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# FROM THE EDITOR...

As touched upon in our last issue, gaining planning permission and dealing with local authorities has been a major sticking point for self-builders for some time. A quick Google News search of the term 'self-build' returns a slightly depressing catalogue of local news stories about planning refusals for both self- and custom-build applications.

However, the Government's ongoing commitment to build more – and the reforms it promises to help facilitate that – means the sector is hopeful the tide could be turning.

At the end of May the Government revealed plans to support SME builders to help "get Britain building". It acknowledged that a planning system that sees a site of 10 or less homes having to go through the same process as a site of over 100 homes is flawed, and promised to "streamline" the system. It also said it will ease Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements for SMEs.

With much of the UK's self- and custom-build housing built by SME builders, this is welcome news for the sector. The proposed changes have been praised by the National Custom & Self Build Association (NaCSBA), who has been fighting for years for an overhaul of the planning system that currently works against small projects.

A turbulent planning process was sadly the reality for Lily and Rob Wood's project in south west London, where changing planning officers, moving goalposts and various other requests meant gaining approval took almost two years. But despite the painful start, their finished family home was worth all the hardship. You can read more about the project in Carol Burns' case study on page 34.

Elsewhere in London, Al and Lily Chen overcame potential planning issues when their architect submitted a joint application with a neighbouring property for matching single storey extensions clad in London-stock brick. It meant both looked original and in-keeping with one another, as Alexandra Pratt explains in her case study on page 14.

**ROSEANNE FIELD**



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ON THE COVER...

© PHIL COFFEY (PAGE 34)

## Worth the wait

Lily and Rob Wood persevered through a lengthy planning process to achieve their dream home

## A perfect fit

Adam Brown explains why customisable freestanding furniture is worth considering for your project

## A new lease of life

What was intended to be a simple extension turned into a complete renovation project for Lettie and Tom Fardon





## REGULARS

08

### Home Styling: Flexible elegance

Adam Brown of The Painted Furniture Company discusses how customisable freestanding furniture offers flexible, high-quality pieces that adapt over time and combine personal style, durability and design continuity.

12

### Interior Inspiration: Living Rooms

Whether you need to find the perfect sofa for relaxing in the evenings or some handy storage to keep things tidy, we've curated a selection of products from the comfortable to the practical to help you create your ideal living space.

## PRODUCT FEATURES

41

### Structural timber: a smart choice

Andrew Orriss of the Structural Timber Association (STA) looks at timber as a sustainable, low-carbon building choice, increasingly popular among UK self-builders for its environmental and practical benefits.

45

### Designing with doors in mind

Deuren's Ian Chubb shares how specifying doors early unlocks better design choices, avoids compromise and keeps your self-build ambitions on track.

47

### Building your dream outdoors

To help self-builders transform muddy plots into luscious garden havens, Anita Magee of Tobermore looks at the top trends inspiring garden design.

49

### Smarter by design

Theben Automation's Paul Foulkes explores how smart homes are moving beyond timers and schedules, embracing real-time, sensor-based automation for greater comfort, efficiency and intuitive living.





# CONTENTS JULY/AUGUST 2025

## PRODUCTS

<b>FINANCE &amp; INSURANCE</b>	32
<b>SITE PREPARATION</b>	33
<b>STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS</b>	33
Timber	33
<b>BUILDING ENVELOPE</b>	
Doors & Windows	42
Glass & Glazing	42
Veranda's	43
<b>HEATING, VENTILATION &amp; SERVICES</b>	43
Radiators	43
<b>INSULATION</b>	44
<b>INTERIORS</b>	
Acoustic Wall Panels	46
Bathrooms & Kitchens	43
Floors	44
Interior Doors	45
Stairs	44
<b>SAFETY, SECURITY &amp; SMART HOMES</b>	
Connected Homes	48
<b>LANDSCAPING &amp; EXTERNAL SURFACES</b>	47
Decking	50

## CASE STUDIES

14

### Beyond the looking glass

Al and Lily Chen's renovated and extended Edwardian home is a masterclass in space and light.

24

### The best laid plans

Lettie and Tom Fardon fell in love with a timber-framed 1950s bungalow ripe for renovation and bought it at auction, but didn't realise just how much work would be involved in bringing it up to modern standards.

34

### A house of two halves

A chance to design their own home from scratch in their favourite part of London was far too good an opportunity to pass up for Lily Wood and her family





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# FLEXIBLE ELEGANCE

Adam Brown of The Painted Furniture Company discusses how customisable freestanding furniture offers flexible, high-quality pieces that adapt over time and combine personal style, durability and design continuity.

For anyone embarking on the rewarding journey of building their own home, one of the most exciting aspects comes at the later stages: transforming a beautifully constructed space into a living environment that feels personal, practical and timeless. Furniture plays a pivotal role in this transition and while fitted furniture often comes to mind as the go-to solution for built-in storage or tailored looks, there's a compelling case for considering an alternative: customisable freestanding furniture.

Customisable furniture offers the perfect middle ground between flat-pack convenience and the permanence of fully fitted designs. It can be an ideal solution for self-builders seeking a personalised style without

compromising on future flexibility, creative freedom or build quality.

Customisable furniture refers to standalone pieces (such as dressers, wardrobes, sideboards and desks) built to high specifications but with options for size, colour, configuration and detailing. Unlike mass-market furniture, these pieces are typically made to order, allowing homeowners to specify dimensions, select finishes and choose hardware or features that reflect the personality of the space.

This approach differs from fitted furniture, which is permanently fixed to walls and usually built onsite to the contours of a room. It's also far removed from flatpack furniture, which is manufactured for mass appeal, requires home assembly and is rarely built to last.

## WHY SELF-BUILDERS SHOULD CONSIDER CUSTOMISABLE FURNITURE

Self-building is about creating a home that fits your lifestyle – not just structurally, but emotionally and practically too. Customisable furniture aligns beautifully with that mindset and can further enhance your project in a number of ways.

### LONG-TERM FLEXIBILITY

One of the key benefits of freestanding customisable furniture is its adaptability. While fitted furniture is permanent and difficult to move or repurpose, freestanding pieces can evolve with your needs. You might want to refresh a room, reconfigure a space as your family grows, or even take your furniture with you if you move. With custom pieces, you maintain the flexibility that fixed solutions can't offer.



## DESIGN CONTINUITY ACROSS SPACES

Customisable furniture allows for cohesion throughout the home without becoming repetitive. By choosing a consistent colour palette, finish or design style, you can link spaces together while tailoring each piece to its function. A media cabinet in the living room can share visual cues with a home office desk or kitchen dresser, while still feeling appropriate to each room.

## A FITTED LOOK WITHOUT THE PERMANENCE

Many homeowners appreciate the built-in look for its clean lines, minimal gaps and a tailored fit. With careful planning, customisable freestanding furniture can also achieve this look. Slightly wider pieces can be made to fit between alcoves, or taller wardrobes can be designed to reach just below the ceiling, creating a seamless, intentional look without the commitment of permanent installation.







### **SUPERIOR CRAFTSMANSHIP & DURABILITY**

Unlike flatpack furniture, which is designed for cost-efficiency and convenience, customisable pieces are crafted from high-quality materials using traditional joinery. Think dovetail joints rather than cam-lock fittings, solid timbers over laminates, and painted finishes that can be refreshed over time.

### **EASIER INTEGRATION WITH EVOLVING INTERIORS**

Self-builders often complete their interiors in stages. You might get the main structure in place first, then fine-tune the look and feel as you settle in. Customisable furniture supports this phased approach. Rather than locking in permanent features early on, you can introduce key pieces gradually, each tailored to your developing vision.

### **ACHIEVING THE LOOK YOU WANT**

A major advantage of custom furniture is the range of styles available.

Whether you're building a rural retreat, a modern townhouse or a coastal getaway, there are options to suit. From shaker simplicity to contemporary minimalism, from bold colours to classic neutrals, your furniture can express your taste and enhance the character of the home.

And because you choose the finish and configuration, you're not limited by seasonal trends or standard formats. If you want a tall larder cupboard for a kitchen alcove or a wide sideboard to double as a hallway console, with custom furniture, the answer is usually 'yes.'

### **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Custom furniture does require more planning than ready-made pieces. Each item is made to order meaning lead times can be longer, so it's wise to align your order with your build schedule. Delivery access should also be factored in, particularly for large items, though many suppliers offer

split designs or onsite assembly to help navigate tight spaces.

While prices vary, customisable furniture often offers better long-term value than high-end flatpack or bespoke fitted alternatives, especially when you consider its durability and the tailored experience.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

A self-build home is more than a collection of rooms, it's an expression of your values, needs and lifestyle. Customisable freestanding furniture supports that vision by offering a unique combination of flexibility, style and craftsmanship. It's a reminder that good design doesn't always have to be fixed in place. Sometimes, the most thoughtful choices are the ones that can move, grow and adapt right alongside you.

*Adam Brown is a director and co-founder of The Painted Furniture Company*



# Scandi-Inspired Self-Build Brought to Life with VELFAC



When Fiona and William Coe set out to build their dream home in the Suffolk countryside, they had a clear vision: timeless Scandinavian style, exceptional natural light, and high energy performance. That vision became Homestead—a striking, modern family home built to Passivhaus principles and brought to life with VELFAC windows and doors.

Recommended by industry friends, VELFAC was the natural choice. Slim-framed, triple-glazed units fill

the home with light and deliver outstanding thermal performance. “The design possibilities with VELFAC are incredible,” says Fiona. “We loved that we could have sleek aluminium frames outside and warm timber inside.”

A dramatic double-height library wall floods the hall with light, thanks to a huge 3m-wide VELFAC 200 ENERGY window—expertly installed by distributor okoHaus using a Smartlift robot. A frameless corner window opens up views to the front

garden, while sliding doors and Juliet balconies upstairs embrace the surrounding landscape.

