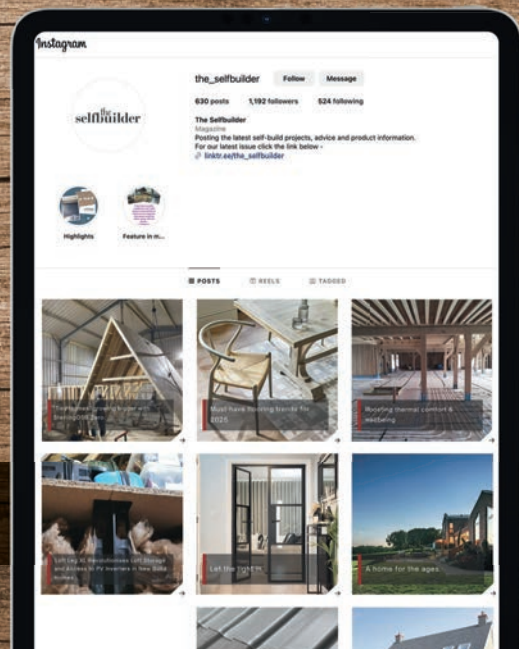
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