Finished in a rich grey-black powder coat to complement zinc cladding, the external frames bring a contemporary edge. Inside, FSC-certified pine adds warmth and texture.

“After years in a draughty Victorian house, we’re loving the calm, comfort and efficiency of our new home,” Fiona adds. “VELFAC made it all possible.”

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1. Inspired by the beauty of nature, the **Gogan collection** from **Chaplins** draws its name and aesthetic from the smooth, time-worn Japanese stones that line the banks of rivers and lakes. Like these stones, the Gogan sofa and armchair are sculpted into flat, solid forms that invite relaxation and comfort. The sofa's undulating shape evokes the interlocking positions of stone sculptures that maintain balance and stability despite their irregular shapes, elevating your living space with its natural elegance and timeless beauty. Price: £19,320 [chaplins.co.uk](http://chaplins.co.uk)

2. The **Cece small pedestal** from **Olivia's** showcases a striking Pandora marble effect with neutral tones that blend seamlessly into any space. Perfect for use on its own or grouped for added impact, this versatile piece is also available as a side or coffee table. Designed to elevate and add drama to any object or room, it's both functional and stylish. Price: £271 [olivias.com](http://olivias.com)

3. Designed with deep-piled covers and subtly tapered feet, the **Blyth range**





(snuggle chair power recliner pictured) from **ScS** adds a touch of elegance to any home, available in a host of colours. The subtle stitching patterns enhance its visual appeal, adding a touch of texture to the overall design. Whether you're searching for a three or four seater sofa, a cosy power love chair, or a stylish designer footstool, the range has something for every preference. Its clean lines, gently curved arms and balanced proportions provide ample seating. Price: £949 [scs.co.uk](http://scs.co.uk)

4. The **Beauvais coffee table** from **Sweetpea & Willow** is crafted from mango wood and detailed with a patterned drawer made from bone and aged gold. The table is the perfect place to store remotes and reading glasses to keep your space clean and convenient while decorating your living room with natural charm and beauty. Price: £1,000 [www.sweetpeaandwillow.com](http://www.sweetpeaandwillow.com)

5. Handmade from richly toned mango wood with soft, curving edges and fluted details, the **Tinta Green Stripe**

**Sideboard** from **Oliver Bonas** sits in a low, wide profile on four handcarved feet, with a smooth surface finish on top. It features two small drawers in the right hand side, the top coated in a screen printed green stripe fabric, and finished with hammered brass pulls. The main compartment has two rattan panelled doors with handcarved handles. This contemporary sideboard contains plenty of space to store home accessories, keeping your living space stylish and clutter-free. Price: £575 [www.oliverbonas.com](http://www.oliverbonas.com)

6. Enjoy big moments on television with **Desser & Co's Manhattan Wide Rattan & Wood TV Stand** with storage (pictured in black). The handmade sustainable solid mango wood TV stand features two natural rattan front panel cupboards and gold handle detailing, ideal for hiding away TV boxes and games consoles. Perfect for any living room aesthetic, it can be styled with other trendy furnishings for a modern look or with vintage items for a more retro style. Price: £499 [desser.co.uk](http://desser.co.uk)



## CASE STUDY

# BEYOND THE LOOKING GLASS

Al and Lily Chen's renovated and extended Edwardian home is a masterclass in space and light.

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT IMAGES WILLIAM TOZER ASSOCIATES

"We were looking for a family home with potential for expansion," explains Lily Chen, who has two young children with her husband, Al. "We bought this home in 2019 because we loved its Edwardian character and it offered plenty of space for our children to play."

Set in a conservation area in Wandsworth, this end-terrace home is typical for the area, offering charm, space and that most highly prized home feature; a garden in London.

While the home's vitals set their hearts racing, the condition of the building did not. "It hadn't been touched in 30 years," recalls Lily. "The kitchen was small and the bedrooms were cramped. The loft and the basement were not usable. We also wanted to improve the energy efficiency of the property."

The couple's solution was a comprehensive refurbishment of the entire building. Al and Lily also took this opportunity to extend it, so that key areas are a more appropriate size for family life. These additions included making the basement a functional space, adding a small dormer extension to the loft and a more significant ground floor extension, which offers a spacious kitchen and dining room. Most strikingly, this space also incorporates an internal courtyard that adds green space and fresh air all year round.

"Having a full-width extension produced its own challenges, such as how to get natural light and ventilation to other areas. The solution was a new courtyard," says architect Adoracion Marco Vidal of William Tozer Associates, who admits the concept is somewhat counterintuitive when square footage is at such a premium, but "it brings natural light deep into the plan."

This injection of light and air meant that further out into the extension, the architects were able to make the extension higher, rather than have a lower roofline along the entire addition without a courtyard.

William Tozer Associates is an award-winning

*"We wanted a modern, functional family home that retained some of the property's original character."*

London-based architecture practice that was recommended to Lily and Al by friends. "We chose William Tozer Associates because of their reputation for high-quality minimal design and their experience with similar projects," explains Lily. "We've been extremely happy with their work; they were professional, knowledgeable and always willing to listen to our ideas."

Those ideas were expressed in the brief the couple gave to the practice. "We wanted a modern, functional family home that retained some of the property's original character," says Lily. "The plan evolved through a collaborative process, with both us and the architect contributing ideas. The intriguing use of light and reflection was a joint idea."

Inspirational use of light is the defining feature of the project and is more than the single internal courtyard; it is consistent throughout the home. All four levels are organised around straight lines and spaces that simultaneously divide and connect, conceal and reveal. For example, sliding pocket doors (fire-rated, as is required in all homes with more than two storeys) can either disappear into a wall or fully enclose rooms, such as in the loft extension. Here, an open living room can be converted into a private bedroom, closed off from the landing by pocket doors that form a partition. The wall









above the doors is clad in a frameless mirror. This creates the illusion there is no wall and the ceiling is continuous, making the space feel open at all times.

Elsewhere, a glass floor between the first and second floors, combined with a large rooflight above, brings natural light and views of the sky down two levels into the building, while the open-riser staircase allows the light to continue onwards, down another storey to the ground floor. In the sitting room, which has the traditional layout of a central fireplace with recesses on either side, each recess is fully mirrored. This creates a visual 'doubling' of the living space, which gives the impression that the project is a conversion of not one, but two terraced houses.

"My parents were architects," explains Lily. "And my inspiration came from visits to various architecturally interesting buildings over the years. I like minimalist architecture with some Asian influences. My favourite part of this house is the courtyard on the ground floor, which reminds me of my childhood home in Asia, where such courtyards are very common for light and air circulation."

Achieving such ambitious goals in an Edwardian terrace on a London street has proved challenging, however. The first hurdle to overcome was the question of planning permission. The home is in a conservation area, so there were restrictions on the materials

Lily and Al could choose and the scale of any additions. Although the ground floor extension is built using thermally efficient cavity masonry walls with reclaimed London stock brick on the exterior, they were able to use more modern materials on the small dormer extension to the loft. This was built using highly insulated timber frame construction techniques and clad in zinc.

The couple also upgraded the huge roof throughout, so it is now fully insulated. With such a comprehensive renovation, it was a natural step to include the replacement of all the glazing in their home. To the front, the Edwardian facade has new, traditional casement windows which were replicated like-for-like in timber. To the rear, however, they chose modern aluminium-framed windows by Velfac. These windows offer a very slim frame and trickle vents that can be concealed internally, giving the appearance of 'frameless' windows that almost seem to be voids and flood the home with light.

To gain permission for these changes, Tozer Associates found they had to engage the local council's planning department with an outstanding design strategy. In addition to taking account of the conservation area restrictions, they were able to overcome potential concerns about height at the boundary and light to neighbouring properties by proposing a joint application with the neighbouring home (also clients of Tozer Associates). This means that both properties now

## AL & LILY'S TOP TIPS

- ★ Do your research
- ★ Hire a good architect and builder
- ★ Be prepared for challenges
- ★ Renovating your home is a big challenge, but the rewards are definitely worth it



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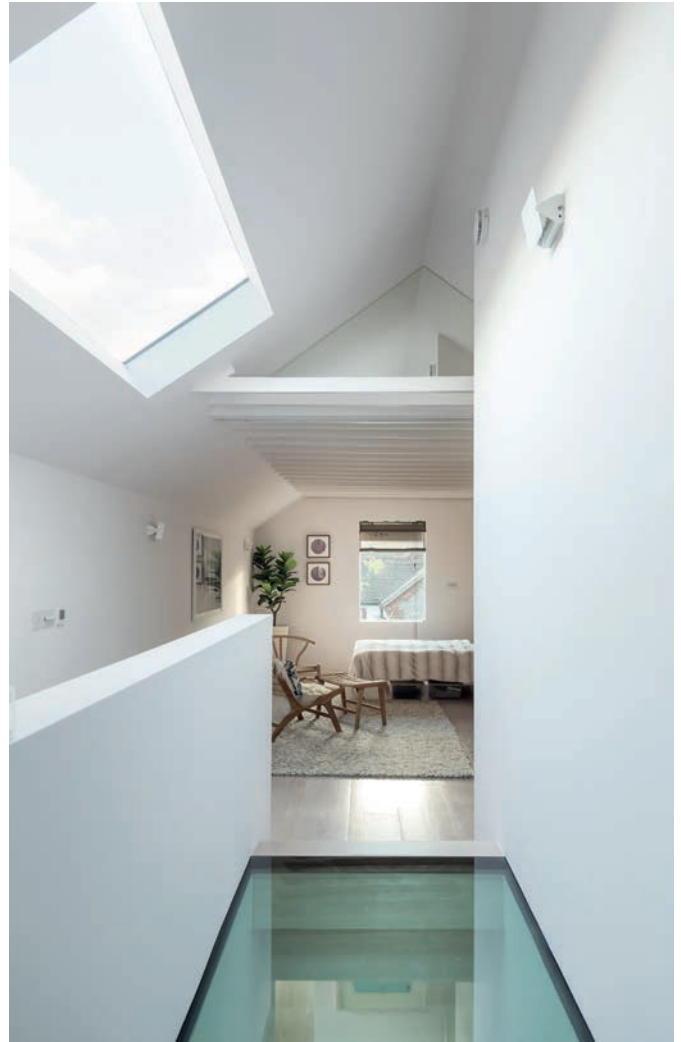
Kasia Fiszer

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have a single-storey, full-width extension on the ground level, each of which is clad in continuous London-stock brick. This ingenious solution makes the additions look original and works well for both households.

Yet this solution was only possible because of Lily's research and willingness to work with their neighbour. During the buying process, Lily noticed that a previous owner had objected to their neighbour's planning application for an extension. So, with their own proposed plans in mind, Lily knocked on her neighbour's door and introduced herself as a potential buyer.

After a few conversations over coffee, Lily found a solution that worked for both of them.

"I explained my plan to extend the ground floor, and said I'd be happy for us both to have flat roof extensions," says Lily. "Luckily, my neighbour was thinking the same and we reached a common understanding before we even closed the deal on the house." It was an agreement that worked out favourably for all concerned.

"It was a unifying design for both properties," explains architect Adoracion. "The adjoining apartment had a living room and bedroom with windows towards their existing side return. The design solution was a mirrored new

***"We love the sense of space, the abundance of natural light and the beautiful garden."***

courtyard to both properties, enabling not only natural light but the opportunity to maximise the height of the extension." As the courtyard and extensions mostly mirror the neighbouring property, neither home was adversely impacted.

"Ultimately, planning permission was granted thanks to their application showing the proposals were "carefully considered, sensitive in scale and maintained a sense of amenity for both properties."

"Some of our biggest challenges were getting party wall agreements and planning permission," recalls Lily. "We also had to manage delays



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### GLAZING

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### COUNTERTOPS

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in the work due to Brexit and Covid. We all managed to find the solutions, but we needed to be patient and budget-in those delays, as well as some extra costs."

Lily and Al were unable to install solar panels or an air source heat pump due to their location in a conservation area. However, they did install a new, efficient boiler, with 'wet' underfloor heating throughout their home. Additional insulation also helps to reduce the energy used, making it efficient and cost-effective.

With no radiators cluttering up the walls, the couple were able to achieve the flawless, lightness of touch that characterises this renovation. Inside, the minimalist approach never feels stark, thanks to the variety of angles from which light falls into spaces. The quality of

the finish throughout is a key element in making this approach a success. Mirrors fit spaces exactly and doors slide soundlessly out of sight into walls. Indeed, having so few walls – or the perception of walls – creates the sense of an airy, multi-dimensional space, grounded in the tactile warmth of natural timber floors from Chaunceys.

"We love the way natural light floods the home," says Lily. "But one of our highlights is the open-plan kitchen and living area, which creates a spacious and welcoming space for entertaining."

Here, Lily and Al have played with contrast, choosing dark kitchen cabinetry from Espresso Kitchens in a sleek, minimalist style. The kitchen island and countertops are Silestone from





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Cosentino, in 'Desert Silver Suede.'

Lily was keen to work with Espresso Kitchens, as she had loved their kitchen in a previous property. The initial discussions about the design and layout included both Ardoracion at William Tozer Associates, and Espresso Kitchens, who reviewed these plans to further develop the kitchen plan. Onsite, Espresso collaborated with the couple's main contractor, Zuz Construction, so that the kitchen could be installed by Espresso within the construction programme.

Across this ground floor area, Lily selected concrete-effect tiles by Reed Harris, which continue outside across a flush threshold onto the terrace for a seamless in-out experience when the sliding glass doors are pulled wide. Lighting after dark is also important in this part of the home, with signature 'Melt' pendants by Tom Dixon above the kitchen island and a statement arrangement by Flos in the sitting room above the piano.

Now the family has moved in (they lived nearby during the works, as the building was stripped back), they have had time to settle in and experience everyday life in this uniquely restful home. "We love the sense of space, the abundance of natural light and the beautiful garden. We have a modern and functional layout and a home that we're proud to call our own," says Lily. "It's a perfect place for our family to relax and enjoy life." ■



## Eco Workshop: Heat & Energy 9th August at NSBRC, Swindon

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# THE BEST LAID PLANS

Lettie and Tom Fardon fell in love with a timber-framed 1950s bungalow ripe for renovation and bought it at auction, but didn't realise just how much work would be involved in bringing it up to modern standards.

TEXT JAYNE DOWLE IMAGES RICHARD CHIVERS









When Tom and Lettie first bought their bungalow the plan was to undertake a simple extension to suit the needs of their young family. However, as time went on their plans progressed to full blown renovation in order to maximise on the property's full potential and bring it up to standard.

"As well as extending into the loft to create three bedrooms – previously there were only two – we quickly learned that we would need to pay a lot more attention than we thought to the insulation," says 37-year-old Tom, who is a diplomat for the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

"We had thought we'd just do an extension to start with, but as plans evolved, we decided to pursue a more ambitious retrofitting course which cleared out all our savings, and created a bit more debt," he explains. "But we accepted that if we did more to improve our new home's sustainability credentials, we would get a better return on our investment should we ever come to sell in the future."

It was especially important for the rebuild to create an energy efficient, easy to manage home that requires absolutely minimum maintenance, as Tom's work means overseas postings. He and Lettie and their young sons aged one and three, are currently in Madrid, Spain. During this posting they are renting out their home through a lettings agency; this also means finishes, such as the engineered ash flooring they've fitted, must be hard-wearing and durable.

When renovation work started, the couple's architect, Darren Bray, co-founder of Studio BAD Architects in Southampton, asked the contractors to remove "the knackered thin layer of rockwool in the roof. It was freezing in winter, so we replaced it with Celotex between the

original rafters. We also insulated under floors with the same product and the walls."

Darren did research the possibility of using some form of natural insulation. But after much discussion with insulation experts, and Tom and Lettie, the choice of Celotex was made. "We decided that given cost and the longer-term benefits of carbon footprint reduction from excellent insulation, it would be worth the carbon impact of manufacturing the product," he explains.

Tom and Lettie, also 37, who works in sales and education for the wine industry, loved the quaint charm of the detached bungalow, which stands in a rural spot in Twyford, Hampshire. It is of traditional 'Colt Frame' construction, built by Colt Houses, a Kent-based company that has been building homes for more than a century.

They already lived in Twyford and wanted to stay in the same place, but couldn't afford a house of the size they needed. So they decided to renovate instead, keeping the original name of the bungalow, 'Cedarwood' because it has stayed true to its original construction. Keeping that sense of tradition alive was important to Tom and Lettie; they are proud that where possible, they used British-sourced materials, such as the engineered ash floor and larch cladding.

"We purchased the property in August 2022 with the intention of doing work on it," says Tom. "We saw the original bungalow had the potential to extend relatively easily." As well as adding extra space, Tom and Lettie were keen to make the build as sustainable as possible and plan their new house to be easy to look after and maintain, as they knew that with Tom's job, they were guaranteed to spend time living abroad.

They started planning the project in November

## HIGH POINT

"When the structure came together, we could see the plans on paper start to become reality. I think finding our architect, and finding our fantastic builder, who was available at short notice, both count too."

— Tom



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The first challenge was ensuring that the house was mortgageable; lenders can be wary of properties built by 'non-standard construction'. "Thankfully, we checked and were able to port our existing mortgage with Santander," says Tom. "They needed to know that the house was timber-framed, but it wasn't a problem."

The frame was in good shape. Darren checked the joints to check the structural condition of the frame: "Timber-frame houses are more susceptible to moisture damage and rot. This also needs to be carefully inspected before work is started." The timber frame and foundations were reused to save waste and to contribute towards the project's sustainable aims.

The accompanying challenge was keeping the budget under control. Saving money and sustainability went hand in hand for the Fardons, who shopped around hard to find the best prices for fixtures and fittings. This included sourcing a "barely-used" second-hand kitchen from The Used Kitchen Company for £4,000, saving "thousands" in the process.

The original timber cladding was stripped and set aside for recycling. Darren specified a combination of British-grown larch cladding (treated in SiOO:X wood protection to promote quick and even driftwood-like weathering) and a low-maintenance zinc-like metal as a contemporary replacement.

"The metal is GreenCoat PLX, made by a Swedish company, SSAB, finished in anthracite grey to contrast with the wood cladding," Darren explains. "We chose it in part due to the green credentials of the manufacturer. The products are free of chromates, which can be hazardous to health. We were really happy with our cladding installer, Jim and his team, they had incredible attention to detail which really shows in the finished home."

Most of the existing glazing was single pane. This was replaced with super high spec double

## *Coupled with underfloor heating and oversized radiators, the heat pump provides a constant gentle heat to the property*

glazed windows from Norsken. "These were a cheaper option to triple glazed, and the difference in spec between these and triple glazed wasn't enough for us to decide to spend limited budget on it," says Darren. "The building was super insulated anyway."

Tom approached local installers Roost Heating with the brief to make the property as energy efficient as possible. He was already keen on installing an air source heat pump to help meet this aim. A big bonus was that the heat pump, a Worcester Bosch CS2000, was 0% VAT rated, and eligible for a government grant of £7,500 to help with the renovation budget. A contingency has been built into the heating system to add photovoltaics and battery storage at a later date, when Tom and Lettie can fund these additions. Coupled with underfloor heating on the ground floor and oversized radiators upstairs, the heat pump provides a constant gentle heat to the property. There is also an electric vehicle charging point.

The internal floorplan was completely rethought. When they bought the house, Tom and Lettie already had a two-year-old son, and his brother came along in 2023 – born before the renovation was finished, when the family were staying with Lettie's parents and they knew

### LOW POINT

"The underfloor heating biscuit screed and drying, a choice that was made by us, delayed the project because it took three weeks to dry. This meant we wouldn't be in the house in time for when our second baby was born. We also had a major flood in the house on Christmas Eve caused by a burst water pipe in the roof. This was before the renovation started, while we were waiting for planning. It was a proper 'what have we done' moment!"

— Lettie





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that they wanted to make it as family-friendly as possible.

"The lady who lived in the house before had her family grow up in the home, and it had clearly been a happy place, the family even left a note for us when we moved in," smiles Lettie. "We wanted to keep the essence of that, while giving the property a new lease of life, allowing our family to follow in their footsteps."

However, Lettie explains that the interior of the house "was very dated with the design, finished with very 1960s fixtures and fittings which made it feel quite dark." The existing layout felt cramped, the living room and kitchen were small and all the bedrooms and the one bathroom were on the ground floor. Tom and Lettie's priorities were to have "a large, social kitchen with generous glazing to connect to the garden."

Working with Darren and his team at Studio BAD, Lettie and Tom decided to form two new bedrooms within a dramatic loft extension, leaving one bedroom on the ground floor to double as a snug and allow for flexible use in future. Adding this new storey freed up space to create a new kitchen/dining room, living room and WC. This also allowed new space for an ensuite in the main first floor bedroom and a family bathroom at this level too, taking the size of the house from 100m<sup>2</sup> to 140m<sup>2</sup>.

The couple knew Darren, as he had carried out a project locally to Lettie's parents in the New Forest which they really liked. "We got three quotes from different architects, but felt Studio BAD was the best fit for the project, and liked their style," Tom explains. "The main question we had with the architect was how

to add those bedrooms in the loft space, without causing issues of overlooking the neighbours' properties."

Their home is located in the South Downs National Park, so Tom and Lettie knew from the start that extra effort would be needed to achieve planning approval, which took eight weeks to secure. Darren brought in a planning consultant, Debra Slade, to help shape their thoughts and understand what was achievable. This collaborative approach helped them engage with the planning team at the South Downs National Park Authority from an early stage of the design process. As Cedarwood stands within a sensitive rural location the designs had to carefully alter the home without impacting the original mass or form, to reduce impact on the surrounding area.

Keeping conversations open about the design and expectations was especially helpful when it came to the dormer windows. Due to the orientation of the house, adding standard dormer windows would have caused privacy issues as the new glazing would look over the neighbouring homes.

"We came up with the idea to shift the window openings, angling them to the side," says Darren. "This offered quite a few advantages. Firstly, it solved the issue of overlooking and created windows with framed views over rural countryside. Secondly, this approach creates an internal window seat space in each bedroom which makes a wonderful place to sit and enjoy the garden. Also, the angled windows make the building look really innovative and striking from the outside, which we all really like."

To accommodate the new bedrooms in what

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was a basic loft space, used previously for storage, the roof height was raised to 1.2m. The additional roof height also allowed for more internal space to upgrade the thermal properties of the house.

This major alteration meant structural engineer Scott Boote was brought on board to calculate what additional support was needed so the timber structural frame could take the additional weight.

Tom and Lettie say that the "bedroom benches" are one of their favourite features, along with the large skylight on the landing that brings in both natural daylight and views of stars.

They also love the huge kitchen window, which looks over the garden. Six of the original window openings, in the kitchen, dining and living spaces, plus one opening in the ground floor bedroom/snug, were pulled down to ground level to maximise the garden, and increase the natural daylight drawn into the home.

That quaint bungalow has been replaced with a modern, striking home that feels warm and inviting. Tom and Lettie admit that when they started out on this full-scale renovation they were daunted by the prospect and wondered if they were really doing the right thing. "But once we had a quote, our builders were amazing," says Tom. "They gave us a quote, and 100% stuck to it while delivering an excellent product. It's so important to work with people who you trust. And manage expectations on timing. We

***"The angled windows make the building look really innovative and striking from the outside"***

did have a few delays we didn't expect."

The renovation has cost £350,000 so far, funded by the sale of their existing house, savings and a mortgage. When funds allow, Tom and Lettie hope to add a full-length colonnade to the south side of the bungalow, leading off the kitchen/dining room and snug, to create a covered area so outdoor space can be used year round. This colonnade would also help mitigate overheating during the warmer summer months.

"Holding off on the colonnade was a hard choice, as it's a part of the design we loved, but we will come back to it," says Tom. "What we love now is the light, the innovative and cool bits of design that make it unique, like the dormers, the flow, the fact it's just right for our family. Being as sustainable as we could afford was very important too." ■

#### PLANNING CONSULTANT

Debra Slade, Draycott  
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CASE STUDY

# A HOUSE OF TWO HALVES

A chance to design their own home from scratch in their favourite part of London was far too good an opportunity to pass up for Lily Wood and her family

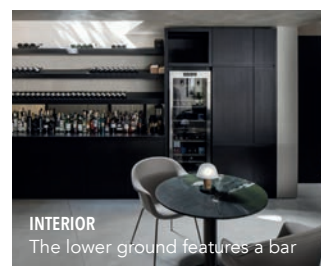
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**EXTERIOR**  
The exterior of the house from  
the front







When Lily and Rob Wood began a hunt for a home in need of renovation to make their own, they ended up with a plot of land just a few minutes away from their existing home with an uninhabitable cottage that gave them the chance to design a bespoke family home in Barnes.

"With a growing family, we wanted to upsize without moving out of the area," says Lily, who is an interior designer. "But the options within Barnes at the time were limited and prohibitively expensive. The sweet but uninhabitable cottage that once stood here was attractive for its detached plot, proximity to the school our children were attending and the potential it presented for us to design our own home."

But this perfect plot came with many challenges. After seeing the property in 2019, it was another two years before building work began on the site and a further year before they could move in with their three children: sons Joshua and Leo and daughter Marlowe.

"We had a challenging experience with the council, having to deal with frequently changing case officers with varying demands, which meant that the application approval was rather painstaking and certainly lengthy. Once the demolition had been executed, we ran into further delays with party wall agreements, before we would eventually begin the excavation and build in March 2021."

The frustrating delays in the planning process meant the building reached a critical point at the height of the Covid pandemic. "To be honest, the whole planning process was a very frustrating period whereby avoidable delays, frequent goalpost moving and unreasonable requests cost us, our contractors, architects

and neighbours unnecessary money, time and nuisance. Agreeing contracts, sourcing products and suppliers and managing the programme in the height of the pandemic was also less than ideal."

The family had previously only undertaken cosmetic changes, such as bathrooms and kitchens in their former homes. But throughout all the delays, work was going on in designing the house, which was conceived by Phil Coffey of Coffey Architects with his cues coming from the original 1930s facade and the unique aspect of the house facing down a garden belt at the rear. "The concept was to remain unassuming and respectful to the architectural precedence of the surrounding houses," adds Lily, "while delivering an unexpected modern architectural punch upon entry." Architect Coffey describes it as an 'Alice in Wonderland' feel to entering the house.

Coffey Architects' brief relied on three key aspects: a distinctive geometry, a palette of earthy materials, and a high level of craftsmanship to complement the clients' refined taste.

The resulting four storey house incorporates a master suite on the top floor, three further bedrooms and two bathrooms on the first floor and the main living space/kitchen/dining room on the ground floor, with a study, boot room, toilet and butler's pantry. The lower ground floor features a flexible movie/guest/gym room plus living room, bar, utility, plant room, and toilet. The back of the house looks out onto multi-levelled landscaped gardens.

"I'm inspired by a lot of Australian architecture and interior design. While we have neither the lateral plots or weather here in London, we

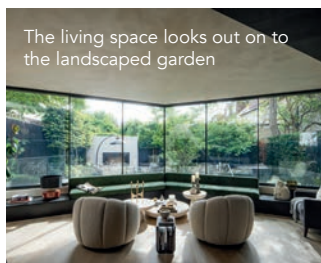
## HIGH POINT

"The site was a few minutes from where we were living at the time of the build, and round the corner from the children's school, which meant that I could pop in frequently (much to the builders' delight). Consequently, I could monitor progress and really appreciate both the milestone moments and the daily attention to detail. The day I came in to see the staircase in all its glory was one to remember!"





The kitchen



The living space looks out on to the landscaped garden



The living and dining space

## LOW POINT

"The whole planning process was a very frustrating period whereby avoidable delays, frequent goalpost moving and unreasonable requests cost us, our contractors, architects and neighbours unnecessary money, time and nuisance."

still had the opportunity with this new build to bring in a sense of expanse and connection to the outdoors as well as play with shape, which I find so energising about modern interiors. We achieved this by working to repeated angles, introducing large format glazing in all directions and carving out double and triple height spaces for 'wow factor'."

The house sits in a modest cul de sac of 1930s semis. The family didn't want to replicate the existing design or create a house that stood out like a sore thumb. "We value modesty and privacy, but we also wanted to take full advantage of the rare opportunity to design a detached new build in London," adds Lily.

The pre-existing house was a one-off cottage built by the owners of the neighbouring house, who had carved up their plot to build a home for their only daughter. She lived there her entire life before selling to the Wood family in 2019. As a result, the house had a unique standing and style within the street, which was honoured in the new design by Coffey Architects.

The front facade references the original cottage, matching the pitch and the three windows with a simple square face, the design of which blends into the street in scale and design. But the rear of the property takes on a much more modern aspect. Designed at a projecting angle, to draw the eye down the row of gardens beyond, it orients it away from the neighbours on either side. "This introduces plentiful light to the living spaces without compromising our neighbours' privacy," says Lily. "Essentially, despite being a new build, the house is the sum of two parts!

"The exterior of the house is not exactly what we had in mind. I flirt between symmetrical

*"The exterior perfectly achieves our design objective of a smart and stylish home that is never fussy and always welcoming"*

and elegant Georgian architecture and modern minimalism in my preferred design aesthetic, so the almost 'twee' front with its unusual trio of small windows (a nod to its previous life) and its staggered pentagonal rear, was never on the original vision board!" Lily continues. "That said, it perfectly achieves our design objective of a smart and stylish home that is never fussy and always welcoming."

As a new home there were plenty of opportunities to incorporate sustainable building techniques and materials, as well as create a healthy home, particularly important as Lily and her younger son have asthma. The house is rendered and very well insulated, runs off air source heat pumps, is fully electric and heated via wet underfloor heating. There is also integrated air conditioning in parts of the house for ultimate comfort.

"The natural clay from Clayworks was the starting point for my design intent for the interiors," says Lily. "I knew I wanted to treat the



**BEDROOM**  
The master suite



**INTERIOR**  
The house is filled with angles



house top to bottom, wall to ceiling with the same breathable, ununiform, calming texture and it has not disappointed."

The house strikes a balance between open plan living and answering the demands of modern family life, offering spaces that vary in openness, privacy, and scale. One of the wow factors comes from the triple-height atrium and forms a central, sculptural stair that connects the lower levels.

The design for the atrium on entering the house meant losing square footage in favour of visual impact. "Not your typical approach to designing a family space in London, but it felt crucial," says Lily of the decision to sacrifice space for design. "The sense of light and space around you is at the heart of this building's purpose. This can be appreciated throughout, whereby manipulated levels, extended glazing and generous voids prioritise visual impact.

"The site was a few minutes from where we were living at the time of the build, and round the corner from the children's school, which meant that I could pop in frequently (much to the builders' delight). Consequently, I could monitor progress and really appreciate both the milestone moments and the daily attention to detail. The day I came in to see the staircase in all its glory was one to remember!"

Lily describes the interior as a palette of quiet luxury. "I think the house is a true reflection of my design aesthetic and our family's lifestyle in London. I wanted the house to be a place of calm, beauty and refinement, but in a relatively casual way. You want to feel relaxed in a beautiful space, not overwhelmed with fussy details or overly stimulating colours.

The palette and selection of finishes are intentionally restrained, speaking the same volume throughout the house," she explains.

The use of ecru, black and green is repeated throughout (apart from the movie room, where a plush merlot velvet sectional felt almost compulsory). The neutral and saturated colours across the four floors help to create a sense of sophisticated calm and a consistent identity for the whole house. The strong architectural lines are softened with curved furniture and fabrics such as bouclé, velvet and linen to create a more 'homely' vibe.

"The house is fairly open plan but with hidden moments dotted all over," Lily continues. "This keeps the place light and flexible. For example, a dressing room and a guest bed tucked behind mirrored doors, a gym and extensive storage hidden behind a timber wall in the movie room and the messy kitchen/pantry behind flush cabinetry doors in the main kitchen/dining space.

"The simple exterior of the front with restrained windows provides a sense of modesty while the angular architecture of the exterior mimics that of the interior layout, floorplans, joinery and lighting. It was all conceived as one," she adds. "The degree of those angles are repeated throughout and all the interior decisions and furnishings have been carefully curated to honour that. Where right degree angles and square walls would have been easier to construct, to utilise storage space and organise furniture, it would have been detrimental to the design intent of this building, so design and honour won over ease and speed!"

The black framed large-scale windows face

## CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

### ARCHITECT

**Coffey Architects**

[www.coffeyarchitects.com](http://www.coffeyarchitects.com)

### INTERIOR DESIGN

**Lily Wood Home**

[www.lilywoodhome.com](http://www.lilywoodhome.com)

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[woodslondon.co.uk/projects](http://woodslondon.co.uk/projects)

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## FAVOURITE FEATURE

"I fell in love with the Jurassic Green marble from the Amazon in Brazil at first sight! It's so unusual, textured and moody, I knew it would be the ultimate feature piece for the kitchen and the bar. The steam shower has become a great friend to me too, I can highly recommend installing one of those if you can!"

into a stunning garden planted with jasmine, ferns, hydrangeas and pittosporum and anchored by a mature cherry blossom and Amelanchier trees. "Green was the predetermined backdrop colour to all the living spaces and therefore, the natural choice for the accent furnishings too," explains Lily.

One of their favourite elements is the simplest. "We introduced planters to the perimeter of the primary bedroom terrace which sits slightly higher than the floor level of the bedroom. The effect of this is not only complete privacy but year-round interest in seasonal planting with their beautiful colours and scents, it's a joy to wake up to."

One of the brave choices Lily made was to walk away from their original architect, mostly down to delays in planning. "When we met Phil we were encouraged by his passion and conviction, which is what we felt we needed to make the most of this rare opportunity to design our own home from scratch in London," she says. "We wanted a comfortable family home that afforded us privacy and practicality for family life but also make a statement from a design perspective and be a hospitable 'party house', if you will, for us and our children, for years to come."

"The shape and openness of the house was the original and singular concept of Phil Coffey, we didn't deviate from that, trusting him to

design a striking building with its relationship with light at the crux. The interior architecture conceptualised by Phil and his colleagues was further developed by my interior design. We made a good team!"

So what would Lily and her family advise anyone else looking to undergo such a challenging project? "Spiralling costs and considerable demand for builders and special trades mean embarking on a big renovation or new build project is more than ever a significant commitment of money, time and pressure," she says. "My biggest advice would be to plan and specify as much as possible in advance, don't try and run before you can walk! We all want to get the guys onsite ASAP but if you are not prepared by way of budgeting, programme, decisions on layout, specifications, provisions, style etc. then ultimately, you are going to be the one holding things up and paying through the nose for it. You'll need to make hundreds of decisions under pressure and the better prepared you are, the less stressful and more cost-effective your project will run."

But her family are clear it was worth all the effort. "The floor to ceiling, wall to wall glazing on the first floor is traced by a bespoke sofa in a forest green velvet. Sitting here feels like you're sitting in the garden, thanks to the projection of the design, and is my favourite spot for a morning coffee." ■



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– RSAW Award 2023 – RSAW Building of the Year 2023



Featured project won a **2024 RIBA West Midlands regional award**



# Structural timber: a smart choice

Andrew Orriss of the Structural Timber Association (STA) looks at timber as a sustainable, low-carbon building choice, increasingly popular among UK self-builders for its environmental and practical benefits.

In recent years, structural timber has emerged as the material of choice for an increasing number of self-builders across the UK. There are lots of reasons behind this surge in popularity, not least the fact that this is one of the most environmentally responsible ways of building a house.

With its low embodied carbon and being a sustainable material, not to mention its carbon capture properties, timber frame construction is most definitely a great choice for those after a method of building that has minimal impact on the world around us.

As we see timber construction methods being used in over a quarter of all new homes nationally, there's never been a better time to consider the benefits this versatile material can bring to your self-build project.

## THE TIMBER ADVANTAGE

Building with structural timber offers multiple advantages that align perfectly with the needs and aspirations of today's self-builders. Firstly, timber construction delivers exceptional environmental credentials. As a renewable resource (with typically five trees being planted for every tree farmed) that actively stores carbon, timber helps reduce the carbon footprint of your build significantly. For every cubic metre of timber used instead of alternative materials, you'll save approximately one tonne of carbon dioxide emissions.

Structural timber solutions make highly energy efficient buildings easier by placing larger amounts of insulation into the timber structural elements. This means your home will require less energy to heat, reducing both your environmental impact and your energy bills for decades to come.

Speed is another compelling advantage. With much of the fabrication taking place in factory-controlled conditions, structural timber frames



can typically be erected onsite in under two weeks. This significantly reduces overall project timelines and minimises the disruption often associated with traditional construction methods.

Any structural method created in a factory away from the building site comes under the bracket of offsite manufacture. It is a broad term covering a number of options, namely timber frame, Structural Insulated Panel Systems (SIPs) and oak frame, all benefiting from short construction timescales and guaranteed build quality.

## OFFSITE MANUFACTURE EXPLAINED

Intelligent, integrated construction systems such as closed panel timber frame and SIPs are now driving innovation in the timber industry, giving you more choice.

Fundamentally, offsite construction describes structural systems that are factory-manufactured to an advanced level to allow for onsite assembly (as opposed to construction) via controlled installation processes. Exact levels of prefabrication can vary, from factory-fitted insulation and pre-cut service channels through to panels that come complete with windows and doors already installed. Even internal finishes and external cladding can be pre-applied.

## CUSTOM-BUILD: A GROWING OPPORTUNITY

While full self-builds remain popular, we're seeing significant growth in the custom-build sector, where small and medium-sized developers are creating schemes of five to 40 units. These developments allow individuals to customise their homes without taking on the full responsibility of a traditional self-build.

This approach is gaining momentum partly due to recent legislation requiring local authorities to meet demand from self-build registers, which has improved planning prospects for custom-build developments. Additionally, these projects often benefit from exemptions such as the Community Infrastructure Levy, making them financially attractive for both developers and buyers.

## FINANCING YOUR TIMBER FRAME PROJECT

One persistent myth is that securing mortgages for timber frame construction is difficult. To be absolutely clear, this is no longer the case. Mainstream lenders now readily provide mortgages for timber frame homes, recognising the material's proven performance and longevity.

The mortgage landscape has evolved significantly to accommodate modern construction methods. Specialist providers like BuildStore now offer innovative mortgage products specifically designed for self-builders using structural timber systems. These include 'accelerator mortgages' which release funds before build stages are completed – a crucial advantage when working with offsite construction methods that require upfront payments.

Perhaps most encouragingly, these specialised finance options are increasingly available to first-time buyers. With products offering up to 95% finance for both land and build costs, timber frame construction has become accessible to a much wider audience.



## QUALITY IS GUARANTEED

Manufacturing sites have stringent quality control processes and procedures in place which ensures the precision manufacture of the structural elements, making sure you get a modern, high-performance structural envelope for your new home.

The STA's Assure scheme also plays an important role in providing confidence to lenders and insurers. Our Bronze, Silver, and Gold accreditation levels offer reassurance regarding the quality and standards maintained by our member companies, further streamlining the finance process for self-builders choosing timber.

## EARLY COLLABORATION: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

One of the most valuable lessons we've learned from successful timber projects is the importance of early collaboration. Engaging with architects, suppliers, and potential lenders from the very beginning of your journey delivers significant benefits.

When timber construction is integrated into the design from the outset, rather than being retrofitted into plans originally conceived for masonry construction, the result is a more efficient and cost-effective build. Early decisions about the structural system influence everything



from foundation design to insulation strategy, so making informed choices at the beginning can prevent costly changes later.

Early engagement also helps align your design aspirations with practical considerations such as budget constraints and lender requirements. Different timber systems – whether open panel, closed panel, SIPs – offer different benefits, and the optimal choice depends on your specific priorities regarding thermal performance, speed of construction, and design flexibility.

Scheduling and costing are more predictable with offsite construction as the design and planning are all carried out with precision before any systems reach site. Onsite installation of panels is

a prepared process making it more timely than traditional building methods.

## THE FUTURE IS TIMBER

Looking ahead, we expect to see continued growth in structural timber usage across both self-build and volume housebuilding sectors. This growth will be driven by increasing environmental awareness, the Government's fabric-first agenda, and the proven performance benefits of modern timber construction methods.

The evidence from Scotland, where timber frame construction dominates the market despite challenging weather conditions, demonstrates the material's versatility and durability. As the rest of the UK catches up, self-builders are ideally positioned to benefit from the ongoing innovations in structural timber systems.

By choosing timber for your self-build project, you're not just creating a home that's energy-efficient, sustainable, and quick to construct – you're also joining a growing movement that's transforming how we build in the UK, creating healthier, more sustainable homes for generations to come.

*Andrew Orriss is CEO at the Structural Timber Association (STA)*

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## Bronze framed glass cabinets from Keller

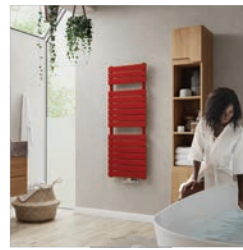


**Keller** is known for innovative designs, and a vast palette of colour, finish and material options. A new range of bronze-framed smoked glass units in 39 different sizes has been developed for modern, stylist kitchen schemes; they are designed to emulate hotel chic and elegant industrial interiors, especially in Japandi style. Also available are complementary new bronze handleless profiles and matching handle. Tip-on/push to open options for the ultra-sleek look included in the range. Keller is well known

for offering the widest range of colours (2,050 NCS) and finishes along with a vast range of cabinet options, all produced by the most sustainable means possible.

[www.kellerkitchens.com](http://www.kellerkitchens.com)

## Quicker delivery for Stelrad coloured radiators



**Stelrad** has introduced a new quicker turnaround service for the supply of some of its radiators in colour.

Initially this new rapid turnaround service will apply to the popular Column and Concord ranges, and to the Classic Towel Rail, Caliente and Concord towel rail products when ordered in one of the now 55 standard RAL colours and finishes within the huge range of radiators available – that's a significant increase over the previous 32

or 35 colour options. The lead time has been reduced from the current eight weeks to up to 14 days. Further improvements and additions will be announced in due course.

0800 876 6813 [www.stelradprofessional.com](http://www.stelradprofessional.com)

## Optimise your outdoor living space with Marlon R Glaze

Global supplier of rooflights, **Brett Martin** has released its new Marlon R Glaze Roof Glazing Panels, providing the ideal weather protection for creating your perfect outdoor space. Manufactured from impact-resistant polycarbonate, Marlon R Glaze panels have a sleek and glass-like finish making them the ideal glazing solution for canopies and pergolas. The new Marlon R Glaze panels provide a great way to unwind and relax in the fresh air, whilst delivering shade for hotter climates and shelter in wetter environments. The highly resistant polycarbonate panels also include a co-extruded UV protection layer so that you can enjoy the outdoors whilst being protected from the harmful effects of the sun. The next generation of transparent roofing, Marlon R Glaze panels are lightweight and offer easy installation. Available up to six metres in length, they can be secured directly to rafters using only screws, without the need for additional glazing bars or special tools to deliver a highly professional finish. Manufactured from 3 mm thick premium polycarbonate, Marlon R Glaze panels provide a highly robust canopy glazing option. As well as a clear option for maximum light, the panels are available in grey for solar control and opal for diffused light. Robin Black, head of strategic development at Brett Martin commented: "We are thrilled to be introducing the new Marlon R Glaze Roof Panels to our range. The panels are designed to deliver maximum value to homeowner."

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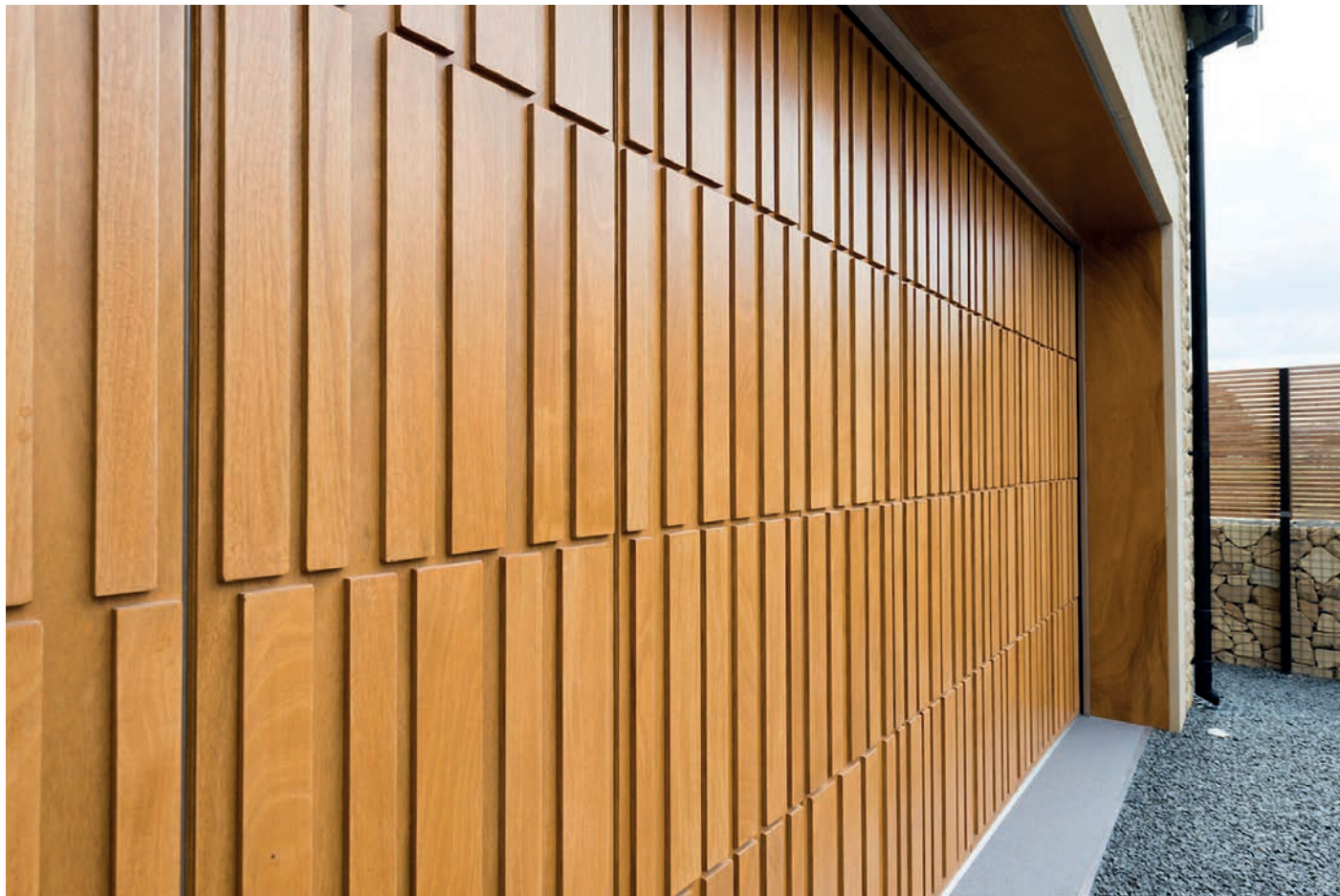
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# Designing with doors in mind

Deuren's Ian Chubb shares how specifying doors early unlocks better design choices, avoids compromise and keeps your self-build ambitions on track.



From structural planning and detailed budgeting to sourcing materials and managing timelines, building or renovating your dream home is a delicate balancing act that can bring a multitude of headaches. But it can feel incredibly rewarding too. Years of careful planning and hands-on effort come together, culminating in a home that's truly your own. Every detail effortlessly reflects the design intent and lifestyle you've spent so long defining. And as stunning focal points that greet guests at every avenue, your front, internal and garage doors contribute greatly to this picture.

If it's your first time undertaking a self-build project, you might presume doors are simply an aesthetic detail to be decided on later. Yet their role extends far beyond appearance alone. Shaping

how your space performs as much as how it looks, they can define floorplans, manage thresholds, support acoustic and thermal performance, enhance security, and even influence how light moves through the home. And with careful planning early on, you can unlock their full potential in your build with ease.

## CONFIGURATION COMES FIRST

When specifying your doors, their configuration is the most crucial consideration of all. More than a stylistic choice, it plays a defining role in shaping your home's architectural narrative and directly influences how you move through and experience each space. From flexible bifolds that offer privacy without breaking flow, to full-height doors that create awe-inspiring grandeur,

each choice impacts the flow and feel of your home.

For self-builders, these decisions need to take place early on, as architects, builders and interior designers must consider your chosen configurations in structural plans and construction processes. If they're not considered up front, you risk having to compromise later, whether that's losing out on a desired design feature or facing costly reworks. You only get one chance to build the structure that supports the impact you're aiming for.

Pocket doors are a prime example. Thanks to their striking aesthetics, clever functionality and space-saving benefits, gaining you an average of 10 ft<sup>2</sup> of additional floor space compared to traditional hinged doors, they're a



firm favourite. However, because they slide into a concealed cavity within the wall, the surrounding structure needs to be carefully designed to accommodate them from the outset. While they can be installed within stud walls as the build progresses, necessary allowances need to be made long before those walls are constructed.

The same goes for extra wide doors. These can create a striking sense of flow and openness, making spaces feel more generous and connected. But retrofitting wider spans isn't always possible once the framework is in place, so if adequate structural openings haven't been factored in early on, your options will be limited later. Early planning is therefore key if you want full creative freedom.

### SHAPING STYLES & MATERIALS

Materials are expressive choices that connect architectural narratives and breathe true-to-you character throughout every corner of your home. And after putting so much thought into the rest of your build, it makes sense to choose doors that are equally considered – not standard or made-to-measure add-ons, but beautifully bespoke and aligned with your architectural vision.

A minimalist interior might call for flush

doors in rich, dark veneers or striking full-height designs that mirror wall panelling. Alternatively, natural oak or walnut – warm, tactile and timeless – can bring an understated luxury to both classic and contemporary spaces. If eccentricity is more your forte, mesmerising metallics, luxury leathers and bold designer fabrics could be the perfect touch to add dimension and personality.

Early planning invites the most creative freedom, ensuring your doors seamlessly elevate your design rather than work around it. That said, even if decisions come later in the process, bespoke options still provide plenty of scope to create something uniquely yours.

### FINISHING TOUCHES WITH FIXTURES & FITTINGS

While fixtures and fittings are often treated as an afterthought, these components are integral to the door's overall performance, design cohesion and user experience. From handles to hinges to latches, they should be part of the planning process too.

Thoughtfully selected hardware can heighten the luxury of any door, turning a simple mechanism into an exquisite design statement. A matte black lever on a walnut leaf, brushed brass detailing paired with a soft neutral finish, or a

minimalist recessed pull on a sliding system – each combination contributes to the home's overall tone. But it's not just about looks. Innovative hardware – such as concealed hinges, magnetic catches and factory-routed latch keeps – enhances both function and form, keeping lines clean and performance high in every detail.

### LEVERAGE EXPERTISE TO ELEVATE

With so many moving parts to navigate, collaborating with trusted specialists pays dividends throughout the self-build process. Your chosen partner shouldn't only be confident in delivering a technically exceptional, aesthetically peerless and flawlessly functioning product. They should understand your project inside out and be able to integrate effortlessly into your team too.

By bringing this seasoned expertise and unwavering commitment, they can help guide your vision and prevent costly and restrictive oversights from diminishing the potential of your project. This is the kind of investment that turns ambition into achievement, and takes your self-build to heights you never thought possible.

*Ian Chubb is managing director at Deuren*

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## Zest unveils new range of acoustic wall panels

**Zest Wall Panels**, part of Swish Building Products, has announced an extension to its range with the launch of its new contemporary Acoustic Wall Panels. Manufactured with real wood veneers and rigid, fully recycled plastic backing, these stylish slatted wall panels are specifically designed to absorb noise and improve sound quality. With the real wood veneer covering all three sides of each slat, these panels are beautiful from every angle. They are available in four timeless shades, Washed Oak, Oiled Oak, Ash Grey, and Contemporary Oak, allowing them to blend seamlessly into any style of interior design. Available as single panels and standing 2.6 m high, Zest Acoustic Wall Panels are easy to install and ideally suited to both modern and older properties and any size and shape of space. "An increase in customer demand for a quality product, together with a desire to extend our range led us to create our new Zest Acoustic Wall panels," explains Brian Neville, national account manager at Zest. "Our aim is to offer a high specification wall panel which beautifully combines style, substance, and sustainability. With their stylish looks, industry leading acoustic qualities, and enviable sustainability credentials, we believe we have achieved this with our acoustic wall panels." Further information about Zest's new premium Acoustic Wall Panels can be found by calling or visiting the company's website.

01827 317 200 [zestwallpanels.co.uk/wall-panels/acoustic-wall-panels](http://zestwallpanels.co.uk/wall-panels/acoustic-wall-panels)





# Building your dream outdoors

To help self-builders transform muddy plots into luscious garden havens, Anita Magee of Tobermore looks at the top trends inspiring garden design.



Current garden trends are seeing a strong focus on blending luxury with sustainability, creating outdoor areas that are both stylish and functional. Features like decorative and retaining walls help define spaces, while texture, colour and pattern add character – all of which is softened by planting for a beautiful, outdoor space.

## MAXIMISE SPACE IN YOUR GARDEN DESIGN

Smart layouts are shaping garden design trends, helping self-builders make the most of every corner. Ornamental feature walls can be used to partition spaces or create privacy. Walls have the added benefit of creating a safe space for children and pets, while also

reducing noise from nearby roads.

For sloping plots, use mortarless retaining walls to build tiers and create usable space. Self-builders can also use mortarless retaining walls to make practical raised beds or save space and increase functionality by integrating a stylish built-in seating area. Those with young children could even consider adding a slide for a fun way to zip from one level to another!

## GARDEN ZONING IDEAS FOR OUTDOOR LIVING

After deciding on a layout, self-builders should take time to think about how they'll use each part of the space. Clever design creates distinct zones, each with a different use. Outdoor rooms or

partially covered areas will take off this year. Outdoor heating, lighting and all-weather furniture ensure your garden is usable in all seasons.

Retreat spaces are more important than ever in today's fast-paced world, so why not create a calming sanctuary or meditation zone? This can be achieved by building a dedicated quiet, shady corner with features like a water feature, or comfortable lounge seating.

For socialising, features like an outdoor kitchen or BBQ space allow for alfresco dining, while sunken fire pits mean the garden can be used after the sun goes down. Similarly, outdoor jacuzzies or hot tubs add a real touch of luxury and are a hit with adults and kids alike.



**TEXTURES, PATTERNS & NATURAL FINISHES**

2025 is all about gardens that make a statement through landscaping. Be bold and experiment with different patterns, colours, sizes and even laying patterns to add a unique touch.

Consider how to link the different elements of the garden. Gone are the days of drab grey pavers – today self-builders can mix a wealth of materials, decorative finishes and warmer, nature-inspired colour palettes for paving, patio areas and walling.

Don't be afraid to play with texture. Combine different materials like smooth slabs with textured natural stone-look concrete. This creates visual interest and can turn your patio or walkway into a statement feature.

The same is true of colour. Co-ordinating tones and colours creates cohesion and ensures that hard landscaping flows throughout the garden. Alternatively, use contrast to create a dramatic, contemporary look.

**SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS & SMARTER DRAINAGE**

83% of self-builders want to incorporate eco-friendly options into their plans. Outside the home, this means replacing traditional driveways and patio materials with sustainable options such as permeable paving.

Permeable paving is a type of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) device that helps manage surface water run-off from rain to prevent flooding. It works by slowing and filtering the water at the source by trapping and breaking down harmful pollutants within the stone.

It comes in a variety of finishes and surfaces, so permeable paving can be tied into the design aesthetic of the home. It's also virtually indistinguishable from standard block paving, meaning self-builders can mix and match, using permeable paving for driveways and larger patios, and standard paving for pathways where permeable paving may not be practical.

**BLENDING PAVING WITH PLANTING**

Integrating greenery with paving and walling creates a more natural, balanced garden design and helps create privacy. Use a mix of bold, sculptural plants, such as grasses or hydrangeas to create a statement. As with hard landscaping, consider how colour, pattern and texture will work together.

Decorative walling can form a perfect backdrop for tall and climbing plants like ivy, clematis or wisteria. Beds above retaining walls can be planted with trailing plants that tumble

over the top, creating pools of colour. Vertical planting is also a great way to maximise smaller spaces.

For sustainability, opt for native plants to create wildlife-friendly gardens. Plants that thrive in the UK climate require less water over the dryer summer months. They'll also attract vital pollinators such as bees and butterflies. Incorporating sensory elements like fragrant flowers, textured plants and water features will also encourage nature and create tranquillity.

Ultimately, good design is about unlocking the potential of your outdoor space. Decorative and retaining walls can shape and zone a garden, creating beautiful, functional spaces suitable for year-round use. Playing with texture, colour and patterns as part of the hard landscaping design adds a depth and personality that truly mirrors the home. At the same time, permeable paving gives self-builders the chance to ensure solutions are sustainable too. Finally, softening the scheme with planting will create a space that balances form and function, and elevates your garden from good to truly great.

*Anita Magee is a landscape architect & garden designer at Tobermore*

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LUXORliving is the KNX-based smart home system from Theben, ideal for new builds or renovations.

Effortlessly switch and dim lights, regulate heating, and control blinds or curtains, using voice commands, a mobile app or a simple push button.

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Win a Smart Home!





# Smarter by design

Theben Automation's Paul Foulkes explores how smart homes are moving beyond timers and schedules, embracing real-time, sensor-based automation for greater comfort, efficiency and intuitive living.

For decades, home automation has promised ease and efficiency. But early systems, reliant on fixed schedules, timers and manual controls, often fell short of that vision. Fast forward to today, and the future of smart living is finally taking shape. At its heart? Intelligent, sensor-based systems that respond to how we actually live – moment by moment.

These next-level solutions are designed to adapt in real time to human activity and environmental conditions. Whether it's adjusting lighting based on the amount of natural daylight, regulating temperature with precision, or automating routines that once required several switches, today's smart home is becoming more intuitive, responsive and efficient than ever before.

## THE SHIFT FROM SCHEDULED TO SENSED

Traditional smart home setups typically followed a pre-programmed routine. Lights turn on at 6pm, heating kicks in at 7am, blinds close at sunset. While helpful, these systems were rigid. Life, however, is anything but.

Sensor-based systems, in contrast, react dynamically. Motion detectors, temperature sensors and daylight sensors allow your home to make decisions in real time. If no one's in the room, lights automatically dim or turn off. If the sun is blazing through the windows, the heating pauses. If you wake up in the middle of the night, soft lighting guides your path instead of blinding brightness. This adaptability enhances comfort while reducing unnecessary energy use.

## COMFORT, EFFICIENCY & CONTROL

Comfort is the most immediate benefit of a dynamic smart system. Take something as simple as night time lighting. In many modern homes, presence detectors in hallways, ensembles or landings can switch on low-level lighting at night. Instead of fumbling for a switch, or being woken by harsh light, you move through softly lit spaces that match the time of day and your needs.



During daylight hours, those same lights remain off entirely or brighten to an appropriate level, based on natural light levels.

From an energy perspective, the impact is significant. Rooms are only lit, heated or cooled when needed, which reduces consumption without sacrificing comfort. Even something as seemingly small as dimming lights at certain times can contribute to noticeable energy savings over time, especially when every space in the home is working in harmony.

## THE END OF THE SWITCH BANK

Nowhere is the power of sensor-based systems more evident than in open-plan spaces. Modern kitchen-living-dining areas often feature a dozen or more lighting circuits to create layered lighting effects. Traditionally, this required large, clunky switch banks, sometimes resembling office control panels, with sticky notes reminding the homeowner what each switch does.

But with a well-planned smart system, that complexity disappears. Instead of

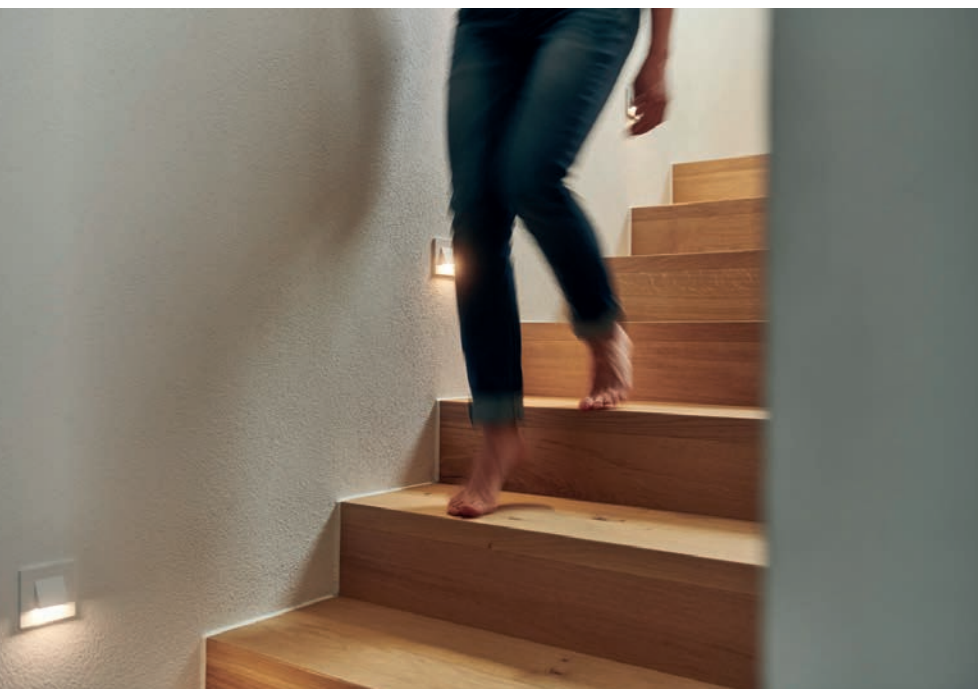
navigating 10 switches, homeowners can enjoy simple, intuitive scenes: a 'cooking' setting for bright, focused light, a 'dining' setting for softer ambience or an 'evening' setting to unwind. One touch, or a voice command, is all it takes. And when it's time to leave the room, or the house altogether, an 'all off' scene clears everything in one go.

It's this blend of simplicity and control that sets these systems apart. By keeping complexity behind the scenes and offering a clear, elegant interface, it allows homeowners to engage with smart tech on their own terms, without the learning curve.

## BUILDING HOMES THAT THINK AHEAD

For those building or renovating their own homes, integrating smart systems early on brings even more value. Planning for sensor-based automation from the outset allows for seamless integration, no retrofitting, no compromises. It ensures the system is tailored to how the space will be used,





with presence detection, light-level sensing and temperature regulation designed to work together.

Homeowners also gain peace of mind. Systems can be programmed to simulate occupancy while you're away, or to alert you if windows are open while the heating is on. The home becomes

a responsive environment – not just automated, but intelligent.

#### ADAPTING TO EVERY LIFESTYLE

Importantly, these systems are not just for tech enthusiasts or luxury builds. The evolution of smart home technology means that sensor-based solutions

are becoming increasingly accessible, scalable and user-friendly. Whether you're a family wanting safer navigation at night, a couple looking to reduce energy bills or a home worker seeking to optimise your environment, dynamic automation offers a meaningful upgrade to everyday life.

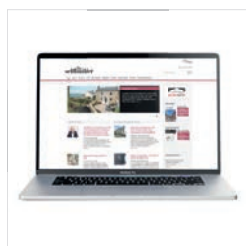
#### A SMARTER KIND OF SIMPLICITY

In a world increasingly filled with distractions, the appeal of simplicity is growing. Ironically, the most advanced smart home systems are those that need less from us. They don't require constant input or adjustment. They don't rely on long instructions or complex apps. They work quietly in the background, making hundreds of micro-adjustments each day to keep the home just right.

Systems like LUXORliving reflect this shift, where smart really means seamless, and homes quietly anticipate our needs without demanding our attention. As more UK self-builders and renovators explore what's possible, sensor-based automation is emerging as a must-have for homes that want to be ready not just for today but for the future.

*Paul Foulkes is country manager at Theben Automation*

## The Selfbuilder website



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

as possible. You can also subscribe to receive regular copies of the printed and digital versions of the magazine, or sign up to the monthly The Selfbuilder newsletter.

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## Decking paint, stain or oil?



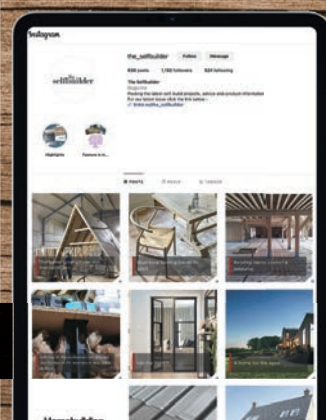
Anyone with timber decking would agree that it's a good idea to care for it to ensure that it's not only looking its best but is protected from the elements. However, knowing your oil from your cleaning product or your stain from your paint might feel a little daunting. **V33** High Performance Decking Stain, V33 Colour Guard Decking Paint, V33 UV-Resistant Decking Oil and V33 High Performance Decking Oil fulfil all these requirements. Before using any of them, the decking should be carefully prepared for

finishing, preferably using V33 Tough Deck Clean & Revive. This fluid helps eliminate any greying effect, cleans off mould and mildew, and ensures the finishing product can be properly applied.

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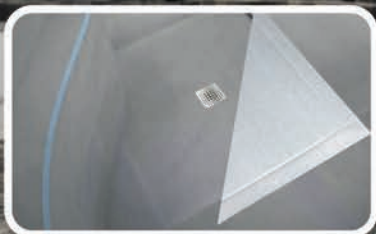


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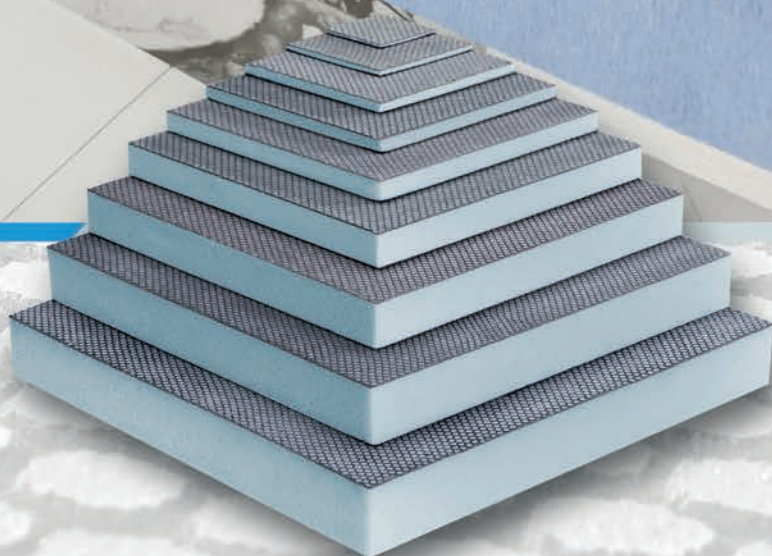


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